

28 OCT 1985

Singapore Government

# PRESS RELEASE

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PS-CJK-:D

Release No. 37/OCT  
04-2/85/10/20

SPEECH BY MR CH'NG JIT KOON, MINISTER OF STATE (COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT), AT THE MANDARIN ORATORICAL CONTEST ORGANISED BY THE CIVIL DEFENCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION OF SINGAPORE CIVIL DEFENCE FORCE AT THE TIONG BAHRU COMMUNITY CENTRE ON SUNDAY, 20 OCTOBER 1985 AT 10.30 AM

I am pleased to be here at this Mandarin Oratorical Contest organised by the Civil Defence Welfare Association of the Singapore Civil Defence Force in conjunction with the National Speak Mandarin Campaign. This contest serves two purposes: It helps to encourage more Chinese Singaporeans to speak Mandarin and to generate an even better understanding of Civil Defence among our people.

To promote the use of Mandarin, we need first to ensure that the people have some knowledge of the language. It is pointless for us to keep urging or reasoning to someone who is not familiar with a language to use the language unless we can provide him with the assistance he requires. The Government has devoted quite a substantial effort in this aspect, like conducting Mandarin conversational courses for the Civil Servants, various types of Speak Mandarin programmes over the radio, television and even through the telephone for members of the public to learn the language. Many private organisations have also carried out intensive Mandarin courses for their employees. We should continue to provide ample opportunities for the people to learn the language. However, it does not mean that after going through these elementary programmes or classes, the people will be able to speak Mandarin effectively. If they do not speak the language regularly, or if they fail to further upgrade their knowledge in the

language, they will soon forget what they have learnt. As a result, their previous efforts will be wasted. There is, therefore, a need to provide Mandarin lessons beyond the elementary level so that those who have achieved a reasonable standard of competence in the use of Mandarin are given a chance to further improve themselves.

For those who are already conversant with the use of Mandarin, they should set a good example by speaking Mandarin instead of dialect more often in the community. In this way, they can help to make Mandarin the lingua franca among the Chinese thereby enhancing the practical value of Mandarin. The success achieved in the teaching of Chinese as a second language in our schools has also contributed greatly in creating a Mandarin speaking environment. We can expect more and more people to converse in Mandarin because of this success. I am therefore confident that with all the efforts put in by both the government and the community, we should be able to achieve our aim of promoting the use of Mandarin among the Chinese.

I shall now talk about the importance of Civil Defence. There are many places in the world which are in a state of war and chaos. Although we enjoy political stability in Singapore now, we can never know what will happen to Singapore in the future. No one can guarantee that we can enjoy peace forever in this fast-changing world. If war unfortunately breaks out here, the bomb will not be just hurled on military installations but will also fall on civilian properties. The bullets will shower not only on the military personnel, but will also hurt or kill the innocent women, children and the old folks. If we prepare for war during peace time, learn to put out fire, perform first aid on the injured and control evacuation in emergency, we could then remain calm and stable when there is a sudden outbreak of war or any disaster.

Being well prepared in Civil Defence skills, we can also reduce the extent of damages to properties and minimise the casualties or death toll. More importantly, our soldiers will be able to maintain their fighting spirit at the battle front only if they know well that their families are well taken care of under our Civil Defence Scheme.

The promotion of Civil Defence exercises goes beyond the racial or language barrier. If we do well in our Civil Defence, it will not only enhance our total defence capabilities but also strengthen the fabric of our multi-racial society. This will be the most important safeguard for the peace and prosperity which we have painstakingly achieved over the past 25 years.

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