

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS RELEASE

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PUBLICITY DIVISION · MINISTRY OF CULTURE · CITY HALL SINGAPORE 6

"EMBARGOED TILL AFTER DELIVERY
PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY"

MC/APR/5/77 (Istana)

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT B H SHEARES AT THE TEA PARTY
ORGANISED BY THE MUSLIM MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF SINGAPORE
TO CELEBRATE PROPHET MUHAMMAD'S BIRTHDAY
TO BE HELD AT THE SOCIETY'S PREMISES LORONG 12, GEYLANG
ON WEDNESDAY, 6 APRIL, 1977 AT 5.30P.M.

I was pleased to receive the invitation to this tea party celebrating Prophet Muhammad's Birthday.

From its very early days, Singapore has thrived and flourished because its peoples who came from different lands and brought along with them their religions, cultures and traditions, have cultivated the spirit of tolerance and mutual respect for each other. For some time now, religious organisations have gone a step further by creating a climate of religious understanding, harmony and co-operation which is the foundation for peace, stability and prosperity in our country. Through the efforts of enlightened religious leaders, Singaporeans know that despite minor differences in religious beliefs and practices, they must work closely together to bring about peace, social justice and a better quality of life for everyone.

Singaporeans respect the religious needs and practices of their fellowmen, and in the opinion of our Government, there is room for as a wide a variety of religious principles and creeds as the religious needs of our people deem necessary. Each religion has its unique place in Singapore and each has its contribution to make towards the spiritual welfare of the people.

Notwithstanding the happy and healthy state of affairs now pertaining in Singapore, we must always be on our

guard against communists and communalists who use religion to cause friction and suspicion. As can be seen in some instances in other parts of the world, subversive elements use pseudo-religious issues to confuse the people and cause unrest. They heighten religious feelings, highlight controversial religious issues and spread falsehoods to confuse the people by implying that Governments are not doing enough for the religious needs of the faithful. Religious organisations such as the Muslim Missionary Society of Singapore should be in the forefront to prevent such activities from rearing their ugly heads in our community. They can do this by providing effective guidance in religious matters and underlining the importance of religious tolerance, mutual respect and understanding. Your society can ensure that religious principles and precepts are not deliberately misinterpreted or distorted so as to impede national progress for all.

Religion can be a tremendous force in accelerating social and economic development because it is a factor which influences the minds and hearts of people. Religious organisations and religious leaders have therefore a very crucial role to play in our society. Their activities and teachings can either help improve our social and economic well-being or cause a drag on our development and progress. I therefore urge your leaders to be sensitive to the changing social needs and circumstances of our country and continuously analyse their role, aims and programmes of activities to make sure that Islam continues to be a source of unity in Singapore.

Birthday celebrations are always joyous occasions and they are more so when the celebration is to commemorate the birthday of a great man like Prophet Muhammad. On this happy occasion, I urge Muslims to share the spirit of Prophet Muhammad's Birthday with non-Muslims in Singapore.

Finally, I congratulate the all Singapore Muslims Prophet Muhammad's Birthday Celebrations Committee for organising this tea party. I wish all Muslims a joyous celebration.