

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE YANG DI-PERTUAN
NEGARA, TUN YUSOF BIN ISHAK, AT THE OPENING
OF THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE WEEK ON 21.8.64.

The need for the categorical and spontaneous acceptance of the National Language by the people of Singapore has taken on a note of urgency with the formation of Malaysia. Our new nation is based on a multi-racial society which represents a unique experiment in the history of South-East Asian affairs. Whether the experiment succeeds or fails will depend greatly on the will of the people concerned.

The oft-quoted motto -- "Unity in Diversity"--will remain a meaningless cliché if there is no positive attempt made to consolidate its implications. We have achieved political unity in the teeth of Indonesian and Filipino opposition which made us more determined to remain unified. But if Malaysia is to remain a political reality strong enough to withstand outside pressures, a more permanent unity, other than the political declaration, is needed. This is so because we have to combat not only the external but our own internal disintegrating forces.

Learning the National Language is the first prerequisite in the welding together of a multi-racial society into a harmonious, viable unity. When we have learnt to communicate and hence understand each other better in one language, then those who try to create conflict and misunderstanding between the races will be denied the opportunity to disrupt us.

Seen in this perspective, the two slogans adopted by the National Language Week Committee for 1964 have added significance. They are:

BELAJAR-LAH BAHASA KEBANGSAAN
BAHASA KEBANGSAAN BAHASA KITA

The activities of the National Language Week are therefore no longer mere gestures. They are geared to serve a utilitarian purpose, that is, to provide people with the incentive towards learning the National Language. I cannot stress too strongly the urgency of all of us learning to use the national language within the next few years.

With the hope therefore that Singaporeans will patronise and take to heart the activities of the National Language Week in great numbers, I have the pleasure to declare the National Language Week opened.

AUGUST 21, 1964.

(Time issued: 1000 hours)