

**REMARKS BY MR THARMAN SHANMUGARATNAM, MINISTER FOR FINANCE  
AT THE SINGAPORE CEYLON TAMILS ASSOCIATION 100 YEARS  
CELEBRATION ON 31 JULY 2010, 7.30PM AT CEYLON SPORTS CLUB**

Dr. R. Theyvendran  
Singapore Ceylon Tamils Association President

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Evening

**Introduction**

- It is my privilege to be here this evening. This is a momentous occasion as we celebrate 100 years of the Singapore Ceylon Tamils Association (SCTA). The Association has not only contributed to the Ceylon Tamil community, but in doing so has helped the community add visibly to Singapore's progress as a multi-cultural society.
- The SCTA has itself grown. It was formed by 300 Ceylon Tamils in 1909, and growing to over 1400 members today.

**Making the Most of Multiracialism**

- Ceylon Tamils in Singapore are a small community. They are a minority within a minority.
- They have done well. In the judiciary and legal profession, in academic medicine and clinical practice, and in engineering, their contributions have been greatly disproportionate to the size of the community. There were also, historically, well represented in the senior levels of the civil service on both sides of the Causeway. My JY Pillay who is here this evening was the foremost example during his time in the Service in Singapore.
- Equally important was their contribution to education, starting in colonial Malaya where they served as Principals and teachers in schools up and down the country, and continuing in the independence years. Educationists like Mr Sigamoney, former Principal of RI in Singapore.
- Sporting life also saw many Ceylon Tamils excelling. It seemed to run in the blood. We are proud to have names like Dr A Vijiaratnam, who played for state in hockey, cricket, football and rugby.

- Why have the Ceylon Tamils made a significant impact in Singapore? I think the most important reason has to do with the way they took advantage of an environment in post-independence Singapore that rewarded talent and effort regardless of race, and the way they have interacted freely with the other, larger communities. They have never had a minority complex, never looked inward to seek refuge.
- The habit of interacting freely with other communities in fact went back many years. The Ceylon Sports Club for example, going back to the 1920s, was an example of how Ceylonese of all races got along as friends and fellow sportsmen. Tamils, Sinhalese and Burghers. They also opened their doors to non-Ceylonese, including many from the majority community in Singapore, and expats from all over the place. The Club knew of only one form of discrimination. It was not a comfortable place to be if you didn't appreciate cricket, or at least feign an appreciation in the sport.
- So the Ceylon Tamils were well-disposed to the multiacialism that defined Singapore after independence. It is probably no accident that S Rajaratnam, coming from this minority community, drafted the Singapore Pledge - with its call for a single, united people regardless of race, language or religion.
- This habit of integrating with other races and thinking of ourselves as Singaporean first, is the only way each of our communities can progress in Singapore. We can afford neither majority or minority complexes.
- The multiracial instinct that has always been there in the Ceylon Tamil community must continue to define its role in the years to come Singapore - in work and business, in culture and in every field of civil life. It is how we will keep contributing to Singapore.
- It is difficult to say if our future generations will see themselves as a distinct community of Ceylon Tamils. Not a few are marrying with the broader Indian community, or with other races. That too is part and parcel of their growing up in Singapore. But we must hope they will take pride in their Ceylonese roots, and never forget the way their forefathers made their way to this part of the world, and made the most of opportunities despite being in a minority. We must hope they understand deep in their hearts that their only future is to champion multiracialism.

### ***Role of SCTA***

- The SCTA has provided a platform to nurture the cultural heritage among the Ceylon Tamils while actively promoting its integration in our multi-cultural society. It helps keep alive the Tamil language and culture through the present SCTA Sunday School and its various activities.
- SCTA must continue to innovate and stay relevant to a changing Singapore. For instance, by helping to integrate new immigrants into Singapore society.

- To the younger members, I urge you to heed Dr. Theyvendran's earlier call to serve and continue the good work of the Association as well as to preserve the rich heritage of the Ceylon Tamils.
- On this note, I wish SCTA many more fruitful years to come and a happy 100<sup>th</sup> year.

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