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**SPEECH BY MR WONG KAN SENG, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS  
AT THE LAUNCH OF THE 1995 SPEAK MANDARIN CAMPAIGN  
ON MONDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER 1995 AT 7.30 PM  
AT THE TELEVISION CORPORATION OF SINGAPORE (TCS) TV THEATRE**

After years of Speak Mandarin Campaign, there is no doubt that Mandarin is now more widely used among Chinese Singaporeans. Before, Chinese Singaporeans spoke dialects in their daily interactions among themselves. Now, our senior citizens, shopkeepers and hawkers have learnt to speak Mandarin. Even the Seventh Moon groups are using Mandarin as the language for their auctions. I notice this in my constituency visits and Meet-the-People sessions. Now that Mandarin is being taught as a subject in schools, most Chinese Singaporeans are able to speak Mandarin at a fairly competent level. This means that among the Chinese community in Singapore, Mandarin is fast becoming a common, unifying tongue. It helps to promote mutual understanding and cohesion among various Chinese dialect groups.

However, we must look beyond that fact. Mandarin has both cultural and economic significance. Language is a powerful means of maintaining our tradition and culture. Past Speak Mandarin campaigns have often emphasised, quite rightly, that knowing one's mother tongue is an invaluable means to understanding one's culture better. Knowing a language opens up a world of information and experience about the culture behind that language, something that mere linguistic translation can never hope to convey as satisfactorily. It is a bridge towards one's roots, ensuring that cultural heritage will not be lost in current and future globalising influences.

Language is also an economic tool. The growth of China's economy provides a strong impetus for Mandarin to gain wider

usage among Chinese Singaporeans, and indeed, Chinese people living in all parts of the world. The Mandarin-speaking businessmen who venture into China will not only have a window to the Chinese language and culture but will also realise the economic benefits of knowing Mandarin. Hence, speaking Mandarin with your counterparts in China can bring a facilitative atmosphere of intimacy to your business dealings. This will also help you to establish "quanxi" in China.

Many older Singaporeans are not educated because they did not have the opportunity of education when they were young. Since the launch of the Speak Mandarin Campaign in 1979, many of them were encouraged to learn to read Chinese and speak Mandarin. This has boosted their self-esteem and self-development.

Thus, the Speak Mandarin Campaign remains relevant, even with the rising percentage of Chinese Singaporeans who speak Mandarin. But we should not be content with what we have achieved so far with the campaign. We should take the campaign a logical step further: to promote a higher level of competency in Mandarin among Chinese Singaporeans.

In recent years, there has been concern over the increased use of English vis a vis Mandarin. For example, a survey of some 100 bilingual pre-schoolers at the Asian Reading Congress in June this year revealed that they used less Mandarin than English at home. So while Mandarin has largely supplanted dialects, the use of English is also on the rise.

Such a situation should come as no surprise. Our schools teach in English, and it is still the language of business and administration in Singapore and the world. But we do not want Chinese Singaporeans to lose out on their mother tongue. This is why the Speak Mandarin Campaign has specifically targeted English-educated Chinese Singaporeans in the last four years. I am pleased to note that the present Committee to Promote the Use of Mandarin includes both English- and Chinese-educated

members.

I would like to conclude with some observations about the ways in which we try to shape and manage the use of Mandarin among Chinese Singaporeans. Apart from situational factors like level of education, language use among family and friends, and the bilingual policy in schools, the use of Mandarin among Chinese Singaporeans really boils down to personal motivation - how far the individual is able and willing to develop a competent level of proficiency in the language. This is why the campaign this year continues to emphasise, as in last year, the lighter aspects of learning and using the language, to make learning fun. We want Chinese Singaporeans to speak more Mandarin, but we do not want them to get anxious or feel pressured about it.

The continued success of our efforts to promote Mandarin will depend on the ability of the campaign activities to achieve resonance with the target groups. The Committee to Promote the Use of Mandarin has organised various activities such as the recently-concluded Mandarin Debate for Junior Colleges, a Chinese Film Premiere later this month, and a Toastmasters' Competition in Mandarin for Businessmen in October. These activities are a step in the right direction. They are novel and interesting ways of encouraging English-educated Chinese Singaporeans to use more Mandarin, and of raising the profile of the language among this target group. Chinese-speaking Singaporeans should also do their part in using Mandarin whenever possible with English-speaking Chinese Singaporeans, and be helpful in enlightening them about the links between the language and the culture. The Committee could also organise or encourage other organisations to hold supplementary activities such as Mandarin Oratorical Contests, Appreciation of Chinese Proverbs Courses and Chinese Riddle Contests throughout the year to further promote the use of Mandarin. A comprehensive and facilitative learning environment will then be achieved, moving the Chinese community here ever closer to establishing Mandarin as their true lingua franca.

Ladies and gentlemen, on this note, I am pleased to launch the 1995 Speak Mandarin Campaign.

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