

04-1/82/10/29.

SPEECH BY MR S DHANABALAN, MINISTER FOR CULTURE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
AT THE PRESENTATION CEREMONY FOR THE CULTURAL MEDALLION
AT THE ISTANA ON FRIDAY, 29 OCTOBER 1982 AT 8.00 PM

Tonight we are gathered to honour five Singaporeans for their achievements and excellence in the various fields of the arts. Among them, we have an artist, a photographer, a poet-writer, a musician and a dramatist-playwright. They join the select group of artists who have been bestowed the Cultural Medallion since the inception of the Award three years ago. May I congratulate them on their success,

There is a growing consciousness amongst Singaporeans today of the value of aesthetic pursuits. In a society like ours where economic and material pursuits take precedence over other interests, value is often measured in monetary terms.

But the worth of the arts and the pursuit of aesthetic activities cannot be measured or quantified. We have, as a people, worked hard to earn the reputation of being a clean, efficient and hardworking nation. We also possess a rich but complex gift, i.e. our multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-cultural milieu. This diversity of our society will over time cause a sea-change in the cultural pursuits of our different ethnic groups and lend a distinctly Singapore flavour and colour to the pure forms that we have derived from elsewhere.

But to achieve this we have to build upon a firm foundation. Every now and then cultural activities must be given a firm though subtle guidance which will give the necessary support and yet not stifle creativity.

The Singapore Government has to this end actively supported the development of the arts. Our role is to encourage and nurture talent whether in eastern or western art forms, and create avenues for expression.

The Cultural Medallion which will be awarded tonight is not a reward for brilliance in isolated performances in a chosen field. Rather it is an acknowledgement of a life-time spent by these artists in perfecting their particular art, and in the process enriching the cultural life of their fellow human beings, and setting a fine example to aspiring artists.

The recipients of this award are special people. But we must also remember that for every good dancer, musician or painter there are scores of backstage hands, organisers and officials without whose organisational and managerial skills, support and encouragement, no play or performance can be completed. They form a necessary and integral part of cultural activity, for as much as we need talent players for a successful act, so do we need skilful hands to put together the players for that act.

Similarly, the arts cannot flourish without patronage. Government patronage needs no elaboration. What must be mentioned is the role of commercial and industrial organisations in supporting and promoting the arts in Singapore. Some of the industrial and commercial concerns have provided financial aid by directly sponsoring cultural activities while others have donated generously through the Singapore Cultural Foundation. Their continued sponsorship is needed to create new avenues for artistic pursuits and to sustain the interest of budding talents who must be given scope and encouragement to develop freely.

Many have bemoaned that our island is a cultural desert - nothing will grow here but money, decry our critics - but we can prove them wrong if we try.

This award accords recognition to our artists. To each of the five artists, may I extend again my warmest congratulations on your achievements.