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SPEECH ORIGINALLY DELIVERED IN MALAY

**SPEECH BY MR MASAGOS ZULKIFLI BIN MASAGOS MOHAMAD,
MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND WATER RESOURCES,
AT THE LAUNCH OF BULAN BAHASA 2017
ON SATURDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER,
AT THE MALAY HERITAGE CENTRE**

Senior Parliamentary Secretary
Associate Professor Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim,
Chairman of Malay Language Council of Singapore

Ms Rahayu Mahzam
Chairman of the Bulan Bahasa 2017 Committee

Ladies and Gentlemen

INTRODUCTION

1. Thank you Temasek Polytechnic and NAFA for the welcome dance.



*Ke kampung jawa mencari benang,
Untuk menyulam si kain kasa;
Tempat jatuh lagi dikenang,
Inikan pula Bulan Bahasa.*

2. It gives me great pleasure to join you here today, to launch Bulan Bahasa 2017.
3. Bahasa Melayu is a language that I hold very close to my heart. As former Chairman of the Malay Language Council, Singapore, I also enjoy a warm sense of familiarity and pride, as I return to be a part of today's celebrations. In addition, this year's launch ceremony is held at the Malay Heritage Centre – a site of significance for Singapore's modern history.



LEADERSHIP AND EFFORTS

4. I would like to commend Professor Faishal Ibrahim for his leadership of the Malay Language Council, Singapore and Ms Rahayu Mahzam for her sterling efforts in continuing to grow Bulan Bahasa as the signature platform for promoting the Malay language. With Singapore's changing language landscape, it is an uphill task for the council and the Bulan Bahasa committee to encourage and promote Malay language. But they have done well. I would also like to thank the various Singapore Malay-Muslim organisations and student groups from the higher institutions that have supported Bulan Bahasa.

5. In 2014, when Bulan Bahasa celebrations in the heartlands started, we had only 2 housing estates involved – Tampines and Jurong. Now we have five – with Sembawang, Nee Soon and Chua Chu Kang joining in.



6. As MESRA advisor, I am personally supportive of the Malay Activity Executive Committee Council's steering role in bringing Bulan Bahasa to the heartlands and the wider community. This year, more than 25 MAECs are joining in the celebrations. This is indeed a heartening development. I would like to encourage even more Malay Activity Executive Committees to join in and support this worthwhile cause.

7. I am also delighted to witness the efforts of many ministries and agencies such as the Ministry of Education (MOE), Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI), and the Ministry of Culture Community and Youth (MCCY), the Malay Language Learning and Promotion Committee (MLLPC), the National Library Board (NLB), the National Arts Council (NAC) and the National Heritage Board (NHB), coming together to support the promotion of our national language.



NATIONAL LANGUAGE AND THE MALAY HERITAGE

8. At the 40th Anniversary of MESRA, I spoke about how a misunderstanding of Islam can lead to extremism in our community. It is even more dangerous if it leads them to acts of terrorism, in support of ISIS and al Qaeda. As Muslims, we need to understand that Islam teaches its followers to be moderate. This is apt and suited to the environment we live in. It is MESRA's role to guide our community to integrate with the general community in Singapore. I am glad that the local religious leaders are aware that there needs to be a balance between the way Islam is practiced and the needs of the Malay-Muslim community in Singapore.

9. It is common to find remarks in online debates which may be construed as unkind – a natural result of the practice of freedom of speech and open-mindedness.



10. Influence from popular culture from the West may cause us to lose our religious beliefs, values and culture. If we further neglect the love for the Malay culture, more people will be easily influenced by foreign ideals and values emulated by some in our community.

11. We must believe in our own culture, heritage and values. Our roots, our values are inextricably linked with Malay language – *Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa dan Yang Cantik itu Budi, Yang Indah itu Bahasa.*

12. If we have a strong understanding of the Malay language and culture but do not showcase our values and heritage, whether through song lyrics or theatre performances, it will be difficult for our community to accept, understand or use it.



BULAN BAHASA THEME – *ILMU* (KNOWLEDGE), *BUDAYA* (CULTURE) , *MESRA* (RELATIONSHIPS)

13. The theme for Bulan Bahasa remains the same – *ilmu* (knowledge), *budaya* (culture) and *mesra* (relationships). I would like to encourage three groups of people to work together in preserving our language: they are our religious leaders, our language teachers and parents.

14. Our understanding of the Malay language is strengthened when we pursue knowledge of any form in the language. That's Bahasa *Ilmu*. The Malay language is also used for religious teaching. I would like to encourage our religious leaders to think about how to improve the use of the Malay language in our efforts to inculcate religious values as a pedagogy for religious teaching.

15. We appreciate the graceful and artistic nature of the Malay culture when we find its meaning through the Malay language. That's Bahasa *Budaya*.



I hope that all teachers will be able to inculcate a love for the language as you are the catalyst for the appreciation of the Malay language in your students. MESRA will work with teachers to organise programmes outside of school, to create platforms for students to use the Malay language in a realistic setting.

16. For parents, we must be confident that using our Mother Tongue language at home will not decrease the ability to learn other subjects in school. We have to understand how language is connected with a person's values and character, and their ability to communicate politely and appropriately, to fosters ties and relations. That's Bahasa Mesra.
17. The three groups are important custodians to the Malay language as they will be able to ensure the continuity of the Malay language in our community. We have to create as many opportunities as possible for our young ones, as well as our community, for them to hear and use the language.



CLOSING

18. I would like to end my speech with a reminder from the late Dr Muhammad Ariff Ahmad, from the book *Yang Terukir, Bahasa dan Persuratan Melayu*:

“I hope the Malay community will not be embarrassed to speak Malay, especially those of higher status.”

“I am glad that we have progressed in terms of *Bulan Bahasa*. However, the progress is similar to a *Hari Raya* celebration. I hope it does not stop there. In terms of language, I hope everyone will be able to appreciate the Malay language. If a person uses the language, he/she has to know what is being said.”

19. Bulan Bahasa should not be regarded as a yearly literary festival. We have to be attuned to the fact that the use of the language has declined within our community. Let us, religious leaders, language teachers and parents, bring to life the Malay language in mosques, schools and at home.



Let's continue our efforts together, as the *Bulan Bahasa* slogan goes "*Bahasa kita. Gunakanlah*" (Our language. Use it). If not us, then who?

20. Thank you.