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80 0051 87SPEECH BY MR A. RAHIM ISHAK, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE
FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AT THE TAMILS REPRESENTATIVE
COUNCIL NATIONAL DAY CULTURAL SHOW AT THE VICTORIA
THEATRE ON SUNDAY, AUGUST 24, 1980, AT 7.30 P.M.

I am indeed honoured to be invited to address you on this auspicious occasion - when you are gathered here to celebrate the 15th anniversary of our independence. The cultural show that you have organised this evening reflects the colourful tradition of the Indian Singaporean - in particular the Tamil Singapore.

Singapore is only a dot on the world map. We do not have rubber, tin, petrol or for that matter any natural resources to back us up. What we have is only a land-space of 616.3 sq km. Human resource is about the only asset, that we are endowed with. We have a population of 2.3 million, who are basically united and hardworking. Ours is a multi-racial society. We seek unity in diversity. It is our government's policy to encourage the preservation and promotion of the cultural and linguistic heritage of the different ethnic groups that make Singapore. We value the contributions made by all ethnic groups. With tolerance and appreciation for each others cultural, we are already evolving the spirit of a true Singapore.

The Tamil language is recognised as one of the four official languages of Singapore. The Tamil language and its rich culture have a long history. It has a place of pride in the Singaporean society. Singapore will certainly be culturally poorer without the contributions of the Indians. Our government encourages the study of Tamil language in school.

At this juncture, I must explain our government's policy of encouraging bilingualism. We want our citizens to be well educated and be fluent, if possible, at least in two languages - that is in English and their own mother-tongue. English should be studied as the language of communication, education and

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administration whilst the mother-tongue should be **studied as the** language which can maintain **and** enhance **the** cultural ballast in our **people** in the face of our **rapid** modernization. The Chinese, Malay **and** Tamil languages **are** not entirely adequate for Singaporean. Being a modern nation, dependent mostly on international trade **and** industry, science **and** technology, we need **the English** language. But this **is** not to say that **the English language alone is adequate for the Singaporeans.**

We need our mother-tongue and its **inherent** value **and** cultures to help prevent Singaporean from **becoming de-** culturised digests in society. We do not want **Singapore** to **become** a nation of Southeast Asian **and** - who look **the** graces **and** values of their forefathers. Hence, **the emphasis** on the mother-tongue together with English. If **we can** succeed in **this** policy, **then** we can rest assured that our people can forge ahead in the movement toward modernization without getting lost by the wayside.

At the moment, there **are** about 100 **schools** in Singapore which offer Tamil as second language. **There is now** apparently **an** increasing trend among **Indians** to opt for Tamil as **second language** - whereas in the past **there was** a tendency for **them** to **choose** Malay **or** Mandarin. To cope up with this **increasing** trend, the **Ministry** of education in the last two years added about 20 schools to these **that already** offered Tamil as second language. Today, **one** out of three **Indian** pupils in **secondary** schools offer Tamil as second language - and one out of **two** **Indian** pupils in primary schools offer **Tamil as** second language. In **the** case of **the** Malays almost 100 per cent in primary and **Secondary** schools take Malay as **second** language.

In view of the bilingual policy of our **nation** **and** the increase in facilities, **more** Indian parents **would** be expected in future to opt for Tamil as second language for their children. I learn **that** in **1978**, **only** 15,800 pupils out of 38,000 offered Tamil as second languages. In **the year** 2000 **the** projection is **that there will** be 48,000 Indian pupils. The obvious **trend** is **that more** Indians will offer their mother-tongue as their **second**

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language. To achieve our goal of unification in a multi-racial society it is vital that the cultures and traditions of our forefathers are learnt together with English. I believe the Tamils will work towards this.

I wish to conclude my speech with a few words about the Tamils Representative Council. From what I know the Tamils Representative Council has been in existence for many years. But it had remained dormant until it was revived about two years ago under the able leadership of Mr G. Kandasamy. The council must be congratulated for making a headway in uniting under its aegis the many splinter Tamil cultural, social and civic organisations. Within the short period of two years the council has organised several constructive activities such as cultural shows, seminars, workshops, surveys, etc., and has made several recommendations to the government. The council will, I believe, keep up its good work.
