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SPEECH BY MR HO KAH LEONG, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (EDUCATION),
AT THE SEMINAR ON PRODUCTIVITY ORGANISED BY THE SINGAPORE TAMIL
TEACHERS' UNJON AT THE NATIONAL STADIUM THEATRETTE
ON SATURDAY, 6 NOVEMBER '82 AT 8.30 AM

I am very happy to be with you here this morning particularly when you have decided to deliberate on an important aspect of our existence, namely, Productivity. First, allow me to tell you my understanding of the term 'productivity' which I shall dwell on in my speech this morning. Productivity does not simply mean an increase in out-put. It is a concept used to describe the quantitative as well as the qualitative improvement in a system using existing resources. Here, I am stressing on certain words, namely, 'quantitative', 'qualitative' and 'existing resources'.

How can teachers, in a given situation, increase not only the quantity but more important the quality of out-put using existing resources? In a factory we can easily measure the 'quantity' as well as the 'quality' of the products, that is, one can count the number of TV sets, cars, watches, trasistors, etc a factory produces in a given period of time and thereby establish quantitative improvement. Using quality control systems the quality of such products can be easily monitored. But in the field of education such measurement is not as straightforward. Hence, I must congratulate the Singapore Tamil Teachers' Union for taking this bold step to discuss, "Improvement in the Teaching of Tamil Language in our schools" under the Productivity concept.

The situation in Singapore is very conducive for the teaching and learning of Tamil. Tamil is an official language treated on par with English, Malay and Chinese. Parents are given the option of choosing Tamil as the second language for their children and now we have about 15,500 children studying Tamil as a second language in our school system. Teachers are being trained by the Institute of Education for the teaching of Tamil and CDIS has embarked on the production of Tamil books and teaching materials. To provide

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additional training for our Tamil teachers local bursaries are being offered and now there are two teachers specialising in Tamil in Tamil Nadu. In brief this is the situation.

One cannot work alone to bring about qualitative improvement in teaching. Co-operation among teachers is a fundamental requirement and I am happy to note that recently primary school Tamil teachers from one zone had organised a teaching materials exhibition which was highly commended by senior officials of my Ministry. This is an example of co-operative work and I hope other zones will consider similar moves. Later this can embrace not only all the primary schools but also teachers in secondary schools.

For any system or innovation to work, it eventually depends on the success of classroom instruction. How can teachers co-operate to bring about 'quality' teaching in the classroom? How can pupils be motivated not only to learn the language but also to have the desire to become teachers to teach Tamil? If quality teaching is to be ensured particularly at the upper secondary and pre-university levels we need to have graduate teachers who are capable of teaching Tamil. Currently, the majority of Tamil language teachers graduating from the Institute of Education have had instruction in Tamil only at the second language level and as the more experienced teachers are gradually phased out due to retirement, we may have to run in-service courses to upgrade Tamil language teachers from time to time.

Time and time again Tamil pupils have exhibited potential - one such recent example is the ASEAN Letter Writing Competition jointly organised by the Postal Services Department and the Ministry of Education where the pupil who submitted the entry in the Tamil Language was adjudicated the overall winner.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is a conducive environment prevalent in Singapore for the teaching and learning of Tamil and I would like to see the concept of Productivity applied to it. The success of this rests with you, the teachers, and I wish you all a fruitful discussion session.

I now have great pleasure in declaring the seminar open.