

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, ON THE
ELECTION OF PRESIDENT IN PARLIAMENT ON
29 DECEMBER 1978

Mr. Speaker, Sir,

I beg to move the motion in my name:

That this Parliament, in accordance with Article 1 of the Constitution, elects Dr. Benjamin Henry Sheares as President of the Republic of Singapore for a further term of four years to commence immediately after the expiry of his present term of office.

It was eight years ago, in November 1970, that I first moved his election as President. He was then 63. He had a distinguished career as a professor and practitioner of Obstetrics & Gynaecology. He brought to his office a fine intellect and a quiet dignity.

He keeps himself abreast with all important matters of state. All Cabinet papers and other important subjects go up to him so that he is aware of the background to the decisions he is required by the Constitution to endorse. He

also undertakes his social and protocol functions with conscientious interest, never treating them as perfunctory chores. He has done us proud and been an asset to Singapore these past 8 years. No distinguished visitor who has called on him has failed to notice the compliment he has paid him by really knowing about him, his country, and his major interests.

When I asked him in April this year if he would serve as President for a third term, he asked for time to consider it. Characteristically, he wanted to satisfy himself that he could and would discharge his duties to the high standards he sets himself. It was after careful deliberation that he told me in October this year that he was prepared to undertake another term. He said he would do his best. I have no doubts that he will.

I have less hesitation in commending his re-election to the office, than he had in accepting the nomination. For me, the question was simple. Is there a better man for the job? There is none. He is the best. However, the question he put to himself was different. Could he discharge his duties in the next four years as well as he had in the last eight?

It took time to persuade and convince him that whilst his energy and vigour at 71 may not be what it was at 63 when he first assumed office, nevertheless, it was more than adequate, given the experience he has acquired, and the routine he has worked out for himself. I am happy that I was able to persuade him to continue.

I have no doubts that the habits of a lifetime will not change. It is part of his nature to apply himself, thoroughly to his work.

I believe some thoughtfulness on the part of the government can lighten the physical demands of the office. These are the adjustments each of us has to make as the years go by. It is called growing old gracefully, a phrase forged by poetic license. If we are fortunate to have the right mental approach, we learn to accept these changes without resentment. If we are more fortunate, like the President is, we shall have members of the family and friends who help and encourage us to make these changes as we soldier on.

Sir, I beg to move.
