

2007 Official Launch of the Speak Mandarin Campaign (SMC)

Monday 5 November 2007, 3.00pm

The Cage @ Kallang

Speech for Minister Lim Swee Say, Prime Minister's Office

Secretary-General, National Trades Union Congress

Good afternoon, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. I am very glad to be with you at the 28th year of the Speak Mandarin Campaign (SMC) 07/08. As I look back at the history and roots of the SMC, I can see that it has really grown into a strong campaign that has sunk roots into Singapore society. The campaign was started to encourage the Chinese in Singapore to speak Mandarin instead of dialects so that there is a common language amongst the Chinese, allowing for better communication and hence understanding.

Over the years, the SMC has continued to encourage Chinese Singaporeans young and old to speak Mandarin. As times change, people change, and our target audience has changed, but the mandate has not changed. SMC is still encouraging Chinese Singaporeans to speak Mandarin. In this campaign year, we will focus on PMEBS, that is, the Professionals, Managers, Executives and Businessmen (PMEB's) in their 30's and 40's; youth between 15 and 29 years of age; and students below 15 years of age. These groups grew up in an effectively bilingual environment. They have all been educated and have received a foundation in the Chinese Language; but because of their work environments and social circles, they may not use Mandarin as often in their lives, and hence, their mastery of the language may be affected. These are the ones who have the ability to pick it up again and use it effectively. Thus, SMC's tagline this year is “讲华语，你肯吗? - Are You Game?”

Despite the emergence of China as an economic powerhouse, the Campaign is not advocating the replacement of English with Mandarin. What we want to develop is a Chinese Singaporean who is effectively bilingual in both English and

Mandarin, who can switch between the two languages comfortably. For anyone to do that, we need to understand, appreciate and enjoy the language.

This year's Campaign will complement the growing interest in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), Chinese tea and other activities that have been associated with Chinese culture. These interesting highlights represent the roots of Chinese culture and can be accessed by everyone. Cultivating an interest in these areas will encourage people to want to find out more about the correct terms and words to use and the idioms that are associated with Chinese culture. This way, Mandarin can be learnt by osmosis and becomes a channel to an enjoyable activity or hobby. It is no longer just a functional tool that one can forget when the examinations are over.

In addition to this, the SMC has also lined up a series of movies, music and arts and design programmes to provide another platform to show how permeable Mandarin is. For the last three years, 华语 COOL! has become the phrase on everyone's lips. The upcoming events by the SMC will make 华语 even cooler by showcasing the use of Mandarin in new art forms.

For the very first time, the SMC is collaborating with the Singapore Sports Council to present our finest sportspersons from Team Singapore who are bilingual to promote the Speak Mandarin Campaign. This marks the first time any campaign in Singapore is using sporting personalities to promote the use of a language. On Your Marc, Get Set, Go! a bi-weekly videoclip will be shown on Stomp! featuring sports journalist Marc Lim interviewing athletes and learning Mandarin in the process, coupled with a weekly column in The Straits Times. Year 2008 promises to be a lively year for sporting events. With the Barclays Premier League, SEA Games and the Olympics in Beijing, sports is *the* platform for the SMC, 再好不过了。

Mastering a particular sport is like learning a language. It takes hard work and discipline and more importantly, you have to enjoy the sport. Speaking of sports, I prefer the term 体育。During the Olympics, 奥林匹克期间, 看高水平体育竞技, 是

一种享受。其实，除了欣赏某项运动，我们还应该学会欣赏运动员的“体育精神”。“体育精神”除了竞争精神和自我超越精神，也包括了“体育道德精神”，‘sportmanship’。体育道德精神包括了公平竞争、团结合作、配合默契。这样一种自我超越精神和集体主义精神，正是我们对生命该有的态度。So, in speaking Mandarin, let us be challenged to 超越自我, and when you are asked, “讲话语，你肯吗？”，说：“我肯！”。Speak Mandarin, use Mandarin with each other, and enjoy it.

Truly, we will come to see that “Mandarin is an enjoyable, fun and a living language”, not just for use when we need to pass exams or for business in China. Mastering Mandarin in addition to speaking English can only enrich our lives and interactions. I wish all in the SMC a very fruitful and sporting year ahead.

Thank you.