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SPEECH BY MR TEO CHONG TEE, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (SOCIAL AFFAIRS)
AND MP FOR CHANGI, ON THE BIRTHDAY ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS OF THE
GODDESS OF WISDOM AT THE SRI RAMA TEMPLE ON 7 OCT 81 AT 7.00 PM

I am deeply honoured to be here this evening as the Guest of Honour to join you in celebrating the Birthday festival of the Goddess of Wisdom. This invitation to me, a non-Hindu, is of deep significance as you have by your action, shown that you subscribe fully to Government's policy of having a multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-cultural Singapore. Despite the many religions and cultures flourishing side by side in Singapore, we remain united as a people tolerant of each others religious practices and beliefs.

The celebrations that you have organised tonight is also evidence to me of the growing involvement that Singaporeans have with their chosen religion. The churches are crowded on Sundays; mosques, especially the mosques in HDB satellite towns are heavily utilised for religious classes and the study of the Quran; Buddhist temples are a hive of activity and so too are the Hindu temples. This pre-occupation with religion is a good thing because it gives a lie to the claim that Singaporeans exist only for the pursuit of moneytheism. The fact that Singaporeans find time to learn more about God and the after life, shows that they realise that economic well-being alone does not bring joy and peace in their lives but they need a spiritual life to help them overcome the pressures, frustrations and disenchantments in their lives.

Our population consists predominantly of young people. Thirty-nine per cent of our population are below 20 years of age. We are still in the process of nation-building. Some people see nation-building mainly in terms of high-rise flats, super highways, towering buildings and men and women in uniform equipped with modern weapons. But nation-building is more than external progress. Nation-building without moral

values is not complete. Because of our young population, we need to develop in our people a basis for common values and an ethical outlook in life. Our youth must adopt the correct attitude towards their duty, their work and life. They must not be allowed to lead a passive life, to be inactive and to pander to excessive pleasures. The consequence of this will be that the State will have no political stability and economic prosperity. The elders and leaders of the society must find ways and means of preventing the youth from such dangers. They must lead them from frustrations and weariness in things without to joy and peace in things within. They must be shown to take the right stance towards their duty and their work, and they will then bring out their best intellectual and physical powers to bear on their activities. Nation-building can then be accomplished through moral and spiritual in addition to material well-being.

Without a basic grounding in moral principles and religious philosophies, our youth may well face a crisis of identity and confusion of values. The Hindus can play a vital role in promoting such values in their community. Hinduism, I believe, is basically a system of conduct. If properly appreciated, it could serve as a strong anchor to prevent the wavering and irresolute from being swept away by a tide of decadent life styles and sub-cultures. The elders must try to impart the tenets of the Hindu religion to their young. Religious education for your children is therefore very important and it is gratifying to know that you are putting your attention to this important area in the lives of your children. The elders in the community must understand the youths of today. With the literacy rate progressing rapidly, we must realise that, unlike in the olden days, our children will not accept our word without question. They have been taught to ask and to reason out things which puzzle them and which are not clear in their minds. Therefore, the elders when they impart their religious beliefs to the young, must try to do so in as clear and as concise a way as possible so that they will receive religion wholeheartedly and willingly because they understand the concepts. We must not allow the generation gap to prevent us from imparting to our young the correct moral values which they must have in them in order to lead a proper and good life.

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