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**SPEECH BY MR HO KAH LEONG, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY
(EDUCATION) AND CHAIRMAN OF PROMOTE THE USE OF MANDARIN
CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE, AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE PROMOTE THE
USE OF MANDARIN MONTH 1984 AT THE SINGAPORE CONFERENCE HALL
ON FRIDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 1984 AT 8.30 PM**

The inauguration of the Use Mandarin Month this evening marks the commencement of the sixth year of the Speak Mandarin Campaign since it was launched by our Prime Minister in September 1979. In October 1981 our Prime Minister launched the campaign for the second time and gave away certificates to civil servants who passed the Oral Mandarin Examination. Tonight's function is the third occasion when we have the honour and pleasure of our Prime Minister's presence. We are grateful that he has kindly consented to officiate at this year's campaign opening ceremony. His presence is a clear indication of the importance of this campaign and his own personal interest to promote the use of Mandarin.

It is perhaps pertinent to ask, "What has been achieved over the past five years?" It takes a long time to change people's language habits which are deep-rooted in most cases. We have succeeded to a certain extent in the five years of promotional efforts. There are now more people using Mandarin in market places, supermarkets, hawker centres, eating houses and restaurants and across counters at government and statutory board departments. It is hoped that eventually all ethnic Chinese could be persuaded to abandon dialects in favour of Mandarin.

Meanwhile, we cannot wait until all ethnic Chinese have given up dialects for Mandarin to start paying attention to the issue of standard and non-standard Mandarin. We feel strongly that we must promote the use of standard form Mandarin. Of course, we cannot expect every Chinese Singaporean to speak Mandarin with a Beijing accent. We must, however, use a version of Mandarin that is intelligible and acceptable to Mandarin speakers in other parts of the world. We have, therefore, set up a committee for Standard Mandarin and done research on the vocabulary, phonology and syntax of Mandarin. The sub-committee on vocabulary has already come up with a list of standardised terms commonly used in market places and hawker centres. We hope these new standardised terms will be widely adopted.

The majority of the population in Singapore are ethnic Chinese. However, compared with the population of Mandarin speakers all over the world, we are but a very small group. Under such circumstances, it is almost impossible for us to take a leading position in any reforms to the Chinese language. However, it does not mean that we should not pay attention to movements which are aimed at the reformation of the Chinese language. These movements are taking place in countries where Mandarin speakers make up the majority of their population. We have come to know that, at the moment, there are experts on language reforms in China who are researching into the possibility of romanizing the ideographic Chinese characters. We also know that some primary schools in Heilungjiang of northern China are experimenting with a method of teaching and learning the Chinese language through first mastering Hanyu Pinyin before going on to the characters to make possible the early learning of reading and writing. We should benefit from such research findings. However we should not rush into changes until we are sure of the effectiveness of such experiments.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my heart-felt thanks to our Prime Minister for gracing the occasion with his kind presence. My thanks are also due to the public and private sectors, community leaders, the social and commercial groups and clan associations who have supported the Speak Mandarin Campaign. We hope that greater efforts will be made by all parties concerned to bring about an even greater success to this campaign.

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