

Media Release

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“USE IT, DON'T LOSE IT” -- SPEAK MANDARIN CAMPAIGN 2003 CALLS ON PROFESSIONALS AND YOUNGER CHINESE SINGAPOREANS TO ACHIEVE GREATER PROFICIENCY IN MANDARIN

Singapore, 18 September 2003 – More Chinese Singaporeans above the age of 15 prefer to speak Mandarin, according to the AC Nielsen Media Index 2002, which polled more than 4,000 individuals. The survey shows that the percentage of Chinese adults above 15 years who prefer using Mandarin in their daily life has increased over the past three years - from 58% in 2000 to 64% in 2002.

In addition, 87% of these Chinese adults polled say they are literate in Chinese, compared to 82% in 2000. And nearly all of these adults or 99% in 2002 understand Mandarin, while the figure was 98% for 2000.

While these figures reflect the success of the Speak Mandarin Campaign in establishing Mandarin as the common language of communication among Chinese Singaporeans in the last 25 years, the continued and increasing use of Mandarin is vital for Chinese Singaporeans to move towards a higher level of proficiency in the language. The key thrust of this year's campaign thus focuses on the importance of continuing to speak Mandarin or risk losing the ability to use it.

With the success of the Speak Mandarin Campaign over the years, the challenges and objectives of the campaign have also evolved. Professor Wee Chow Hou, Chairman of the Promote Mandarin Council (PMC), observed that while more Chinese Singaporeans are speaking Mandarin in their daily life, more needs to be done to deepen the knowledge of Mandarin beyond speaking the language.

“It is not uncommon to hear Chinese Singaporeans pepper their Mandarin conversations with English words and phrases, especially when they have difficulty expressing themselves. We need to help them build up their vocabulary and improve their quality of spoken and written language, especially among the younger Chinese and the professionals. When they get more comfortable with the language, it will also cultivate a greater depth of knowledge and understanding of Chinese culture,” says Prof Wee.

This year's campaign aims to:

- Reach out to and engage English-speaking Chinese Singaporeans to learn and speak better Mandarin in their everyday life;
- Build a community of Chinese Singaporeans who have a strong command of the language as well as an appreciation and understanding of Chinese culture, tradition and history.

Statistics from AC Nielsen's Media Index 2002 shows that among Chinese professionals, managers and executives (PMEs), the use of Mandarin is increasing but still below the national average. 58% of this group prefers communicating in Mandarin in 2002 compared to 52% in 2000. With the emergence of China, knowledge of Mandarin has become an economic asset, and this has provided the added advantage and urgency for English-speaking PME's to take learning Mandarin more seriously.

Among Chinese adults aged between 15 and 29, who grew up in a bilingual education system, Mandarin is spoken at a basic level. However, most of them do not read, write or understand Mandarin at a deeper level. This is a target group of the SMC as they are unable to communicate well in Mandarin, especially on a formal basis.

This year, the National Library Board (NLB) took over as the secretariat supporting the Promote Mandarin Council. There is very good synergy as the PMC works with the NLB to bring the Speak Mandarin message to the people, tapping on NLB's vast network and resources.

On this challenging role for the NLB, Jennifer Yin, Head of the PMC Secretariat, said: "The NLB, with its network of 22 regional and community libraries, is well-placed to promote the Speak Mandarin Campaign and to reach out to the masses. We want to encourage Chinese Singaporeans to improve their command of Mandarin through reading, and our vast collection of 1.8 million Chinese books is a valuable resource for them to learn more about Chinese language and culture. We have also partnered various bodies from the private and public sector to deliver a variety of innovative and refreshing programmes to promote Mandarin throughout the year."

Channel NewsAsia has been appointed as the official TV media for this year's campaign.

Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts Dr Lee Boon Yang will launch the 25th Speak Mandarin Campaign on 23 September 2003 at 4.30pm at Mox Bar & Café, 21 Tanjong Pagar Road #04-01.

Ends

About Speak Mandarin Campaign

The Speak Mandarin Campaign (SMC) was launched by then Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew in 1979. Now into its 25th year, the Speak Mandarin Campaign is a year-round campaign, focusing on creating awareness through publicity and getting community involvement. Several programmes to facilitate the learning of Mandarin have been introduced. This included publications/resources such as CD-ROMs and tapes of Mandarin lessons for people who are keen to learn Mandarin, handbooks of English-Chinese terms and telephone Mandarin lessons. More information on SMC can be found on www.mandarin.org.sg

About National Library Board

The National Library Board (NLB) was established on 1 September 1995 with the mission to continuously expand the learning capacity of the nation. NLB oversees the management of the National Library, two regional libraries, 20 community libraries, 28 community children's libraries, as well as libraries of government agencies, schools and private institutions. Hosted by digital information solutions provider, eLibraryHub, the NLB Digital Library provides patrons access to information resources and services any time, anywhere. Through its innovative use of technology and collaboration with strategic partners, the NLB ensures that library users have access to a rich array of information services and resources that are convenient, accessible and useful. More information on NLB can be found on www.nlb.gov.sg

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