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PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR CH'NG JIT KOON, MINISTER OF STATE (COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT), AT THE "XINYAO NIGHT" AT KIM TIAN ROAD MARKET (BASKETBALL COURT BEHIND BLOCK 119 KIM TIAN ROAD) ON SATURDAY, 18 OCTOBER 1986 AT 7.30 PM

The Speak Mandarin Campaign is now entering into its eighth year. The non-Chinese communities in Singapore now understand that the campaign is targetted at the Chinese community only. The campaign has achieved remarkable success in promoting the use of Mandarin. Survey findings show that the number of Chinese Singaporeans who can speak fluent Mandarin has gone up from 76 per cent in 1981 to 82 per cent in 1985. More and more Chinese Singaporeans are speaking Mandarin in their daily life, particularly at youth gatherings. Many Chinese parents also speak to their children in Mandarin.

Notwithstanding this success, there is still an area where progress has not been entirely satisfactory. We find that there are still a lot of people speaking dialects at hawker centres, markets and coffee shops. This is probably a matter of habit. Added to this is the misconception that hawkers do not speak Mandarin. Hence the continued use of dialects at hawker centres.

For this reason, this year's Speak Mandarin Campaign is targetted at the food and drinks sector. The aim is to get the Chinese patrons, food vendors and their employees to drop dialects in favour of Mandarin and to remove the misconception that hawkers do not speak Mandarin.

In fact, according to press reports, hawkers in Singapore generally have had some education. Most of them can speak Mandarin. If customers speak in Mandarin, hawkers will have no problem following it up in Mandarin in most cases. Therefore, I would urge food vendors and their employees to speak in Mandarin when serving customers. This will go a long way in popularising the use of Mandarin and helping to create a Mandarin-speaking environment.

So long as everyone understands the objectives and advantages of promoting the use of Mandarin, takes cognizance of the fact that the great majority of Chinese Singaporeans can speak Mandarin and makes a conscious effort to use Mandarin at all times, the success of the Speak Mandarin Campaign will then be long lasting.

The performance you will be seeing tonight is a novel way of promoting the use of Mandarin and at the same time providing entertainment. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the organisers namely the Lianhe Zoabao and Lianhe Wanbao and the artistes performing at this "Xinyao Night" and all of you here for giving your enthusiastic support to the Speak Mandarin Campaign. It is hoped that after watching tonight's splendid performance, you will always bear in mind the message brought by "Xinyao Night" - start with Mandarin, not dialect.

I wish you an enjoyable evening.

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