

EMBARGO TILL 16 SEP 2000, 7.30 PM

SPEECH BY PROFESSOR WEE CHOW HOU, CHAIRMAN, PROMOTE MANDARIN COUNCIL, AT THE LAUNCH OF THE 2000 SPEAK MANDARIN CAMPAIGN ON SATURDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 2000 AT 7.30 PM AT GV GRAND, GREAT WORLD CITY

Minister for National Development Mr Mah Bow Tan, Minister for Information and the Arts and Minister for the Environment Mr Lee Yock Suan, distinguished guests, members of the Promote Mandarin Council, ladies and gentlemen, good evening.

2 After 21 years, the Speak Mandarin Campaign has succeeded in getting most Chinese Singaporeans, including the English-educated, to speak the language. The challenge now is to get them to speak more and better Mandarin. This year, the Promote Mandarin Council will focus on creating a conducive environment to help speakers attain a higher standard of Mandarin.

3 The Council is planning a diverse range of interesting activities to engage the Mandarin-speaking public. Among other things, there will be forums on the learning of Mandarin, web chats with celebrities, a Chinese Heritage Series to discover the cultural nuances of Mandarin, and a showcasing of critically-acclaimed Mandarin movies. Given such an environment, we hope that learning Mandarin will be fun and every one will be encouraged to improve his standard of spoken Mandarin and deepen his appreciation of the language.

4 To get things moving, a Mandarin Film Festival will be held at Golden Village Grand from 17 September to 23 September. Watching movies is one of the best ways of appreciating the richness of a language because we are exposed to situational dialogue and expressions. The dozen movies that are picked for this Festival are among the best in Chinese cinema because many are award-winners, with varied and innovative themes. I can hardly think of a more entertaining way to learn Mandarin.

5 Another new Campaign activity is the 'Mandarin for the Family' forum. Scheduled for November to coincide with the school holidays, the forum features prominent personalities in various fields who will share their personal experiences in learning Mandarin. Because of their varied backgrounds and diverse ages, each of them will have his own unique and compelling story to tell. Participants, especially parents, can pick up tips on how to create a Mandarin-speaking

environment at home. Children too will be engaged in interesting activities like story-telling and hands-on sessions in Chinese arts and handicrafts. In short, 'Mandarin for the Family' will be an occasion for the discovery of Mandarin as the key to the rich Chinese heritage for both parent and child.

6 The Chinese Heritage Series aims to familiarise Chinese Singaporeans with the artistic aspect of Chinese culture. Through a variety of cultural shows, from puppet shows, *Xinyao* to orchestra, we aim to showcase the diversity of Chinese art forms. The presentations are done in both Mandarin and English by emcees who are also popular radio deejays. During the shows, the audience will pick up tips on Chinese culture and art forms. For instance, during the performance of a Chinese Orchestra, the emcee will briefly introduce the various orchestral instruments. The audience will also be invited to take part in games that are hip and entertaining. Through this, we hope to convince Chinese Singaporeans that knowing Mandarin not only enables them to appreciate their culture, but will open up new opportunities for learning and enjoyment.

7 We have also improved our website (mandarin.org.sg) with information on the cultural aspects of the language. The site is a gold mine of information on Chinese festivals such as the mid-Autumn festival, Chinese fables like the Cowherd and the Maiden, as well as the meanings behind Chinese surnames.

8 The site has also featured web chats with personalities like Jack Neo, Ann Kok, Evelyn Tan, Diana Ser and Belinda Lee. We intend to carry on with this practice so that web chatters will have a medium through which they can practise their Mandarin. In the months ahead, we will also be working with StareastNet to invite some foreign artistes over for a 'performance-cum-sharing' session during which they will share their experience of learning Mandarin even as they perform their acts.

9 Earlier, I mentioned the need to speak more and better Mandarin. Looking ahead, and recognizing the increasing importance of China as an economic super power, it may be timely for us to reconsider levelling up the spoken form. This will enable Chinese Singaporeans to have a deeper appreciation of their culture and to use the Chinese language as an important competitive tool in the world of business as well. It is also part of our goal toward life-long learning.

10 To sum up, the Promote Mandarin Council aims to provide Chinese Singaporeans with an environment to speak better Mandarin and further appreciate Chinese culture and heritage. We hope they will respond by participating in the

many interesting activities lined up for them. Finally, we hope that at the end of the Campaign, they would be convinced that speaking good Mandarin is not only easy, but can also be an asset. Thank you.

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