

PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 • tel. 3378191 ext. 352, 353, 354/3362207/3362271

01-1/82/05/08

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT, MR C V DEVAN NAIR, AT THE SINGAPORE
BUDDHIST VESAK DAY CELEBRATION AT THE NATIONAL THEATRE ON
SATURDAY, 8 MAY 1982 AT 7.30 PM

For countless millions in Asia, the birth of the Enlightened One is the most sacred of days. For this ochre-robed monk, who renounced a kingdom in favour of a begging bowl and staff, has exercised an infinitely greater influence on the thought and conduct of innumerable generations of people on this continent, than all the kings and emperors, warlords and generals, politicians and merchants put together.

The Buddha's teachings and perceptions have left their gentle influence and benediction on every important sphere of life - in government and politics, as well as in the art, sculpture, painting and literature of all the great nations of East Asia, South Asia, and South-East Asia.

It was clearly no ordinary light that blazed up on the Asian firmament some 2,500 years ago, and continues to provide spiritual sustenance to millions of human beings in Asia and beyond.

All the great religious traditions of the world, which we in Singapore are heirs to, have each made its own unique contribution to our society. The Buddhist tradition is no exception. The compassion, and the absence of bigotry and narrowness in matters spiritual, which characterise the Buddha's teachings, are also of unique significance and value in a multi-religious society like ours.

The liberation of Nirvana which He envisaged was not to be encapsulated in any exclusive dogma or belief. On the contrary, He taught that it is the consequence of right conduct and right aspiration, as laid down in the Eight-Fold path.

Buddhists hold that the supreme serenity of the Buddha conceals certitudes which escape or exceed normal human experience and perceptions. Those who have followed his teachings have achieved a calm gladness of mind, gentleness, silence, self-control and a purifying of the whole temperament.

Honest sceptics concede that even if the perceptions of men of the spirit like the Buddha were no more than dreams, there have been, nonetheless, only a very few persons on our benighted planet, who have dreamed equally noble dreams. And if we have to dream, far better for us and for our fellowmen, if we dreamed noble dreams, rather than sordid ones.

I do not count myself among the sceptics, for I hold all the great men and women of the spirit in equal reverence. And I join with all Buddhists in paying homage to the illustrious memory and teachings of the Buddha on this Vesak Day.
