

**PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH MOVING MOTION FOR THE**  
**ELECTION OF THE NEW PRESIDENT**

Mr. Govindasamy, Sir,

I beg to move that this Parliament, in accordance with Article 1 of the Constitution, elects Dr. Benjamin Henry Sheares as President of Singapore.

Since April, 1968, my colleagues in the Cabinet and I have been conscious of the possibility of having to call upon one of our citizens, at short notice, to undertake the duties of President. It was a deliberation spread over 2½ years. After the death of the late President, we decided to invite Dr. Benjamin Sheares to undertake this office.

He is a doctor, eminent in his own specialty. By disposition courteous, by nature kind, he has done a great deal for the College of Medicine, and is largely responsible for the high standards of our gynaecologists, nearly all of whom he taught. After he retired in 1960, he went into private practice. However, he continued to help in many fields connected with his expertise. He has given generously of his time to public duties, like the Family Planning Association. As Chairman of the Medical Specialties Board, he was helping to decide on which

medical specialties Singapore should concentrate her resources. He had to recommend which department had outstanding specialists, so that the most modern equipment and facilities could be provided for the exercise of their talent, what special support in nurses, anaesthetists, radiographers, cardiographers, and specialised workers we must train to support these specialists in the use of the latest equipment.

After he accepted the Government's offer to be nominated as President, I explained to Dr. Sheares that he would have to undertake his duties as from the 2nd of January, 1971. In less than a fortnight he will be receiving the heads of the various Commonwealth delegations who will be arriving for the Conference. His first reaction was to ask for the curriculum vitae of the leaders of these delegations, and a note on the countries they represent, their history, their political, economic and social system. He wanted to know about the men he will be meeting and the nature of the countries they represented. Although he has not been experienced in the political or diplomatic field, his readiness to bring a disciplined intellect to bear on to a new field augurs well for Singapore. I am confident that he will develop a grasp and understanding of persons and peoples, of associations and communities, of nations and their leaders, their national aspirations and individual ambitions. It will make what could be a perfunctory duty into an interesting office, more of a challenge than a chore.

The duties of the President require not only distinction and ability, but integrity and understanding. He brings these qualities to the office of President. More than that, he is modest and friendly, by nature and habit.

His wife, Mrs. Sheares, speaks Chinese, English and some Malay. She can lend support to the President in his social duties.

My colleagues and I commend Dr. Benjamin Henry Sheares to the House for election as President. At 63, he enjoys good health, despite a major operation five years ago. Here is a man of outstanding ability. I am sure he will grow with the office, and discharge it with dignity and distinction.

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