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MC/FEB/27/78(Istana)

4 MAR 1978

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT SHEARES AT THE TEA PARTY HOSTED BY
THE MAJLIS UGAMA ISLAM SINGAPURA TO CELEBRATE
PROPHET MUHAMMAD'S BIRTHDAY HELD ON SATURDAY, 25 FEB '78
AT 4.00 P.M. AT THE SHANGRI-LA HOTEL

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Muslims all over the world are celebrating the Birthday of Prophet Muhammad which is indeed a joyous and auspicious occasion. This function organised by the Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura is more than just a celebration: it is an occasion for all of you gathered here to re-dedicate yourselves anew, to be fully united with your fellow citizens, and to follow the teachings of the Prophet.

All great religions of the world preach universal brotherhood regardless of race, language and culture. Islam which lays strong emphasis on universal love, tolerance, peace and equality, can help spread goodwill and harmony among our people and make them understand how their personal lives are linked with others in the same country.

Very few countries in this part of the world have such varied and venerable religious traditions like ours. We have the advantage of a spiritual heritage rooted in the wisdom of several great religions. It helps us to understand and accept one another as products of the creator and teach us to have faith in one another and to work collectively towards salvation and peace. Whatever our religion, we know we must follow the path of goodness and purity and work closely with our fellow citizens to ensure a better and happier Singapore.

Modernisation and technological advance, unless strongly buttressed by a strengthening of the religious spirit, will result in a neglect of the ethos. In the presence of moneytheism, materialism and scientific advancement, religion can lose its

perspective and give way to repetitive ceremonies and rituals conducted without commitment. It is indeed fortunate that our technological progress appears to have been achieved with a minimum of neglect in our religious lives. Pains have been taken to preserve traditional values and religious principles which are relevant to our society.

The relevance of religion is attested to by its capacity to improve the spiritual and moral lives of mankind. Muslim parents and religious leaders should therefore ensure that the aspirations, attitudes and life-styles of our youth are guided by pertinent religious principles including such fundamental human values as compassion, tolerance, charity and service advocated personally by the Prophet.

The Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura must actively pursue its objective of integrating and co-ordinating the activities of all our Muslim religious bodies. Muslim religious organisations in Singapore on the other hand, should work closely with the Majlis to avoid controversy and to ensure unity of purpose in driving home the importance of spiritual development and propagating the correct religious tenets through sermons in mosques as well as the mass media. This co-ordinated effort will ensure a balance between spiritual and material values and constantly teach Muslims how to align their faith with knowledge and action. As religious leaders, you have a responsibility of guiding people along the path of peace and goodwill and follow the moral and social values which are relevant in Singapore's domestic context. You should set an example by showing mutual respect of differences in beliefs among the religions in Singapore and only in this way can we in Singapore be enriched by the wisdom contained in our multi-religious heritage.

The Government of Singapore fully recognises that religious teachings in the context of proper priorities have a distinctive and positive part to play in the moulding of our nation, and religious leaders should accept this responsibility.

In conclusion, I wish all of you the very best in this year's celebration of the Birthday of Prophet Muhammad and I hope all of you have a joyous celebration.