

Singapore Government **PRESS RELEASE**

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Archives & Oral History Department
Singapore 7 AUG 1981

SPEECH BY MR SIDEK BIN SANIFF (KOLAM AYER), PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (TRADE AND INDUSTRY) AND (SOCIAL AFFAIRS) AT THE NATIONAL DAY CULTURAL SHOW ORGANISED BY THE TAMILS REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL AT THE VICTORIA THEATRE ON SAT 8 AUG 81 AT 7.30 PM

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For the developing nations, education has been defined as the key that unlocks the door of modernisation. Both the nation and the economy require a more literate population and perhaps more significantly, well trained groups of executives, administrators and professionals who are capable of running the government and improving modern methods and techniques. Education also, in the widest sense is not confined to the classroom nor does it end when formal schooling is completed. It is part of the complex problems of socialization that transforms the infant into a social being capable of participating in the life of society and continuing as long as he must learn to adapt to new circumstances and play new roles.

This scenario is exactly what Singapore is moving into with greater exhilaration in economic progress as well as inculcating values to the people - values that could be extracted from the 3 major cultures of our people that could integrate them as Singaporeans. Integration of our society is something inseparable: as coolness cannot be separated from ice and heat cannot be dissociated from the sun. If this is achieved then tolerance, respect and greater understanding will fit in like a glove.

We have introduced moral education in our education system and have emphasised the importance of a second language that has every element and relation to one's roots. We have also restructured our economy to meet the present and future needs of our country. All these must go hand in hand if we are to achieve progress in the true sense of the word. The litmus test of a nation is how she responds to progress with the acumen of a good nurtured population.

The Tamils Representative Council is an example of an organisation which has restructured itself to respond to changes. The year 1978 saw out of necessity the departure from its traditional role of representing only the interests of persons who spoke only Tamil. Instead the interests of the cross-section of the Tamil community mattered. Yet another departure was the practice of electing a President who was fluent in Tamil and invariably born in India.

What is it that led to such sacrifices by the incumbents? It was no more than a genuine interest aroused by the educational policies and the reviews on them, and the need for a new leadership that can moderate anxieties with action plans. The interests which rallied community leaders to your Council were and still are to improve the teaching of Tamil and the preservation and promotion of the Tamil Culture.

Your Council has thus far not only sustained these interests but also taken various actions to satisfy them. But the fact that 40% of school-going Tamil children are not offering Tamil as their second language, although it is recognised as one of the four official languages means that you have an enormous task before you. The government can only fulfil the demand and ensure that those who register for Primary I take Tamil also and allow for option after Primary III. You should consider it as a major part of your activities to convey the message to the Tamil speaking community that only they can better discharge the responsibility of promoting the study and use of the Tamil language. While it is true and realistic, it is equally important - infact I consider it as responsibility at its highest degree especially in a multi-racial society like Singapore - should there be among us the non-Tamil speaking people to show concern, and help in whatever way they can in facing this difficult task. Your Council should continue to monitor the results of your efforts and maintain, if necessary, the dialogue that you have established with the various government authotities. Your feedback will be useful.

Your Council is not just a federation of Tamil organisations but also an organisation of individual members. It is inevitable that in so being and given the wide-shared purpose, it will attract professionals

and organisational skills into your Council. I was told that 30% of your direct members are professionals while 55% are active up to Sub-Committees' level. This is difficult to come by and you should regularly review your results with your Sub-Committees and ensure that efforts put in by each individual no matter in what capacity, are relentless. I have no doubt your Council will continue to tick and draw more professionals and Community leaders who, within their own sphere of influence can achieve the same objectives.

Your Council's gesture to reward GCE 'O' level students for achieving distinctions in Tamil as a second language is consistent with the total approach it has adopted to encourage and popularise the study of Tamil. The Oratorical Competitions encourage the students to use their vocabulary to express ideas and make Tamil a living language. Finally, I would like to congratulate the students for their fine performance and the schools for producing them.