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SPEECH BY MR HO KAH LEONG, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (EDUCATION), AT THE LAUNCHING OF THE "DIAL-FOR-MANDARIN" TELEPHONE SERVICE (SERIES THREE) AT THE PSA AUDITORIUM ON MONDAY, 20 MAY 1985 AT 3.00 PM

Since the launching of the Speak Mandarin Campaign in 1979, two fundamental approaches have been adopted to help create a Mandarin-speaking environment for ethnic Chinese Singaporeans. One is to encourage those who know Mandarin to speak it more often in daily life and the other is to help those who do not know Mandarin to learn it if they are interested.

The "Dial-For-Mandarin" telephone service was first introduced in May '83 as one of the activities in line with the second approach. The first series of 52 lessons of the "Dial-For-Mandarin" telephone service was transmitted between May '83 and May '84. This was immediately followed by the second series which also comprised 52 lessons. The second series ended earlier this morning.

The "Dial-For-Mandarin" telephone service was introduced to provide those who are unable to find the time to attend formal Mandarin courses with an easy means to learn Mandarin at their own leisure and pace. Since the first launching, the service has received positive response from the public. The incidence of calls to the "Dial-For-Mandarin" service was extremely high when the service was first introduced. The 32 telephone lines devoted to the service had to be increased to 64 and eventually to 100 to relief congestion.

It has been two years since the service was first introduced. Up till now, the response has been very encouraging. Latest call statistics monitored by Telecoms for the first quarter of this year showed that the service received an average of about 1,700 call attempts per hour. The 100 lines for the service can cater to a maximum of 2,000 calls per hour.

As in Series One, a questionnaire survey was carried out in March '85 to gauge the response of the public to the "Dial-For-Mandarin" Series Two. Survey forms were sent to some 529 persons who obtained booklets containing lessons for "Dial-For-Mandarin" (Series Two) from the Ministry. Forty per cent of them responded.

Encouraging results were noted from the survey conducted this year. More and more people were using Mandarin in their daily life and in other situations. The percentage of respondents who did not use Mandarin at all at home fell from 18.42 per cent in 1984 to 9.39 per cent in 1985 while the percentage for those who did not use Mandarin at all in public places fell from 19.30 per cent to 6.57 per cent.

The percentage of respondents using Mandarin "quite/very often" in places of work and at social gatherings rose significantly. The percentage of respondents who used Mandarin "quite/very often" at their work places rose from 23.69 per cent to 35.21 per cent. 32.4 per cent indicated that they were using Mandarin "quite/very often" at social gatherings compared to 23.69 per cent in the last survey.

The rise in the percentage of Mandarin speakers at home is also encouraging. 53.99 per cent of the respondents claimed that "sometimes" they used Mandarin at home. The percentage for 1984 survey was 42.11 per cent.

The majority of the respondents, nearly 80 per cent, find the lessons useful in their daily life. About 40 per cent wanted to revise/practise their Mandarin or to broaden their vocabulary.

Forty-seven per cent claimed that their understanding of Mandarin had improved tremendously or fairly well. Almost half indicated that their spoken Mandarin had improved tremendously or fairly well. Majority of the respondents (95 per cent) would like the service to be continued after Series Two.

The Committee to Promote the Use of Mandarin which mooted this unique idea of introducing the "Dial-For-Mandarin" telephone service is pleased with the favourable public response. In view of the encouraging interest in the "Dial-For-Mandarin" service as seen from the results of the recent survey, the Committee has decided to continue the service with Series Three. However, as I mentioned when I launched the "Dial-For-Mandarin" Series Two in May last year, the service cannot be extended indefinitely because of the constraints of the telephone network. Because of technical constraints experienced by Telecoms, the service has to be brought to a conclusion by the end of 1985. This means that Series Three which is being launched this afternoon will be the last series. The 52 lessons in Series Three will have to be transmitted within the next seven months. The frequency of the lessons, which was one lesson a week in the past two series will, therefore, have to be doubled to two consecutive lessons a week for Series Three. Users of the service can now learn two lessons a week instead of one. The changeover of lessons will take place every Monday and Thursday before 9.00 am.

A lot of time, effort and co-ordination have been put in by various organisations and individuals to make the service possible and to ensure its smooth running over the

past two years. On behalf of the Committee to Promote the Use of Mandarin, I would like to take this opportunity, once again, to express the gratitude of the Committee to the various organisations and individuals concerned who have in one way or another made the service a success :-

- (a) the three Education Officers, namely, Mr Teo Seng Huat, Mr Tham Siew Kwang and Mr Hoo Boon Piang, who designed and developed the course;
- (b) the panel of advisors, namely, Mr Loo Shaw Chang of the Chinese Language and Research Centre, NUS, Dr Chew Cheng Hai of Institute of Education and Mr Cheah Chak Mun of the Education Ministry for their advice, assistance and time in vetting the lessons;
- (c) the Ministry of Education for providing the services of the three Education officers;
- (d) Telecoms for providing the equipment and maintaining the service;
- (e) the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation for recording the lessons on tapes;
- (f) the Straits Times & Lianhe Zaobao which have been publishing the lessons in the newspapers over the past two years and have agreed to continue to do so for third series;
- (g) the Translation Section of the Ministry of Communications & Information for translating the course materials and the Mandarin Campaign Secretariat for co-ordinating the project.

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