

Opening Remarks by Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information Dr Janil Puthucheary at Singapore Tamil Youth Conference on 2 July 2022

Mr Vijayaraj Muthukumaran, President of NUS Tamil Language Society

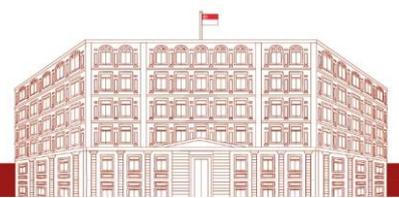
Youth delegates and guests

Introduction

1. A very good morning to everyone. Thank you for inviting me to join you. It gives me great pleasure to be part of this year's Singapore Tamil Youth Conference.
2. First, I would like to commend members of the NUS Tamil Language Society for your unwavering efforts to build this community around the Tamil language and uplift community efforts such as through initiatives like your theatre production Sangae Muzhangu, Sports Spectra, community service projects and today's conference. These give a platform for the language. They give an opportunity for youth volunteers to get involved, and more importantly, they give a sense of community and engagement around shared cultural values and language.
3. The hybrid format and the continued engagement of the community throughout the years, speak not only of the organising team's adaptability but also your enthusiasm and commitment to the cause, and I am heartened by the return of the conference this year.

Importance of preserving the Tamil language and culture; Government supports this

4. For this year's conference, you have added a new focus area, the Tamil Language itself, other than your other traditional fields. I was speaking to Vijay earlier on and I understand that this represents a sort of return to the roots of the society. Language and our culture are deeply intertwined. Learning our Mother Tongue helps us imbibe values and gain a deeper understanding of our cultural roots. It is therefore important and crucial for us to preserve both learning and cultural engagement. Not just for it to be an academic exercise; it has to be a cultural experience. I think that is represented both by the work of the society as well as the various pillars that you have at the conference today. This combination of learning and engaging in a cultural experience through the language helps to ensure that the language flourishes.
5. The Government is interested in making sure this happens and happens well. We want to support the lifelong learning and appreciation of the Tamil language and culture. Examples of what we have done include NLB's Tamil Cholai in April this year. It is Singapore's largest Tamil Literary Festival, collecting over 20,000 works. We hope that efforts like these will motivate people to keep learning about Tamil, and about our culture and heritage.
6. I said earlier on that language is also a means to create a sense of community. I think for young people especially, one of the points of personal development is to have that sense of confidence about being part of the community. That sense of people like me are out there. That sense of community is important to our sense of identity, which gives us an anchor in tough times and rough times and helps us deal with the challenges of adulthood and growing up and all the things and responsibilities that we have. Language is not the only one, but it's an important part of how we create that sense of community. Once again, congratulations to the NUS Tamil Language Society for creating this sense of community and making this more than just an academic exercise around language.



Encouraging youth delegates to participate actively in the discussions and have their voices heard

7. In the conference, your other focus areas are Education, Tamil Youth, and Arts and Culture. These are all topics that are very personal to our lives today. You will be discussing other important issues such as mental health, climate change and women empowerment. To me, what is very interesting is that the topics that you all have curated for yourselves are also universal issues for youths around the world, I have participated in dialogues with young people, both in Singapore and around the world. You have a very uniquely Singaporean context today when you are using one of our mother tongue languages as a platform to bring people together, and yet the issues that you are discussing are of universal concern to the global youth community. I hope you are able to participate actively in the discussions, share your views candidly, provide new perspectives, suggest ideas for change and consider how you can be part of the solutions.

8. As you do this, take the opportunity to reflect on our identity and values. The role that you can play in forging more cohesive community. Explore what it means to be a young person of this community, what you can do to grow the community of the young people in Singapore, in the Tamil community. Just like the theme of the conference – The Voice of Tomorrow’s Leaders – you are our leaders of tomorrow within the Tamil community and for Singapore as a whole, and potentially, given the fact that you are interested in the work of this society, you have a potential role for being a future guardian of the Tamil language and culture. All of you here can make a mark on our society by forging a consensus on specific issues and taking constructive action. Feel confident in your ability to do so. Please put yourself forward.

Closing

9. With that, I would like to thank everyone at the NUS Tamil Language Society and your partners, for putting together an enriching programme and for inviting me to participate and be part of this programme. It is a privilege for me to be invited to a youth conference. It makes me feel young and it gives me the opportunity to tell other people I got invited to youth conference.

10. I wish everyone a fruitful time at the conference. Congratulations once again to the Society for your efforts. Thank you very much.

