

**SPEECH BY MR EDWIN TONG,
MINISTER FOR CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND YOUTH
& SECOND MINISTER FOR LAW,
AT THE ANUGERAH PERSURATAN 2020/2021 CEREMONY,
ON SATURDAY, 10 APRIL, AT THE ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM**

Profesor Madya Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim
Menteri Negara, Kementerian Ehwal Dalam Negeri & Kementerian Pembangunan
Negara, dan Pengerusi Majlis Bahasa Melayu Singapura

Dr Azhar Ibrahim
Pengerusi Anugerah Persuratan Dua Ribu Dua Puluh Satu (2021)

Para tamu yang dihormati

Tuan-tuan dan Puan-puan

INTRODUCTION

1. Good afternoon. It is my pleasure to be here today at the Anugerah Persuratan 2020/2021 Awards Ceremony.
2. Let me begin with a pantun and I hope I do it justice. Please forgive me if I don't:

*Bukan mudah orang berladang,
hingga menuai padi dijaga;
Bukan mudah kerja mengarang,
jiwa disemai akal dibina.*

3. The Malay Language Council, Singapore or MLCS is an instrumental part of our efforts to build strength, leadership, and literacy in language. We constantly want to build up ground-up support and investments in our culture and heritage. And the Malay language, in today's context, is more than just a way we communicate with one another or to express ourselves. I see it as a window to our heritage, and the exchange of culture that underpins Singapore's multi-racial, multi-cultural society.
4. Our Mother Tongue Languages, like Malay, play an important role in building community bonds, and connecting generations, and across generations of Singaporeans to our cultural roots.
5. Through language and literature, we learn to better understand our heritage, who we are and where we came from. We have a common Singaporean identity, and we learn to appreciate cross-cultural and societal issues, and at the same time, use forms of expression through the literary arts to express ourselves and the beliefs of culture and society today.
6. MLCS also engages in important research work to deepen our knowledge in Malay literary arts, such as through a grant offered for research on past and present Tun Sri Lanang award recipients.
7. MLCS' efforts to foster more widespread awareness and deeper appreciation of Malay culture and heritage can be seen through initiatives such as Anugerah Persuratan, Bulan Bahasa (Malay Language Month), and Singapore's

membership at MASTERA, a regional language organisation that monitors the development of Malay language and Malay literature.

8. Inaugurated in 1993, Anugerah Persuratan is the pinnacle event to recognise outstanding local writers and their contributions to the Malay language and literary scene.
9. It showcases how the old adage “mata pena lebih tajam daripada mata pedang” – or as we know it in English, “the pen is mightier than the sword” – continues to be relevant today.
10. The awards aim to develop and encourage more writers to step forward to publish and showcase quality literary works in Malay, and promote Malay literary arts, for Singaporeans not just today, but future generations to enjoy as well.
11. One award recipient is Dr Noridah Kamari, who received the Anugerah Harapan award in Anugerah Persuratan 2013.
12. Dr Noridah supports both emerging and established writers through the production of Sekata, an academic journal that encourages the Malay community to critically discuss current affairs.
13. She also co-founded Unggun Creative with her husband, Mr Farihan Bahron, in 2016 to publish and produce quality works for the community. Mr Farihan

similarly received the Anugerah Harapan award in 2017.

INNOVATION IN MLCS ACTIVITIES

14. We all face the same challenges of COVID-19. The pandemic came into our lives and were unforeseen. The MLCS faced, confronted, and surmounted these challenges:

15. For example, Bulan Bahasa 2020 was held virtually for the first time, after more than 30 years.

16. With the support of its 61 partners, Bulan Bahasa 2020 presented 144 programmes on digital platforms such as Facebook, Zoom and Instagram. This shows the resilience and adaptability of MLCS's ability in continuing its efforts for outreach and in building a following in Malay literary works.

17. I thank the MLCS, and Committee members involved in initiatives like the Bulan Bahasa and Anugerah Persuratan Committees, for their commitment and adaptability.

CONCLUSION

18. In closing, let me congratulate this year's award recipients for the Tun Seri Lanang Award, Tun Seri Lanang Posthumous Award and respective Literary Awards.

19. I congratulate you for your excellent contributions as writers and language activists, in developing our Malay literary scene.

20. I hope that you will continue to be shining examples. You're all trailblazers that others will follow. Once in a while, look back and be a mentor to young writers/artists that follow your lead. In doing that, you will inspire many more local writers and build a strong and vibrant literary scene with an engaged community underpinned and powered by culture and the arts. This is what will truly define Singapore as we move towards a new generation of Singaporeans bonded together by our interest in common heritage, and in a place with a strong sense of belonging.

21. Thank you and have a good afternoon ahead.

Source: <https://www.mccy.gov.sg/about-us/news-and-resources/speeches/2021/apr/fostering-appreciation-of-malay-culture-and-heritage>

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