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**SPEECH BY DR TONY TAN KENG YAM,
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE,
AT THE LAUNCH OF THE 1996 SPEAK MANDARIN CAMPAIGN
HELD AT GOLDEN VILLAGE MARINA
ON SATURDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 1996 AT 7.15 PM**

I am very pleased to be here this evening to officiate at the launching ceremony of the 1996 Speak Mandarin Campaign.

The Speak Mandarin Campaign was first launched eighteen years ago on 7 September 1979. In the initial years of the Speak Mandarin Campaign, the objective was to replace the use of dialects with Mandarin in order to help reduce the difficulties which children face in learning Mandarin in our schools. While dialects have retained and probably will forever retain strong emotional bonds for Chinese Singaporeans, the Speak Mandarin Campaign has succeeded in changing the language habits of Chinese Singaporeans. Today, more and more adults and children use Mandarin for conversation at home, at hawker centres, in the offices and at work places. With Mandarin more widely used in Singapore among Chinese Singaporeans, children in our schools get greater exposure to the language. This has helped to reduce the difficulty of learning Mandarin in our schools.

With Westernisation and greater use of English in Singapore, many Singaporean parents are concerned that their children may lose their sense of identity and eventually forget who they are and where their ancestors came from. In response to this worry, the Speak Mandarin Campaign promoted the learning of Mandarin as the essential key to our culture and heritage for Chinese Singaporeans.

A knowledge of Mandarin reminds Chinese Singaporeans of their ancestral roots. It strengthens awareness of deeply held traditions and values. It provides an anchor for our children so that they do not forget their origins and become adrift when faced with the pervasive influence of Western ideas and practices in the modern world.

This year, the theme of the Speak Mandarin Campaign is "Speak Mandarin, Explore New Horizons".

Singapore straddles East and West geographically and culturally. We can be a valuable partner for Western companies who wish to invest and do business in China. Similarly, we can facilitate the expansion of Chinese companies to Europe and America. Chinese Singaporeans, who can communicate effectively in Mandarin as well as in English, will have many opportunities to benefit from the growth of China's economy. With China's rapid development, the learning of Mandarin has become more widespread worldwide. Mandarin will be an important international language in the next century. Knowing Mandarin opens up a whole world of opportunities for Chinese Singaporeans.

There is therefore much to lose if we do not provide a conducive environment for our children to use Mandarin. Already, English is the medium of instruction in schools; and the predominant medium of business transaction and cyberspace communication. If Chinese parents only stress the importance of English to their children, we could get ourselves into a situation whereby Mandarin becomes a language that Chinese children doggedly learn in order to pass exams, rather than a language in which they think or feel. The Speak Mandarin Campaign has, thus, shifted its focus to English-educated Chinese Singaporeans in the last five years.

Promoting the learning of Mandarin is a long-term task. It requires constant effort both on the part of the individual as well as on the community. For the Speak Mandarin Campaign to achieve its objective, new and innovative ideas have to be tried out to make the learning of Mandarin more effective and interesting. I commend the Committee to Promote the Use of Mandarin on their efforts to encourage the use of new techniques to facilitate the learning of Mandarin, for example, learning the language through television, movies or karaoke.

The Committee's decision to work with community groups to publicise their projects is another good idea. This creates more opportunities for English-educated Chinese Singaporeans to get in touch with Mandarin. At the same time, they will also likely to learn more about Chinese Arts and other aspects of Chinese culture.

Provided that we keep up the effort, we can make sure that Chinese Singaporeans will have the preparation to cope effectively with the demands of

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living in a modern Singapore and with the challenges of regionalisation without losing their sense of identity and cultural heritage.

On this note, I am pleased to launch the 1996 Speak Mandarin Campaign.

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