SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

MC. MY. 12/63 (PM)

TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINSTER,

MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE BUDDHIST UNION, JALAN SENYUM

TEMPLE VESAK DAY CELEBRATIONS

ON WEDNESDAY, MAY, 8, 1963.

This is the first visit I have paid to a Buddhist temple in this part of Singapore. I have been to older temples before. It would appear from this temple that the Buddhist faith is a vigorous and lively one among quite a section of our population.

National Archives of Singapore

If we were all to follow the teachings of Buddha or those who are Muslims to follow the teachings of Islam, or those who are Christians the teachings of Christ, then the world would be a very peaceful, a happy and a prosperous place to live in. It is when man fails to live up to the high precepts

set by those who have blazed the trail before him to a happier and more peaceful society that often we run into travail.

I read with great interest yesterday evening that pamphlet you sent me on the meaning of Vesak – of how some 2,500 years ago a prince in the foothills of the Himalayas set out to seek ultimate truth.

Ultimate truth is a very necessary and comforting thing for a lot of people in this world. But as the Government, often I have to pay attention to the more immediate truths. For unfortunately man (and woman) in the 20th century with universal education spreading all over the world is impatient to wait for the millennium hereafter. He wants to see millennium right on earth in his lifetime or if not in his lifetime he wants to see it coming in his children's lifetime. That really is the problem of balancing the competing interests of the present generation and that of posterity.

National Archives of Singapore

I have become more and more convinced that the more – in a society like ours with no deep rooted traditions – the more people have got abiding faith in ultimate good the more are the chances of a peaceful and orderly progress towards a better life for everybody. In other parts of the world not only in Europe, even in Asia where society is established as it is in India, everybody

has a place, everybody knows his place. There is the caste system – the Brahmin, the whole series of strata right down to the untouchables which stabilises change in a society.

But here 90 per cent of our population are immigrants. All of them have left their homelands either in this generation of one or two previously. Everybody seeks a fortune quickly. Some have made it and are happy. Some have made it and are unhappy. And the problem really for us all whether we are governments who administer the material needs of the people or priests who administer to their spiritual welfare our problem is to reconcile one's hopes, one's ambitions with reality and so far as the Government is concerned, to make reality approximate as near as possible and as quickly as possible to what the ambitions of the people are.

May I thank you for allowing me to say these few words of felicitation on this happy occasion of Vesak.

National Archives of Singapore

---

8 May, 1963. (Time issued : 1700 hours)