

A TALK BY MR. ONG SOO CHUAN, POLITICAL SECRETARY TO
THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE ON 'NATIONAL LANGUAGE MONTH'
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(Translation of a talk in Chinese)

The Second National Language Month organised by the Ministry of Culture will be extensively launched. There are altogether more than 600 items in a variegated programme, which includes debates, oratorical contests, dramatic performances, book exhibitions, national language lessons, poems and song recital contests, essay contests, poster contests, sepak raga contest, national language forums, pantun contests, a National Language night, a national language songs night and the Miss National Language contest sponsored by Malay Youth Associations. From the enthusiasm and fervour with which the activities of the last National Language Month were carried out, it can be seen that the campaign will have better results this year. It also reflects the progress made year by year by the people of Singapore in the promotion and use of the national language.

A point of particular significance is that the current National Language Month campaign is the first of its kind to be launched after Singapore's independence. Singapore had long before accepted Malay as the National Language. After her independence, she still maintains Malay as her national language. On October 1, 1965, a statement concerning Singapore's official languages was issued by the Prime Minister's Office, which stated categorically that the four languages, Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English in Singapore are official languages of equal status, and that Malay is our common language for it is a language which is easier to learn. Thus, our decision on official language is based purely on the multi-racial society in which we live and there is no racial discrimination whatsoever. Obviously, we are different from other countries which make use of language as a political instrument and must arbitrarily fix a certain language in a multi-racial society as the only official language so that by means of language, they can perpetuate their communalist feudal rule.

On the contrary, we in Singapore have adopted an enlightened, practical and appropriate policy with regard to the language problem. Not only have we made the four languages the official languages all enjoying equal status but we have also at the same time made the Malay language the national and common language. For the distant future, we can promote cultural exchange and emotional accord among the various races through the medium of a common language, thus laying the foundation for a multi-racial society so that Singapore will then become an exemplary multi-racial country where there is no distinction of race, language and religious faith.

Our paramount objective in launching the National Language Month is therefore to induce the people of Singapore to use this common language extensively so as to foster racial relations and promote mutual understanding and co-operation, and to pool their efforts and strive for the realisation of a multi-racial country.

In the meantime, we will prove that language is no longer a political issue in this newly-emergent multi-racial country of ours by presenting the fact that the people of Singapore take an active part in launching the National Language campaign and are using the common language extensively.

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