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SPEECH BY PROF S JAYAKUMAR

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND MINISTER FOR

LAW AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE

TAMIL LANGUAGE MOVEMENT

ON SATURDAY, 4 SEP 99 AT 6.30 PM

AT THE OCTAGON, Ngee Ann Polytechnic

Tamil is one of the oldest languages of the world. Unlike Latin and Sanskrit which have ceased to be spoken languages, Tamil continues to be a living language.

2 There are many Tamil-speaking people all over the world. Apart from Singapore, Tamils can be found in Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Mauritius, Fiji and South

Africa.

3 In Singapore, Tamil is one of the four official languages. Tamil is thriving and remains a spoken and written language among the majority of Indians in Singapore. Our students study it in schools from primary to pre-university levels. The number of kindergartens and schools providing Tamil as a second language has increased over the years. We have regular television programmes in Tamil. We have two Tamil radio stations. We also have a Tamil newspaper in Singapore. Tamil is used in Government campaigns, public education programmes and other public functions regularly.

4 The challenge is: how can Tamil stay relevant and vibrant in Singapore? The answer must depend on the support of the Tamil-speaking population. Parents and teachers must encourage students to use the language whenever and wherever possible. Tamil speakers should be encouraged to talk to each other in Tamil. Likewise, the Tamil media, the press, local writers and performers should also be encouraged and motivated. We should also continue to support organisations and programmes which promote the Tamil language.

5 At the same time, Tamil must not be left behind by technological changes. We must take advantage of the changes taking place.

6 It is important for us to target our efforts at the youth. Their attitude and usage will determine the relevance and importance of the language in future years. Priority should be given to the promotion of the language through schools by organising competitions, debates and cultural programmes.

7 On 12 May 99 the formation of the Tamil Language Movement (TLM) was announced.

8 I said on that occasion that Mr Arasu had agreed to head the Committee. He had consulted me and other Indian MPs and we had strongly supported this move. We agreed to be advisors.

9 I also announced the good news that the then Minister for MITA, BG George Yeo, told me that Government is committed to support the promotion of all four official languages. Therefore MITA will provide a grant to this Tamil Language

Movement.

10 The present Minister for Information and the Arts, Mr Lee Yock Suan, has also decided to appoint a Tamil Language Council which MITA will consult from time to time on matters concerning Tamil language and culture. The TLM will be the core of this.

11 Through these measures, Government will continue to do its part for the promotion of Tamil language and culture in Singapore. But the greater responsibility lies with us in the community. Tamil will thrive in Singapore only if we make a concerted effort to use it and make it a living language. Students must not be shy to speak it in appropriate settings. Parents must create a conducive home environment and make the effort to speak Tamil themselves. Community organisations should create ample opportunities for our youth to speak the language and imbibe our culture.

12 TLM has an important role to play in this regard. But it cannot be the only body involved in this effort. It must be a collective effort involving TLM and all the other community organisations. I therefore invite all Tamil organisations to come forward and work together with the TLM to promote Tamil language and culture in Singapore.

13 I wish the TLM and all partner organisations success with your programmes.

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