

**Speech by Naseer Ghani,
Secretary, Nagore Dargah Indian Muslim Heritage Centre (NDIMHC)
At the Official Opening of NDIMHC
Sunday, 29 May 2011**

Bismillahirrahman nirrahim, In the name of God Most Gracious Most Beneficent
Salawat and Salam to Our Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) Peace Be Upon Him

Our Guest of Honour, His Excellency President S R Nathan
Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA) & Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs
Haji Alami Musa, President of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore MUIS
Haji Zainul Abidin Rasheed, Advisor to the Federation of Indian Muslims (FIM)
The Mufti of Singapore Sahibus Samahah Mohamed Fatris Bakaram
Beloved Syeikh Syed Isa Semait
Our special guests from India
Haji Kazi S.A.Shaik Hassan Sahib, the Managing Trustee of Nagore Dargah Sharif and
Haji S S Syed Kamil Sahib, the President of the Advisory Board

Community Leaders, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Assalamu-alaikum wr wb and a very good morning to all our guests.

On behalf of the Management committee of Nagore Dargah Indian Muslim Heritage Centre, I wish to welcome all of you to the official opening of this Indian Muslim Heritage Centre which I believe is the first of its kind in this region and perhaps the only one in the world.

The Nagore Dargah was built between 1827 and 1830 in memory of the Holy Saint Shahul Hameed of Nagore, India by the Chulia Tamil Muslims from the Coromandel Coast. It was gazetted as a National Monument on 19 November 1974.

In the early days, the monument was a point of reverence and thanks giving for Indian Muslims who had reached the shores of Singapore after an arduous sea journey from Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu, India to seek better lives here. In those days, Indian Muslim philanthropists in the community would use the annual Kenduri celebrations of the holy saint of Nagore to do charitable acts such as distribution of food to needy Singaporeans. However, over the years many of such acts are now carried out conveniently in our 69 mosques. It gives me great pride to share with you that of these 6 are Indian Muslim mosques built by our philanthropists through the concept of wakaf. Many Malay and Indian Muslims organizations have also flourished since then and are also doing charitable acts through part of their educational social and welfare development programmes.

Being strategically located at Telok Ayer Street surrounded by monuments, clan associations and religious institutions such as the Thian Hock Keng Temple, Hokkien Huay Kuan, Temple of Heavenly Jade Emperor and Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church, Nagore Dargah had played an important role in forging better inter-religious & inter-racial harmony and understanding through its generous acts of benevolence and aid to all Singaporeans. This holds valuable lessons for the Singaporeans in a multi-racial Singapore.

Today, we are gathered here to witness the culmination of a journey started in 1994 when the idea of transforming Nagore Dargah into an Indian Muslim Heritage Centre was first mooted by an 18-member committee comprising Indian Muslim leaders led by Haji Sharafdeen who volunteered their services to raise monies to restore the Nagore Dargah. The committee sought

feedback from Indian Muslim members and leaders to get their endorsement. MUIS, as the administrator of Wakaf properties in Singapore, fully supported the idea and facilitated the process.

In 2005 the 18-member committee was reconstituted into a Nagore Dargah Fund raising Committee (NDFC) chaired by Haji S M Abdul Jaleel and other prominent Indian Muslim leaders. The NDCF managed to raise \$165,000 and together with a capital injection of \$600,000 from Wakaf Jamae which is administered by Muis, the building was restored in 2008.

The Indian Muslim Heritage Centre project gained momentum in the middle of 2010 when consultants from Forth Design were engaged to undertake the research and collect artifacts for the centre. At this point of time, the committee received a pleasant surprise through the generous support of Mr Alan Lee, the Managing director of Banquet Holdings Pte Ltd who came forward to offer to run a small boutique eatery and as part of his corporate social responsibility, he donated \$570,000 towards the work of turning the interior into galleries and also to secure artifacts that would tell the rich history, culture, practices and customs of the Indian Muslim community. In addition, through the rental income generated and the income from the wakaf, the Management Committee of the newly appointed Nagore Dargah Indian Muslim Heritage Centre is confident that the Heritage Centre will be able to be self funding and will be here to stay. It will be enriched from time to time with newly acquired information and artifacts. At a time when we were a little disappointed of not being able to secure anyone who is interested to run the Centre through a tender process, Mr Alan Lee has done us proud and this Centre would not have been possible without his support.

A public appeal for donation of artifacts and exhibits for the Heritage Centre on 8 & 9 January 2011 saw a heart warming turnout of many Indian Muslim families who readily handed over artifacts and their family heirlooms and this speak volume of the support for the project. Several months of painstaking effort was taken up in the research work in Singapore and beyond. Some documents and artifacts were also secured from overseas sources. Interviews with senior members and community leaders were done to record the history of Indian Muslims in Singapore.

The Project team members also went on a trip to Nagore Dargah Sharif in India in March 2011 to understand the role and functions of Nagore Dargah in India. The team members were warmly received by the Management Trustees and Advisory Board. They were briefed and were brought on a tour of the premises. The Singapore delegation was impressed with the strong patronage and reverence of the community for Nagore Dargah and the social roles it played. The delegation was struck by the significant humanitarian role played by Nagore Dargah in providing food and shelter to the recent Tsunami victims. In addition, the Dargah even allowed the burial of the dead, irrespective of their creeds, at their grounds. This spirit of Nagore Dargah in encompassing and serving all mankind is worthy of highlighting. The Managing Hereditary Trustee Al Haj Shaik Hassan and the President of the Advisory Board, Al Haj Kamil Sahib are here with us today as our special guests from India and we would like to welcome and thank them for their strong support and endorsement to this project.

The story of the Indian Muslims is told through four interactive galleries **A to D** at the Indian Muslim Heritage Centre.

Gallery A - gives an overview of Nagore Dargah and the Indian Muslims in Telok Ayer and the history and development of the Telok Ayer district.

Gallery B is the heart of the Heritage Centre telling the story of the Indian Muslim in Singapore. In this gallery, 85% of the artifacts and images are donated from the members of the Indian Muslim community during the 2 day community public appeal event on 8th and 9th January 2011. The gallery tells the story through selective themes such as:

- Who are the Indian Muslims? Their Journey to Singapore. Their trades & Professions. Their contributions in Literature, Journalism & Education.
- Their cultural uniqueness as exhibited in their Weddings & Festivities
- Associations & Institutions, Indian Muslims in Singapore Society

Gallery C touches on Indian Muslim Culinary Heritage. In this gallery eatery, the visitor can sample some popular Indian Muslim foods and find out more about them.

Finally **Gallery D**, which explains the origins of Nagore Dargah in Singapore and India, and about Shahul Hamid the Saint of Nagore, the architecture of Nagore Dargah and the Kandoori Festival.

The history of Nagore Dargah and Indian Muslims is the history in the making of Singapore. Our pioneers worked hard under very trying circumstances to raise their families and build a successful Singapore. It is worth capturing their lifestyles, contributions, and successes for our younger generation to know and learn from.

The committee hopes to tie up with various organizations in Singapore including the Singapore Tourism Board and the schools in bringing the story of Indian Muslims to the fore. We hope the Nagore Dargah Indian Muslim Heritage Centre will become a useful educational stopover in the Singapore Learning Journey. We hope that the humble effort would add to the colourful Singapore mosaic so that our younger generation will understand our past with a view to contributing towards a better future together for Singapore.

On behalf of the Management Committee I would like to thank President S R Nathan for gracing this event and officially opening it.

Our thanks and appreciations are also due to the Honourable Minister Dr Yaacob Ibrahim for his invaluable support and advice to the Indian Muslim Community.

The centre is a small community's effort but we are grateful for the motivation, guidance and support which came from many helping hands especially MUIS, Warees Investments, Banquet Holdings Pte Ltd, MES Group, Muslim and non-Muslim organizations, mosques and other religious institutions, sponsors, donors and supporters and from our Indian Muslim religious and community leaders.

May God bless all of you and may you all continue to support and encourage the Management Committee in our work.

Thank you for joining us on this precious Sunday morning and wishing you an enjoyable and enriching morning at the Nagore Dargah Indian Muslim Heritage Centre.
