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SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER MR LEE KUAN YEW
DURING THE VISIT TO THE CENTRAL SIKH TEMPLE
ON FRIDAY, 2 NOVEMBER 1990, AT 11.45 AM

Thank you for your warm words.

When we took office in 1959, we had to look after a broad mix of races, practising different ways of life and religions.

We soon learnt that each community was deeply attached to its language, its culture and its religion. All wanted their children to retain their traditional values and practices. But parents were also pragmatic and realistic. In the end they all sent their children to English language schools so that they make living when they grew up. But all tried with varying degrees of success to teach their children their mother tongue and to inculcate their key values in them.

Now a younger generation, some totally English educated, have grown up and do not know the past. I was puzzled when I read of the fears and anxiety of Indians and Malays over the slogan of the recent Speak Mandarin Campaign. Some English educated Chinese also expressed unhappiness not only about the aggressiveness of the campaign but also at Goh Chok Tong's proposal that we should teach CL1 in primary schools to preserve Chinese cultural values, provided that EL1 standards in secondary schools are not sacrificed.

These fears are totally unfounded. The clock cannot be turned back. Let me explain. For 30 years Chinese language schools have been steadily losing out to English language schools. Parents have chosen English language schools for their children's future prospects. This trend reached its logical conclusion so that no school teaches only the Chinese language. They have also to teach English if they want students. This policy has given Singaporeans a common working language, English.

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Many, including the organisers of the Speak Mandarin Campaign, fear that in the future Chinese command of Mandarin will be so shallow that it only adequate for the market or the kitchen. This is a legitimate concern, although, I believe, it is unlikely to happen. Bilingualism will continue to be the policy of the government. On the other hand, Malays and Indians need not read too much

into an untactful slogan. There will be no reversal of policy on bilingualism, with English as the common language. We need to be tolerant, indeed sympathetic, of each community's effort to hold on to its language, culture or religion.

At the same time, we must be aware of the serious troubles in other multi-racial, multi-religious countries. Religious fervour has led to violence and bloodshed, as in Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh between Hindus and Muslims.

Tolerance is crucial when peoples of many races, languages, cultures and religions live together. Singaporeans have by and large accepted diversity as an unchangeable fact of life.

Every student in Singapore pledges everyday to build a united nation as equal citizens regardless of race, language or religion. This is a commitment that you and I have made, and it is right that we get our children and grandchildren to pledge this every morning in school.

Mr Goh Chok Tong will continue the Government's long established policy of inter-racial harmony and tolerance, impartial and firm in implementing its policy of equal opportunities, and equal treatment, regardless of race, language, culture or religion.

Your wholehearted support for the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill reflects your realistic appreciation of Singapore's realities. Your contribution to the well-being and stability of Singapore has been more than in proportion to your numbers.

The Sikhs in Singapore, as a distinctive group, have distinguished themselves in adjusting to the Singapore environment. You have been a credit to Singapore because by and large you are law abiding, hardworking and successful in educating your children to join the professions and to go into business.

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I wish you success in preserving your distinctiveness and all that you hold dear.