

New book traces Tamils' presence in region

A newly-launched publication has traced the Tamil community's presence in Singapore and South-east Asia back 2,000 years.

The Indian Heritage Centre's (IHC) *From Sojourners To Settlers – Tamils In South-east Asia And Singapore* was launched last Saturday by Minister for Communications and Information S. Iswaran at the Asian Civilisations Museum.

"Our early Tamil pioneers helped to shape the Singapore identity and laid the foundations of contemporary Tamil culture and practice," said Mr Iswaran.

He also cited an observation in the book, that the Tamil community "is clearly identifiable but not easily definable" and any attempt to do so is fraught with challenges.

Published by the heritage centre and the Institute of Policy Studies, the book explores lesser-known aspects of



Minister for Communications and Information S. Iswaran (centre) with editors, contributors and staff from The Indian Heritage Centre, at the book launch. PHOTO: MCI

Tamil history and heritage in Singapore and South-east Asia, examining evidence of Tamil connections with the region.

These include the inscriptions on the Singapore Stone, which some experts date back to the 10th century.

It was located at the mouth of the Singapore River, before the British destroyed it with dynamite in 1843.

Researcher Iain Sinclair, a contributor to the book, recently identified the phrase "kesariva" in the inscriptions found on parts of the artefact, and said it could be part of the word "Parakesarivarman" – a title used by several Chola dynasty kings.

This suggests a Tamil presence in the Singapore Strait dating back 1,000 years.

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