SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT BYC/INFS.SE.68/59

TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT A MEETING GIVEN BY THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY OF SINGAPORE TO CELEBRATE PROPHET MOHAMED'S BIRTHDAY AT RAFFLES HOTEL AT 4.45 P.M. TODAY

Ours is a land not only of many races but of many religions as well. All the major religions of the world are represented. One of the most arresting and hopeful features has been our spirit of religious tolerance. Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians have worshipped side by side without rivalry or jealousy.

We are fortunate in that we have escaped the religious tensions and conflicts that have convulsed less fortunate countries in Europe and Asia.

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There is no reason why this spirit of tolerance should not continue. We can maintain this spirit of tolerance provided religious and secular leaders do not commit the tragic error of dragging religion into the political arena or using it as a cloak for political ambitions.

For once a religious creed is identified with a particular political movement, then every normal and legitimate political conflict is immediately transformed into a religious conflict as well.

We should guard against this danger because there are politicians who see in the exploitation of religious sentiments a short cut to political popularity.

The true men of religion will, on the other hand, stress the essential principle underlying all religions - that mankind is one and that whatever the doctrinal differences all religions teach that all men are brothers and should live peacefully together.

All religions strive to bring out all that is best in man - love, decency, charity and understanding. These are qualities necessary not only for the spiritual advancement of the individual but also for the well-being of society.

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I hope your Society will help in the task of maintaining the spirit of religious tolerance so necessary to the survival of our multi-religious society.

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