

MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

**SIX YOUTHS RECOGNISED AT THE INAUGURAL EDITION OF NHB'S OUTSTANDING
YOUTH IN INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AWARD 2025**



The six award recipients (from top left, clockwise): Mr Adrian Ong Sin Yong, Ms Banupriya Ponnarasu, Mr Muhammad Ilyia Bin Kamsani, Ms Ng Si Ying, Mr Niranjan Pandian and Ms Syafiqah 'Adha Sallehin

Singapore, 18 March 2026 – Six youth practitioners were recognised today for their commitment, passion and leadership in the practice and promotion of Singapore’s living heritage. The National Heritage Board (NHB) held the award ceremony for the inaugural ***Outstanding Youth in ICH Award 2025*** on 18 March 2026, spotlighting Singapore’s diverse Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) through a new generation of heritage practitioners and their contributions.

2 The award is conferred by Mr David Neo, Acting Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, who gave the awards to outstanding young practitioners across diverse ICH fields from Chinese Puppetry and *Dikir Barat*, to Indian Dance Forms and Making of Rattan Products. To support the transmission and revitalisation of our living heritage, in addition to a trophy and a certificate of award, award recipients may tap on a Project Grant of up to S\$20,000 to be used within three years from the time of award. This grant is an investment in the youth awardee’s training and development in leadership, as well as in their respective fields of ICH knowledge and skills.

3 First announced in 2025, the *Outstanding Youth in ICH Award* complements the existing *Stewards of ICH Award*. It recognises individuals aged 35 years old and below who, in addition to their ability to practice and promote ICH skills and knowledge, showcase promising leadership skills and serve as a positive example to other youths through efforts such as regular engagement with the wider community to raise awareness of their respective ICH practices. The award was conceptualised following feedback from heritage stakeholders, such as the Stewards of ICH, on the need to invest in the continuity and transmission of ICH. Stakeholders shared that a recognition scheme for youth practitioners would foster pride and affirm their community outreach and innovation efforts. In addition, recognising such efforts could inspire other youths to support or take on similar journeys in ICH.

4 Ms Melissa Tan, Director, Heritage Policy & Research, NHB, said: “We are very proud of our youth bearers of Singapore’s living heritage who are so passionate in sharing and revitalising the rich customs, traditions, practices and stories that connect us as Singaporeans. The path of our local cultural heritage practitioners is not easy. Some have faced resource constraints, while others have had to constantly adapt to keep their practice relevant and meaningful to their audiences and peers. The inaugural *Outstanding Youth in ICH Award* is a meaningful step

towards nurturing our next generation of cultural custodians. Through the award, we celebrate not just achievement, but more importantly, passion and effort. We want to encourage all youths, who are surmounting the odds to practise and pass on our living heritage, that their efforts are seen and appreciated. We hope to empower active youth stewardship by investing in our youths' cultural and leadership development, as they grow in their craft. Such efforts contribute to our larger goal under *Our SG Heritage Plan 2.0* to raise interest and deepen engagement in heritage amongst youth."

The inaugural cohort of Outstanding Youth in ICH



Mr Adrian Ong Sin Yong ([Chinese Puppetry](#)) is a youth practitioner of Chinese puppetry with over a decade of experience. His practice in Chinese puppetry encompasses Hokkien glove puppetry and Hokkien string puppetry. Balancing his passion for puppetry with his full-time job, he regularly performs at major festive occasions for deities' birthday celebrations in local temples. Besides being a puppeteer, he has taken up multiple roles of scriptwriter, sound technician, and stage builder to ensure the continuity of his practice. Recognising the declining availability of live musicians, he has innovatively incorporated pre-recorded music and electronic drum kits as alternatives to traditional live accompaniment while retaining the cultural integrity of the practice. He actively mentors young participants, including his niece and peers, by sharing puppetry skills, voice performance techniques, and cultural significance through cultural and community events, as well as staging rehearsals in his own home.



Ms Banupriya Ponnarasu ([Indian Dance Forms](#)) is a multifaceted performing artist with over two decades of experience in traditional Indian dance forms, specialising in *bharatanatyam* and *kathak*. Her artistic journey began at age five under the late Cultural Medallion recipient Mrs Santha Bhaskar, and later continued under the tutelage of the late Cultural Medallion recipient Mrs Neila Sathyalingam at Apsaras Arts. She maintains various roles as a dancer, cultural advocate, arts educator, and producer, leveraging on Indian dance forms as a medium for community building, multicultural exchange, and mental wellbeing. She founded the Scarlet Mela Festival of the Arts (SMFA), a biennial roving incubation programme that supports emerging traditional arts practitioners across ethnic backgrounds in their artistic development while introducing the cultural essence of traditional arts forms including Indian dance to new audiences. She also established Mandala Arts, a dance company that emphasises on lifelong learning, mental and emotional wellbeing. Over six years at Mandala Arts and almost a decade in MOE schools, she has taught over 200 students across institutional and informal settings to deepen their understanding and appreciation of Indian dance forms.



Mr Muhammad Ilyia Bin Kamsani ([Dikir Barat](#) and [Malay Poetic Forms](#)) is a youth practitioner of *dikir barat* and Malay poetic forms for over a decade since starting his journey at Temasek Polytechnic's *dikir barat* group in 2010. He later joined Andika Kencana, one of Singapore's national-level *dikir barat* groups to further pursue his passion. He plays multiple roles in his practice, including as *Tok Juara* (lead singer), a composer, and a lyricist. He spearheaded the inaugural *Festival Dikir Singapura* (Dikir Barat Festival) 2025, the first of its kind in Singapore's *dikir barat* community, deepening appreciation of the practice in Singapore across historical, social and intellectual dimensions, while ensuring its continued relevance in Singapore. To address a gap in existing literature on the subject, he has published '*Serumpun: Jurnal Dikir Singapura*', a dedicated journal that provides in-depth analysis, documentation, and critical reflection on the cultural

traditions of *dikir barat* in Singapore.

He serves as the only youth adjudicator (juri) for national and inter-tertiary *dikir barat* competitions such as *Pesta Senandung Rakyat* and *Piala Suara Serumpun*, and has been appointed as *Sahabat Sastera* (Friend of Literature) by the Malay Language Council of Singapore where he has presented at talks and forums to promote Malay language and literature.



Ms Ng Si Ying ([Making of Rattan Products](#)) is a rattan artist and craftsperson who reinterprets traditional rattan-weaving methods through contemporary contexts and mediums. She started learning the craft from Chun Mee Lee Rattan Furniture, one of the few remaining rattan shops in Singapore. Through her moniker, *atinymaker*, she pushes rattan beyond its traditional boundaries, creating innovative pieces that blend traditional craft techniques with modern design sensibilities. To enhance accessibility of the craft that is typically passed down through oral transmission or informal apprenticeships, she actively shares the craft process and her research on her website and social media platforms. She has conducted rattan-weaving workshops and artist talks in schools and cultural institutions to highlight the craft as part of Singapore's cultural heritage and its significance as a material while demonstrating how it can be reimaged. Her works have been featured in both local and international showcases and exhibitions, including *library@orchard*, Singapore Pavilion at The Expo in Osaka, '*A Year Made Object*' by Objectifs, and '*R for Repair London x Singapore*' at the Victoria and Albert Museum in South Kensington, London.



Mr Niranjan Pandian ([Indian Music Traditions](#)) is a bamboo flautist trained in classical Indian music. He started his practice at the age of 10, under the tutelage of Dr Ghanavenothan Retnam at Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society. He has performed for established ensembles including Singapore Indian Orchestra and Choir, Asian Cultural Symphonic Orchestra, and Singapore Symphonic Orchestra. As the co-founder and creative director of Brahmastra Arts House, he has led notable projects such as '*7 Wonders of Little India*' which combined visual arts with live classical music, and the *Brahmastra Festival of Arts* that has integrated VR technology to enhance accessibility of Indian music traditions to wider audiences. To foster cross-genre collaboration, he created platforms like the Singhanagara Contemporary Orchestra and NP Collective as platforms where young artists from different backgrounds can experiment and grow together. Through the Vamshika Quintet, he also champions the revival of bamboo flute ensemble traditions. He actively engages other youth practitioners in his ensembles and projects, involving them in diverse roles in audio engineering, arrangement, and music direction. He provides mentorship to students across MOE schools, LASALLE College of the Arts, and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA), delivering guest lectures on composing for Indian bamboo flutes and crafting Indian rhythms and ragas¹.



Ms Syafiqah 'Adha Sallehin ([Malay Music Traditions](#)) is a traditional Malay music practitioner, having picked up the accordion to learn Malay Asli music in 2007 with Orkestra Melayu Singapura. She is currently the music director of Gendang Akustika, a Malay folk music ensemble in Singapore. She has mentored young musicians in Gendang Akustika's junior ensemble, some of whom continue to be core members of the organisation. She has also mentored students through the Malay Fusion Ensemble at the School of the Arts (SOTA) and has conducted workshops and masterclasses on traditional Malay music in various schools. Her efforts to promote and further her

¹Melodic framework in Indian classical music that guides composition, improvisation, and performance

practice include her notation project for Malay classical music, with the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music (YST). While the practice is traditionally transmitted through apprenticeships, the project marks a notable shift by using conservatory methods to document and advance Malay classical music. She has also produced '*Dendang Warisan*', a series featuring original compositions that address a gap in Malay Asli repertoire written in and about Singapore.

5 Future *Outstanding Youth in ICH Awards* will be held biennially and presented alongside the *Stewards of ICH Award*. Nominations for the next cycle of both awards will commence in the first half of 2027, with the joint award ceremony held in the later part of the same year. In this way, both younger and more experienced practitioners will have the opportunity to come together to celebrate their dedication and craft as one ICH community in Singapore.

For more information, please refer to:

- [Annex A](#): About the *Outstanding Youth in ICH Award*
- [Annex B](#): Quote sheet featuring *Outstanding Youth in ICH Award 2025* recipients

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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, safeguards and promotes intangible cultural heritage, 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.

ABOUT THE OUTSTANDING YOUTH IN INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AWARD

Eligibility

The *Outstanding Youth in Intangible Cultural Heritage Award* aims to recognise individual youth practitioners of ICH who have demonstrated passion for, commitment to, and leadership in the practice and promotion of ICH within their respective fields.

The scheme is open to individuals only. The eligibility conditions are summarised as follows:

- a) The practitioner must be a Singapore Citizen or Permanent Resident aged 35 years old and below;
- b) The practitioner must practice one or more ICH element(s), which is/are listed on the [National ICH Inventory](#);
- c) The Award excludes practices that are overtly religious or spreads the teachings or beliefs of any one religion, and excludes posthumous nominations.

Award and Other Forms of Support

Award recipients will be given a trophy and certificate of award, as well as the option to tap on a Project Grant of up to S\$20,000 to be used within three years from the point of award, for the transmission and promotion of ICH knowledge and skills.

Examples of projects that could be supported by the Project Grant include:

- Embarking on projects to improve their knowledge and enhance their skills in ICH practices such as:
 - Professional training and skills development (e.g. ICH masterclasses and conferences; residencies; accredited courses);
 - Learning and exchange programmes (e.g. overseas exchange or study trips to learn from other ICH practitioners and organisations);
 - Mentorships and attachments (e.g. to learn from experienced ICH practitioners and organisations); or
 - Resource support (e.g. specialist tools and equipment to improve ICH skills and knowledge).
- Embarking on projects to develop leadership potential and enhance their capabilities in promoting ICH and engaging other youths such as:
 - Engagement and outreach capabilities (e.g. courses or programmes on digital technologies, community and audience engagement, content creation, facilitation, etc.);
 - Leadership or entrepreneurial capabilities (e.g. courses or programmes on organisational management, volunteer management, financial management and fundraising etc.); or,

- Build networks and partnerships (e.g. access to networks and dialogue opportunities through invitations and nominations to speak / participate in various local events and international forums etc.)

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

- a. Video documentation of their skills and knowledge;
- b. Participation in NHB events/programmes to share skills and knowledge; or
- c. Identification and facilitation of opportunities to be part of NHB’s programmes and other non-NHB networks and initiatives.

Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria are as such:

Commitment, Passion, and Resilience
Regular engagement with youths and wider community to raise awareness of the ICH practice.
Displays strong and consistent commitment to sustaining and furthering the ICH practice.
Passion for learning and resilience in overcoming difficulties in sustaining the ICH practice.
Positive Influence, Impact, Innovation, and Leadership Potential
Innovation and creativity in enabling ICH practice to evolve while maintaining its relevance.
Exhibits potential for leadership within ICH field, such as driving efforts in promotion, documentation, or exchange of knowledge and skills of the ICH practice.
Serves as a positive example and role model for other youths, such as efforts to serve the wider community through the ICH practice.
Ability in Skills and Knowledge
Displays ability and potential for excellence in applying both knowledge and skills of the ICH practice.

QUOTE SHEET FEATURING OUTSTANDING YOUTH IN ICH AWARD 2025 RECIPIENTS

S/N	Details of spokesperson	Quote
1	Mr Adrian Ong Sin Yong	<p>I feel truly honoured to receive this recognition from the National Heritage Board (NHB), as what I have always done out of passion and a desire to excel has become a deeply humbling and meaningful achievement. It is important to sustain and further strengthen these efforts so we can preserve what has been passed down and continue sharing this culture with the next generation. While individuals may pass on, our culture endures. Youth in Singapore can experience traditional practices hands-on and use digital platforms to document, share and creatively reinterpret living heritage in their own unique ways.</p>
2	Ms Banupriya Ponnarasu	<p>Receiving this inaugural recognition is a deeply meaningful affirmation of not just my work, but the collective efforts of collaborators and the wider arts community who sustain heritage together. Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is the engine of real integration in Singapore, creating spaces for dialogue, empathy and shared understanding to amplify the efforts in place through policies. It is not about preservation in isolation, but active participation that keeps culture alive and relevant. Youth connect most deeply with heritage when it is accessible and participatory, and ICH thrives when this generation is trusted as co-creators to experience, reinterpret and carry it forward on their own terms.</p>
3	Mr Muhammad Ilyia Bin Kamsani	<p>I am deeply humbled to be among the first recipients of this inaugural award, and I want to thank NHB for this affirmation. I accept this not just for myself, but on behalf of everyone working quietly behind the scenes to keep our heritage alive. This honour resonates even more because, in our fast-changing and multicultural Singapore, sustaining our traditions, whether language, ritual, or craft, is what connects us to our roots. If we lose the practice, we risk losing the very fabric that makes us Singaporean. This is why I believe engagement starts with curiosity. Our youth are natural creators, and when they integrate heritage into the content they already enjoy, it becomes a living, breathing part of who we are.</p>

4	Ms Ng Si Ying	I feel deeply honoured, and also quietly responsible. For me, Intangible Cultural Heritage is not something to preserve behind glass, but something we continue through our hands and daily gestures. What we do today becomes what is preserved for tomorrow. In our fast-moving society, it keeps us rooted and aware of where we come from, as we imagine what may come next. I hope we continue to engage with living heritage not just as nostalgia, but as something we can question, reinterpret, and carry forward in our own time.
5	Mr Niranjan Pandian	Receiving NHB's <i>Outstanding Youth in ICH</i> is a humbling honour that deepens my commitment to carrying forward the richness of Indian classical and folk music. In Singapore's cultural tapestry, these arts create a living symbiosis between past and present, guiding heritage, identity, and cross-cultural dialogue. Youths can engage by learning, reflecting, and creating in spaces that reconnect them to their roots while embracing evolving creative practices.
6	Ms Syafiqah 'Adha Sallehin	Being conferred NHB's inaugural <i>Outstanding Youth in ICH Award</i> is an immense honour for me. I feel a strong sense of responsibility to uphold traditional Malay music in Singapore as I am keeping alive the memories and stories of people who were indigenous to this land and the surrounding region. The values that we can learn from this artform, such as being courteous to one another and living in harmony, makes it important for nation-building in multicultural Singapore. I hope youths recognise this and weave in their own stories through this artform as they continue to shape Singapore's identity for years to come.