

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 • tel: 328191 ext. 352, 353, 354 / 362207 / 362271.

01-1/80/02/09

SPEECH BY PRESIDENT SHEARES AT THE TEA PARTY HOSTED BY
THE MAJLIS UGAMA ISLAM TO CELEBRATE PROPHET MUHAMMAD'S
BIRTHDAY AT THE CENTURY PARK SHERATON HOTEL ON SATURDAY,
9 FEBRUARY 1980 AT 3.30 PM

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 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 Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura 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 organisation 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 economic and social 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 economic and social 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.

In 1975, the Majlis Ugama Islam, with the assistance of the Government, launched the Mosque Building Fund Scheme. In this scheme, three mosques have been completed under Phase I and three more are under construction. These latter should be operational by the mid 1980's.

I am also pleased to inform you that the development of mosques will continue and Phase II of the mosque building programme will commence as soon as the mosques presently under construction in the Phase I programme are completed.

With steeply rising construction costs due to higher wages and more expensive raw materials, Muslims must concede that the facilities in the new mosques will be made available according to the funds in hand as essentially a mosque is a place of prayer.

Birthday celebrations are always joyous occasions - more so when the celebration is to commemorate the birthday of one of the great men as exemplified by Prophet Muhammad. On this happy occasion, I urge Muslims to share the spirit of Prophet Muhammad's birthday with non-Muslims in Singapore.

I do wish all of you a joyous celebration of the birthday of Prophet Muhammad.