

Cultural practitioners key in building social cohesion: President

Nadine Chua

Practitioners of arts and culture play an essential role in strengthening the social cohesion and resilience of multicultural Singapore, said President Halimah Yacob yesterday.

She was speaking at the inaugural Malay Cultural Heritage Appreciation Day organised by the Malay Heritage Foundation (MHF).

Called Hari Warisan, the event is a new initiative to acknowledge Malay cultural practitioners and activists who create content and contribute to their cultural heritage.

Madam Halimah said: "Hari Warisan is a special occasion to acknowledge and celebrate the contribution of our cultural practitioners.

"This new initiative will also provide a unique opportunity for younger personalities... to exchange views and insights among themselves and with others."

While the Covid-19 pandemic has affected livelihoods, the com-

munity has demonstrated creativity and innovation in adopting digital ways of presenting its work to engage audiences, she added.

"Emerging technologies, such as virtual and augmented realities, can help showcase new forms of cultural experience and influence how we create, curate and consume cultural content. I call on our practitioners to seize these opportunities to deepen your skills and develop professionally," she said, addressing Malay practitioners and activists at the Malay Heritage Centre.

MHF chairman Norshahril Saat noted that these practitioners are "the lifeblood" that keeps Malay arts and heritage alive.

"MHF hopes to facilitate knowledge transfers from one generation to another and to encourage more young activists, heritage enthusiasts and artistes to step forward," he added.

At the event, Mr Idris Mohamed Ali, 77, who paints local street scenes and landscapes of old Singapore, was awarded the Heritage Prize (Hadihah Warisan), while Ms



Ms Anis Qurratu'aini Azman (left), Mr Muhammad Hafiz Rashid and Ms Liyana Nasyita Shukarman, who were appointed as cultural ambassadors (Teman Warisan), at the Malay Heritage Centre yesterday. PHOTO: BERITA HARIAN

Nurul Shaza Mohd Ishak, 31, received the Special Mention Award (Tunas Warisan) for her contribu-

tions to the theatre scene.

Three young people who have been actively contributing to the

Malay arts, culture and heritage sectors were appointed as cultural ambassadors (Teman Warisan). They

are Ms Anis Qurratu'aini Azman, Mr Muhammad Hafiz Rashid and Ms Liyana Nasyita Shukarman.

Ms Anis, 31, often sings the *syair* – a traditional form of Malay prose – and is a member of traditional Malay music ensembles.

Mr Hafiz, 27, volunteers at the Malay Heritage Centre by conducting tours and lending his voice for storytelling sessions there.

Ms Liyana, a Malay studies graduate from the National University of Singapore, is pursuing a Master of Arts degree at the university's Department of Malay Studies.

Speaking to *The Sunday Times*, Ms Liyana said: "I am definitely honoured to be given such a heavy role and, of course, it affirms the passion I have for Malay culture and heritage."

The 27-year-old aims to be involved in more conversations relating to Malay culture, heritage and arts, and wants to contribute more to the discourse through her writing. Ms Liyana added: "I believe that everyone can be a (cultural ambassador) because heritage is not just a matter of the past. It encompasses our daily lives too.

"How we understand these aspects affects how we conceive of ourselves and our community, and respond to the social changes that we are confronted with. Our responses to these challenges also mean we are charting a new heritage for our future generations to reflect on."

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