

Create opportunities for mother tongue to be 'a language of use'

Hoe Pei Shan

More opportunities to use the mother tongue need to be created outside the classroom if the next generation of Singaporeans are to improve bilingual proficiency, Minister for Education Heng Swee Keat said yesterday.

"Make it a language of use, and a language that's in use, rather than one that they only study in school," he urged.

Referring to how a growing number of Singaporeans prefer to converse in English or come from English-speaking homes, Mr Heng said that "it is a trend that makes it harder for us to teach the mother tongue languages well and that's why we have to redouble our efforts".

Encouraging children to take part in cultural community events and their parents to also make more of an effort to use their mother tongue at home are some important ways to increase the exposure to these languages, he added.

Mr Heng was speaking to The Sunday Times on the sidelines of the Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan's 84th anniversary gala dinner held at the Mandarin Orchard.

The Huay Kuan is the umbrella body of clan associations for people from eight Teochew districts in China's Guangdong province. Numbering about 560,000, they are Singapore's second-largest Chi-



PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

Mr Heng Swee Keat (right) is accompanied by Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan president George Quek as he arrives to attend the 84th anniversary event.

nese community group after the Hokkiens.

Cracks in the clan's unity seemed to have appeared over the past year, but new Huay Kuan president George Quek swept such talk aside.

"Those were just rumours. We are a family and all of us, just like siblings, have our family squabbles, that was all," said Mr Quek, who was elected to his position in April.

Pointing out that over 800 guests had turned up for yesterday's dinner, including many of

the clan's leaders and members of sister associations across the Causeway, Mr Quek said that the clan receives support from all factions.

Mr Heng, who was the gala's guest of honour, said that the different clans and associations "will be very much a part of our cultural landscape and it's useful for clans to be able to come together and preserve the traditional practices and cultures".

He added: "I'm happy to see that our different associations are coming together to contribute to building a better society."