

SPEECH BY RADM TEO CHEE HEAN, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT THE LAUNCH OF THE MALAY LANGUAGE MONTH 2002 ON FRIDAY, 5 JULY 2002 @ 5.10 PM AT THE EDUTORIUM, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Mr Yatiman Yusoff, Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Information and the Arts, and Acting Chairman of the Malay Language Council, Singapore

Mr Hawazi Daipi, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Education, and Chairman of the Malay Language Month 2002

Parliamentary Colleagues (*Organisers will confirm MPs who would be attending*)

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening.

I am very pleased to join you at this bi-annual event, which marks the Malay community's continuous efforts to enhance the development of the language and widen the use of good Malay among members of the community.

The rapid developments and changes brought about by the advent of the knowledge-based economy have presented challenges to the development of the language, especially in calling for new terminology to be coined. Such a development, however, ensures that the language itself remains relevant in a rapidly changing environment. This, the Malay Language Council has ensured, as it has actively promoted the pragmatic use of the Malay Language, such that Malay continues to be relevant and dynamic in our society.

We have seen significant changes in the use of the Malay Language in Singapore. For instance, Bahasa Baku has been introduced to ensure the standardization of pronunciation. This shows that the users of the language have not resisted the changes in the external environment, but rather, have adopted a pragmatic attitude in ensuring that the language evolves alongside socio-economic and political changes. Such an attitude reflects the dynamic spirit of the Malay community. Like its language, the Malay community has made significant progress on many fronts and, as a result, has grown in confidence. Over the years, it has continuously sought to revitalize itself and to make progress in various fields.

The community's efforts have borne fruit. We have seen good progress amongst the Singapore Malays. Today, with better basic education, more Malay students are moving up the educational value ladder. The proportion of each Malay cohort admitted to universities and polytechnics has more than doubled, from 13% in 1990 to 29% in 2001. In 1990, only 12% of Malays were holding administrative, managerial, professional and technical-related jobs. This had increased to 23% by 2000. The community's standard of living has also improved. According to the latest

census reports, Malay households showed the largest increase in proportion occupying better quality housing between 1990 and 2000. This reflects the rising affluence of Malay households in Singapore.

These achievements and progress have boosted the confidence of the community and this, in turn, has given rise to increasing efforts to further develop the Malay language and culture.

The Malay community's aspiration to see more improvement in their language and culture has the support of the government. For instance, the Malay Language Review Committee, which was spearheaded by MOE, and various Malay political leaders, was formed in 1999. The committee drew up strategic recommendations to enhance the learning of Malay language in schools. As a result of these recommendations, we have introduced the Malay Language Elective Programme, or MLEP, at Tampines Junior College for students offering Higher Malay at the 'A' Levels.

The Ministry of Education introduced the Elective Programme in Malay Language for Secondary Schools (EMAS) at the secondary school level to provide students with the opportunity to enjoy a variety of enrichment activities to better appreciate the Malay Language, literature and culture. The Ministry has also provided for more students to study Malay as a third language in the same way that Malay and Indian students have the opportunity to learn Mandarin as their third language. The benefit that accrues to our nation is that our children, our youth will learn to appreciate the language and culture of their Malay friends and neighbours, thus fostering a greater understanding among our people.

The government also lends its support to other communities aspiring to develop their language and culture. These efforts have enabled each community to retain its rich heritage, customs and values. And while each community seeks to find its own cultural identity, we, the people of Singapore, have been careful that our diversity does not divide us. Instead, we have turned this into our strength, to give colour and uniqueness to our national identity. As we continue to build the Singapore that we call home, I urge each community to continue to work hand in hand to strengthen social cohesion, so as to forge a better understanding of and appreciation of each other's cultural heritage.

While the economic and technological landscape continues to change, some things remain unchanged. The composition of our society will remain multiracial. The building of trust and the forging of ties among different communities is ongoing and are works in progress which do not have a completion date. The process of integration must continue for the ties that bind as a people must be reinforced regularly. It is important, therefore, that each community remains moderate in its expectations, otherwise the sensitivities of other communities may be stirred, causing tension and problems in social cohesion.

The economic changes we are experiencing, and the changes still to come, will present challenges to us as a nation. In these times, Singaporeans of all backgrounds must rally together, instead of being pulled in different directions. It is important that each community

within itself be vigilant of aberrant elements that seek to cause tension and sow distrust among the community's ranks, and, between communities. Singaporeans, then, must continue to make the effort to understand and be considerate to each other so that the various communities' efforts at nation-building are focused on Singapore's collective well-being.

On this note, I congratulate the organising committee on their efforts to promote the Malay language and it is my hope that the activities during the Malay Language month will provide opportunities for the Malay community to reach out to the other communities so that more Singaporeans will learn to appreciate the beauty of the Malay language, and the richness and dynamism of the Malay culture.

Thank you.