

Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, President of JUST, A/P Yaacob Ibrahim, MP for Jalan Besar GRC, A/P Prof Loy Hui Chieh, Vice Dean FASS NUS, distinguished guests.

On behalf of the Malay Studies Department of NUS, I warmly welcome all of you here this morning to join us in launching the Inaugural Syed Hussein Alatas Memorial Lecture.

Today's lecture is an especially significant and meaningful event for the Department. It marks the culmination of a series of events held throughout the academic year (AY2017/18) in conjunction with the Department's 50th anniversary. Yes, many of you here may not be aware that this Department has existed for fifty years. In fact it has a longer pedigree dating back to 1952 when a Department of Malay Studies was first established at the University of Malaya in Singapore. As history would have it, the Department was routed to the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur in 1962 and was subsequently re-established on 1 March 1967 in Singapore at what was then the University of Singapore. In commemoration of its golden anniversary, the Department is indeed proud and pleased to launch the Inaugural Syed Hussein Alatas Memorial Lecture in memory of its founding head, the late Dr. Syed Hussein Alatas and to commemorate his contributions to the Department.

This brief introductory speech certainly cannot do justice to Dr. Alatas' invaluable contributions both to academia and public life. Suffice it to say here, that Professor Alatas, as he was more familiarly known to all, was a leading scholar and public intellectual in the contemporary period. By no means an armchair scholar, he devoted his life to thinking about pressing problems of society (with a focus on the Malays in Southeast Asia) and impediments to its progress in times of unprecedented social change. His scholarly and social contributions were distinguished by a strong moral commitment towards improving social conditions and facilitating social justice based on universal philosophy and values. To this end, he fearlessly spoke truth to power. In fact, most of his works and reflections were directed at the problems of the elite and intelligentsia in major domains of society and their vital role in diagnosing problems inimical to the well-being of society and providing solutions to alleviate them. His original and pathbreaking contributions critically examined problems that were often overlooked, neglected, downplayed or ignored in dominant discourse both in academia and public life. Amongst these were the Myth of the Lazy native, Intellectuals in Developing Societies, Problems of Corruption, Modernisation and Social Change. Professor Alatas also published extensively and delivered hundreds of public lectures on his reflections on religion, culture, tradition and reform. His strong critique on academic imperialism and its adverse ramifications on intellectual captivity on indigenous scholars and elites and his contributions to the development of autonomous social science were trailblazers to later advancements in critical theory among Asian scholars.

Under Professor Alatas' leadership, the Department witnessed a radical shift from its early focus on the study of the Malay language, literature and culture as part of colonial and nationalistic interest to one that pioneered and prioritised development and the problems and challenges of adaptation to social change grounded in multidisciplinary and social science perspectives drawn from both the west and Asian intellectual tradition. This focus has indelibly shaped and impacted the direction and mission of the Department till today although faculty members have certainly evolved their own research and teaching trajectories since then. One of the major enablers for this continuity has been the impact of the late Professor's mentorship on his students and colleagues. He was indeed a

model mentor who dedicated much of his time and efforts to developing critical awareness among his students and those interested. Several of the students he supervised later joined the Department or served in other universities abroad where they developed independently their own intellectual journey and continued to contribute fresh ideas to significant problems. Amongst them were former heads of the Department, Professor Tham Seong Chee and Dr. Shaharudin. Others who joined academia included our distinguished speaker Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, the late Dr. Tan Chin Kwang, A/P Hadijah Rahmat and Dr. Saedah Buang from NTU, Dr. Sharon Siddique (SUTD) and many others not excluding myself. Professor Alatas also shaped the minds of many prominent Malay elite in Singapore who had crossed his path both as students of Malay Studies or through informal reading groups which he used to conduct in his own home. Some who are here today to grace this occasion include A/P Yaacob Ibrahim, Mr. Zainul Abideen Rashid, Mr. Ibrahim Hassan (Mediacorp) and numerous others which time does not permit me to name individually.

Distinguished guests, this memorial lecture series is not intended to develop a personality cult around the late Professor or is to glorify him like what we see of instant heroes on social media today. Its main purpose is to institutionalise the ideals of excellence embodied in the contributions of the late Professor that will allow others to strengthen and develop them with the overriding objective of improving the well-being of the community and the larger society. It is hoped that the memorial lecture series in the name of the late Professor will serve as a constructive platform that can generate stronger interest and awareness especially amongst our alumni and the larger community on significant issues and challenges that confront us today. The support from our alumni and those interested through this platform is indeed vital to enriching the Department's efforts. The Department alone cannot sustain discourse on the condition of the community without strong and effective support of groups beyond the university. Members of the alumni must assist us in playing their role in initiating and leading discussions that will support and complement the Department's efforts. Over the years, the Department has introduced a number of public platforms focussing on specific areas pertaining to the Malays that are intended to facilitate such engagement involving alumni and members of the Malay professionals and civic organisations. In this respect we have collaborated with partner agencies and received much support from them including funding our programmes. On behalf of the Department I take this opportunity to thank our major national partners for their kind support both in terms of funding and beyond for our events all these years. In particular my appreciation goes to the the National Library Board, the National Arts Council, Malay Heritage Board, the Ministry of Education (MELAKA) , MUIS, the Lee Foundation and Mendaki. I would also like to express our utmost gratitude to the MES Group for their kind and generous commitment in funding the Syed Hussein Alatas Memorial Lecture series launched today. Their commitment has made possible for the lecture series to be sustained on an annual basis for at least ten years.

Distinguished guests, it is an honour to have with us today our esteemed speaker to deliver the Inaugural Syed Hussein Alatas Memorial Lecture. Dr. Chandra is certainly the most suitable candidate to launch this memorial lecture in the name of the late Professor. An intellectual and esteemed social activist, Dr. Chandra is an alumni of the Department. Though he did not read Malay Studies in his undergraduate years in the late 60s, Professor Alatas had been a major influence that had impacted his intellectual life in the early years. Dr. Chandra was later supervised by his mentor for his PhD on a topic that continue to bear much relevance till today ie dominant and dissenting ideas in Malay society from the past to the present. He was conferred his PhD in 1972. Dr. Chandra's critical scholarship and his social activism are committed to promoting social progress and justice. He

was the founder of Aliran , a social reform group based in Malaysia in 1977. He also had a brief stint in politics when he served as deputy president of Keadilan. As a scholar he held appointments at Universiti Malaya and Universiti Sains Malaysia. He is presently President of JUST, an NGO committed to developing an alternative vision of a just and compassionate civilisation guided by universal spiritual and moral values. Dr. Chandra is also Chairman of the Board of Trustees of I Malaysia. His extensive publications focus on critical issues relating to religion, politics, human rights and civilisation dialogue. He has published 31 books many of which have been translated into several languages. His latest publications are books entitled Critical Concerns from East to West, the Long Journey to Human Dignity and Global Justice, Wither WANA? Reflections on Arab Uprisings and a World in Crisis: Is there a Cure? Dr. Chandra's contributions have earned him several prestigious international awards.

Distinguished guests, I am indeed honoured to welcome Dr. Chandra to deliver his inaugural speech.

Thank you.