

STATEMENT FROM THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE ON SINGAPORE'S
OFFICIAL LANGUAGES, 1ST OCTOBER, 1965.

In Singapore four languages -- Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English -- are official and equal languages. Malay is our common language and it is our National Language. It is the easiest language of all communities to learn.

The Prime Minister has noted that a few persons in the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, who were conspicuous by their silence on language and other vital national issues when Singapore was controlled by the Malaysian Police and the Malay Regiments, are today trying to assume heroic postures on behalf of the Chinese language.

The Prime Minister would have been more impressed if these people had said these things before the 9th of August, 1965, when it was necessary to have them said publicly and clearly. Unfortunately at that time only the PAP and the Malaysian Solidarity Convention stood up for a realistic and rational approach to our multi-lingual society.

To those who are thinking of joining this posturing to appear as language heroes in Singapore, let them remember the ignominy of Mr. Tan Lark Sye, one-

time great Chinese chauvinist who under the rule of a Malay Police and Malay Army stooped so low as to state publicly that he had nothing to do with the movement for Chinese as an official language, but that on the contrary he had all along promoted the advancement of the Malay language and advocated its becoming the National Language.

The Prime Minister has requested representatives of the four Chambers of Commerce to meet him at his office next week in order to explain to them how they can make statements which will be helpful not just to Singapore, but to their fellow countrymen in Malaysia.

The four languages are official language in Singapore because it is right and good for the country and our people, not because a particular language has a large percentage of the population to support it.

National Archives of Singapore

For those few people in Singapore to exaggerate the numbers of Chinese in Singapore to 80 per cent to justify its being an official language is to do harm to those in Malaysia who are struggling for a fair place for the Chinese language since there are only 36 per cent Chinese in Malaysia without Singapore. It will also open the door for other language chauvinists to use American and other powers to imperil Chinese outside Singapore.

The new Constitution of Singapore will simply re-state what has always been the position, namely, that Singapore has four official languages -- Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English -- with Malay as the common and National language.

Those who are thinking of glorifying their public image by position as language heroes, should consider whether they are bigger than Mr. Tan Lark Sye was when he was at the height of his power as Chairman of the Nanyang University Council. They should also remember the depths to which Mr. Tan Lark Sye grovelled when a country chauvinism terrorised him.

1st October, 1965.

National Archives of Singapore