

# SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY THE ACTING MINISTER FOR CULTURE, MR. ONG TENG CHEONG, AT THE OPENING OF LUNAR NEW YEAR FAIR, ORGANISED BY THE REGIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL (CENTRAL), NEAR TOA PAYOH SPORTS COMPLEX ON SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 1978 AT 3.15 P.M.

Language has always been a powerful tool in the creation of progressive and enlightened societies. And literacy has therefore been a prime target of modern nation-building. What makes the job of evolving a national identity more difficult is when, as in the case of Singapore, the people speak and write not one, but four, different languages.

This diversity, for an outsider looking in, has its colourful and charming sides, but also its frustrating ones for the nation-builder, anxious to get on with his onerous and critical task.

The diversity is a characteristic of the Chinese community itself, where the speaking of dialects exerts considerable cultural influence on the habits, customs and lifestyles of both young and old.

Although Chinese dialect groups share a common written script, it is often difficult for one dialect group to understand another through the spoken word. As a result the Chinese communities have not

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been able to communicate among themselves as effectively as they should. For example, a Cantonese will find it difficult to make himself understood by a Teochew if both only know their respective dialects.

If Singapore is to progress and to establish its identity as a nation, something should be done to improve the situation. The extensive use of Mandarin, the common language among the Chinese communities, should be encouraged to help lighten the load of learning so many languages.

As part of this objective gradually more programmes in Mandarin will be broadcast over radio and television. Programming times and the content of these programmes will be planned with an eye to the younger generation. Programmes in dialect will not leave the air completely. Room will be made for their transmission to audiences in the older age groups.

The emphasis on Mandarin as a means of communication for the Chinese communities should not and would not be allowed to result in cultural loss. The Ministry of Culture will continue to promote the indigenous cultures, including traditional dialect art-forms such as the Wayang.

The Ministry is at present working with the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board to stage wayangs at Hong Lim Park. These will be staged regularly, perhaps on a fortnightly basis, in Cantonese, Teochew, Hokkien and other dialects. The project will, we hope, help to preserve traditional cultures from extinction in the wake of modernization and progress.

I have stressed the importance of uniformity in spoken and written expression for the material development of a country and for the development of a more dynamic and better-equipped new generation. This is an area in which the older generation can contribute their understanding and co-operation. Active encouragement of our young in speaking Mandarin will help ensure that they receive the opportunities for success in a highly competitive society like ours.

Members of the PA Youth Movement, who now number 30,000, will I am sure do their part. You will have realised by now the need in social interaction for effective communication with the different sections of the community. When you succeed in that, in reaching out to people, whether of a different generation or a different race, you would have felt a sense of a falling of barriers.

That is something I would like you to keep in mind in your various activities, of which this fair is only one.

I understand that this Lunar Fair aims to raise funds for the Youth Council. This is an exemplification of youth's wider role in modern society. The objective is commendable and I have no doubt the public will come forth in full support.

It is now my pleasure to declare open this Lunar Fair.