



At the launch are (from left) MP Sim Ann, Senior Minister of State for Information, Communications and the Arts Grace Fu, Education Minister Mr Heng, Promote Mandarin Council chairman Mr Seow and MP Sam Tan. ST PHOTO: LAU FOOK KONG

## What's GDP in Mandarin? New app tells you

By KEZIA TOH

A FREE iPhone app is set to come to the rescue of those stuck for business-related words or phrases in Mandarin.

Called iHuayu, it will have the Chinese equivalents of 50,000 terms such as "hot money" and "gross domestic product".

It is the ticket the Speak Mandarin Campaign will use this year to reach professionals, managers, executives and business types, collectively called PMEBs.

Spanning the fields of trade, economics, finance and accounting, the app aims to oil business discussions in English and Chinese. Handily, it will also translate terms commonly used here, such as "Electronic Road Pricing" and "void deck".

An Android phone version will be developed in the coming year.

Speaking at the launch of the 33rd edition of the campaign yesterday, Education Minister Heng Swee Keat gave the app his stamp of approval, saying it would give working executives and businessmen a platform to brush up on their vocabulary of commonly-used Mandarin business terms.

"Technology is a great leveller, and can be used to great effect in

levelling up linguistic competencies," he said, at the launch held at the Singapore Management University (SMU). He was addressing MPs and business and clan leaders at a full 300-capacity auditorium on the SMU campus.

Launched with the app was an upbeat campaign theme song composed by Cultural Medallion winner Iskandar Ismail and sung by local singer Tay Kewei.

The campaign was first launched in 1979 by then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew to persuade Chinese Singaporeans to drop the use of Chinese dialects in favour of Mandarin. Each year, the drive has come up with a different focus, such as youths or families.

This year's campaign follows a recent call by the Lee Kuan Yew Fund for Bilingualism for ideas on making it easier for young children to become bilingual.

If the right foundation for bilingualism is set, said Mr Heng yesterday, even if English is the dominant language, Singaporeans will be equipped to learn and use Chinese "to a good standard".

He said he had met a group of Singaporean students in Beijing, who were attending Tsinghua University and working in Chinese companies at the same time. Most

of them were the sole foreigners at their places of work.

The Singaporeans had neither taken Higher Chinese nor were fluent Mandarin speakers, he said; in fact, some of them seldom used Mandarin in Singapore – but yet were game to be there, immersed in the language.

Mr Heng said: "Having planted the early seeds of bilingualism in our students, we've provided them with the latent potential to speak Mandarin and operate in a Chinese-speaking environment."

Referring to the iPhone app, Promote Mandarin Council chairman Seow Choke Meng, who is executive vice-president of cultural industry promotion at Singapore Press Holdings, said: "This is for people with difficulty finding the right word – in conversations it's easy, but in business, there are many instances where you can find yourself at a loss for words."

Finance manager Sharon Lee, 33, has tried the application on her iPhone. She said: "I like that you would be able to get the Chinese translation of local schemes such as Medisave or Workfare Bonus at just a tap – so you can explain it to the elderly, or even overseas visitors when they ask."

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