

Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY DR TAY ENG SOON, MINISTER OF STATE (EDUCATION),
AT THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION'S SPEAK MANDARIN CAMPAIGN -
INTER-DIVISION SPEAK MANDARIN COMPETITION -
AT THE RELC AUDITORIUM
ON SATURDAY, 17 OCTOBER 1987 AT 12.30 PM

This year, the nation-wide Speak Mandarin Campaign is entering its 9th year. As you all know, the aim of the campaign is to encourage all Chinese Singaporeans to speak Mandarin instead of dialects. For this year, the official slogan is "Start with Mandarin, Speak it more often". A survey shows that more than 80 per cent of ethnic Chinese can speak Mandarin. Some of us have yet to make it a habit of speaking Mandarin when the need arises. It is vital that we take the initiative to use the language if we want to strive for greater achievement in this on-going campaign. This is, of course, part of our efforts towards bilingualism.

Let me take myself as an example, I have learnt Mandarin in the past few years. But I always think that I am merely a beginner of the language. It is because I do not have many opportunities to practise the language. However, I do try my best to converse in Mandarin to people who cannot speak English or who speak only dialects. By doing so, I have found that it helps not only to increase my confidence in speaking the language but also to improve fluency and vocabulary.

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There are many good reasons for the Chinese to speak Mandarin. Mandarin cuts across all dialect barriers among the Chinese community. It is a common language that is acceptable to all the Chinese. Moreover, Mandarin is a rich language. It has grown with time; it has developed. It gives us knowledge and understanding of our cultural heritage. There is another important reason. Chinese pupils learn Mandarin in school. As far as possible, they should speak it at home with their parents. They will then apply what they learn in school. The more children speak Mandarin, the better they will master it.

In your working environment, I am sure, you have many opportunities to use Mandarin especially when you deal with the public. Do make it a point to speak to them in Mandarin in place of dialects. Moreover, let us bear in the mind this year's slogan "Start with Mandarin, Speak it more often".

5 Finally, I congratulate those who have won a prize in today's inter-divisional competition. To those who did not perform well, I hope you will make it next year.

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