

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

FOUR PRACTITIONERS RECOGNISED BY NHB FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO SINGAPORE'S INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Stewards of Intangible Cultural Heritage Award comes with a cash award, support through a project grant, and opportunities to participate in NHB's festivals and events to promote and transmit their skills and knowledge

Singapore, 1 September 2021 – Four intangible cultural heritage (ICH) practitioners have been awarded the National Heritage Board's (NHB) *The Stewards of Intangible Cultural Heritage Award*, in recognition of their efforts to promote and transmit their respective ICH elements. This recognition scheme was launched in October 2019 as one of the initiatives dedicated to safeguarding and promoting ICH in Singapore under the SG Heritage Plan – Singapore's masterplan for the heritage sector. The awards were presented for the first time last year, and these practitioners are the second batch of awardees.

2 The four award recipients for 2021 are:

- **Mr Almahdi Al-Haj Ibrahim**, veteran thespian, playwright, director and producer, for ***Bangsawan* and Malay Poetic Forms**;
- **Bhaskar's Arts Academy** for **Indian Dance Forms**;
- **Siong Leng Musical Association** for musical performing art ***Nanyin***; and
- **Mdm Tan Poh Choo**, second generation owner of Nanyang Sauce, for **Making of Soya Sauce**.

An award which recognises the transmission of our living heritage

3 *The Stewards of Intangible Cultural Heritage Award* spotlights the importance of transmission of the intangible facets of our living heritage, so that these can continue to be enjoyed for generations to come. This commitment to the transmission of ICH elements is embodied by all four recipients and their continual efforts to promote and sustain their respective crafts and art forms. Their practices are rooted in traditions but adapted to the changing times and trends.

4 Mr Almahdi Al-Haj Ibrahim, also known by his stage name Nadiputra, is a veteran and accoladed thespian, playwright, director and producer who has been promoting public awareness of and interest in *bangsawan* and Malay poetic forms through staging, directing and script writing for multiple productions over the years, including *Raden Mas* in 2016. In addition to conducting workshops with schools and community groups, he has also encouraged more Malay cultural arts practitioners to be involved in *bangsawan*, nurturing and mentoring younger generations of *bangsawan* actors, script writers and directors. He has received many accolades, including the Cultural Medallion and the Aungerah Tun Seri Lanang, for his extensive contributions to Malay cultural arts for more than five decades.

5 Second generation owner of soya sauce brewery Nanyang Sauce, Mdm Tan Poh Choo, draws on her 48 years of traditional sauce-making experience to ensure the consistent quality of their hand-brewed sauce. Together with her son and third generation practitioner Mr Ken Koh, the duo regularly conduct sauce appreciation and sauce-making workshops for the public and educational programmes for students, to promote awareness of and share the skills involved in the age-old craft of brewing traditional soya sauce.

6 Performing arts groups Bhaskar's Arts Academy and Siong Leng Musical Association have also been promoting their respective art forms by investing their time in mentoring and guiding younger generations of practitioners. The former promotes Indian dance through local and international performances that draw on multicultural influences of the region; performance training; workshops with schools and community groups; and a dedicated teaching wing, the Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society, which offers classes in Indian dance to hundreds of students. Founded in 1952 by the late Mr KP Bhaskar, who was later joined by his wife and Cultural Medallion recipient Mrs Santha Bhaskar, Bhaskar's Arts Academy has nurtured many dancers who have gone on to become Indian dance teachers themselves, both at Nrityalaya and around the world, including in Malaysia, Germany and the United States.

7 Since it was established in 1941, Siong Leng Musical Association has pursued its mission of preserving *nanyin* in Singapore, by actively training and nurturing younger generations of *nanyin* practitioners through its apprenticeship programme, along with educational workshops, outreach programmes, heritage performances and even an International Youth Nanyin Festival in 2015 and 2018. In addition to its regular heritage performances at Thian Hock Keng Temple and for the annual pilgrimage to Kusu Island, the association has also explored innovative approaches to promote *nanyin* to contemporary

audiences, such as incorporating or collaborating with cross-cultural musical influences in their *nanyin* productions, including elements of jazz, Malay music, and Mandarin pop.

Safeguarding our intangible cultural heritage

8 All award recipients will receive a S\$5,000 cash award. They will also be able to tap on a Project Grant of up to S\$20,000 for initiatives that help in the transmission and promotion of ICH knowledge and skills. Initiatives that can be supported by the grant include the organising and conducting of public education programmes, internship or apprenticeship training programmes, and research and documentation projects. All of these will contribute towards a deeper understanding and the transmission of ICH traditions, skills, practices and customs. The award recipients will also have the opportunity to showcase and promote their ICH-related skills and knowledge at NHB's exhibitions, festivals or programmes.

(Note: An award ceremony is slated for later this year, where the recipients will be presented with a trophy and certificate of award.)

9 Mr Yeo Kirk Siang, Director of NHB's Heritage Research and Assessment, and member of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Evaluation Body, said, "Our intangible cultural heritage is an integral reflection of our society, history and culture. It is important that it is passed down to future generations, and initiatives like *The Stewards of Intangible Cultural Heritage Award* will help safeguard and promote these traditions and practices that celebrate our multicultural identity as Singaporeans."

10 For more information on the award and its recipients, please refer to:

- **Annex A:** Quotes from recipients of *The Stewards of Intangible Cultural Heritage Award*
- **Annex B:** Details on *The Stewards of Intangible Cultural Heritage Award*

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About the National Heritage Board

The National Heritage Board (NHB) was formed on 1 August 1993. As the custodian of Singapore's heritage, NHB is responsible for telling the Singapore story, sharing the Singaporean experience and imparting our Singapore spirit. NHB's mission is to preserve and celebrate the shared heritage of our diverse communities, for the purpose of education, nation-building and cultural understanding. It manages the national museums and heritage institutions, and sets policies relating to heritage sites, monuments and the National Collection.

Through the National Collection, NHB curates heritage programmes and presents exhibitions to connect the past, present and future generations of Singaporeans. NHB is a statutory board under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. Please visit www.nhb.gov.sg for more information.

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**QUOTES FROM RECIPIENTS OF THE STEWARDS OF SINGAPORE'S INTANGIBLE
CULTURAL HERITAGE AWARD**

- Mr Almahdi Al-Haj Ibrahim, veteran thespian, playwright, director and producer, said, “The award means the world to me, and it is an honour to be given this recognition. It is important to uphold cultural practices and heritage like *bangsawan* and Malay Poetic Forms, so that it does not get forgotten with each passing generation, and I think of it as a personal responsibility to do so. I hope that with technology, I can share my skills and knowledge to keep these art forms alive. I also hope that by understanding the aspirations of younger art practitioners, I can help them to find and spread their wings.”
- Mrs Santha Bhaskar, Artistic Director of Bhaskar’s Arts Academy and Cultural Medallion recipient, said, “We are grateful to the National Heritage Board for this honour and recognition of the decades of immense effort we put in to promote Indian traditional arts in Singapore. Indian dance forms are deeply rooted in tradition and there is a wealth of knowledge and values that can be learnt through it. We have been passing our knowledge and skills to many generations of dancers for close to 70 years, many of whom continued pursuing this tradition both locally and overseas. And we hope to continue in this mission.”
- Seow Ming Xian, General Manager of Siong Leng Musical Association, said, “Siong Leng is extremely honoured to achieve such a prestigious award as we mark our 80th anniversary of preserving, promoting, and developing *Nanyin*. The cultivation of Nanyin not only encompasses the musical aspects of the art but also the values instilled into our lives as human beings. While the development of the art form in Singapore provides a glimpse into our history, culture, and heritage, Siong Leng will need to consistently adapt to trends and design new strategies for the evolution of *Nanyin*.”
- Mdm Tan Poh Choo, second generation owner of Nanyang Sauce, said, “I am very grateful to the National Heritage Board and Singapore for this recognition, and hopefully it will shine more light on the craft of traditional, artisan natural soya sauce. As a traditional sauce brewery, we are often seen as a sunset industry. But making soya sauce the traditional way is more an art than a science. It requires patience, determination and perseverance, as each bottle goes through nine months of fermentation, and we care for it daily rain or shine. I hope to continue to pass down our skills to future generations through workshops we conduct at Nanyang Sauce.”

ANNEX B

ABOUT THE STEWARDS OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AWARD

Eligibility

The Stewards of Intangible Cultural Heritage Award recognises Singapore's ICH practitioners, and only Singapore citizens or Permanent Residents are eligible for the award.

The scheme is open to individuals as well as groups or organisations. The eligibility conditions are summarised as follows:

- a) Individuals;
- b) Groups or Organisations;
The group or organisation must be based in Singapore and be headed by a Singapore Citizen or Permanent Resident.
- c) The practitioner or group/organisation must possess a minimum of 10 years in vocation and be well-respected by the practising community;
- d) The practitioner or group/organisation must display a level of excellence in the application of skills, practices and knowledge;
- e) The practitioner or group/organisation must demonstrate a long-term commitment to the continuation of the practice or craft, as well as consistent efforts to transmit skills and knowledge; and
- f) Practitioners or groups/organisations accorded accolades from other industries or statutory boards may also apply or be nominated.

Award and Other Forms of Support

Award recipients will be given a plaque/trophy and certificate of award, as well as a one-time Cash Award of S\$5,000. An award ceremony will be held in end 2021.

In addition to the Cash Award, award recipients will be given the option to tap on a Project Grant of up to S\$20,000 to be used within five years from the point of award for the transmission and promotion of ICH knowledge and skills. This grant is part of the awards' aim of encouraging the continued transmission of the ICH element. Examples of projects that could be supported by the Project Grant include:

- a. Organising programmes such as talks and seminars for the public as well as demonstrations and training sessions for interested parties;
- b. Introducing an internship or apprentice-training programme, that excludes in-house training of own employees;
- c. Conducting and/or commissioning additional research and documentation of ICH knowledge and skills; and
- d. Embarking on projects to improve their equipment or knowledge, better their skills, introduce innovation and ensure sustainability.

NHB will also work with the recipient on the transmission of ICH knowledge and skills through the following:

- a. Documentation and promotion of the practice.

- b. Participation in NHB events/programmes to share skills and knowledge.
- c. Use of the award label by the practitioners to support their transmission and promotional efforts.

Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria is as such:

Active Transmission of Skills and Knowledge
Displays outstanding efforts to transmit skills and knowledge to the next generation
Regular engagement with the wider community to raise awareness of the practice
Mastery of Skills and Knowledge
Displays excellence in the application of both knowledge and skills
Long-Term Dedication to the Practice
Long-term commitment to sustaining knowledge and skills of the practice
Positive Impact and Influence
Displays efforts to serve the wider community through the practice
Serves as a positive example by encouraging cultural exchange