

Fund attracts pledges of donations

■ BY CAI HAOXIANG

THE new Lee Kuan Yew Fund for Bilingualism to promote the learning of mother tongue and English in preschoolers has already attracted pledges of donations.

Several big donors have committed at least \$9 million to the fund, on top of the \$10 million that founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew is pledging personally.

Another \$2 million will come from sales of 200 copies of *My Lifelong Challenge: Singapore's Bilingual Journey*, which Mr Lee will sign and which will go for at least \$10,000 each.

Property developer Ho Bee Group chief executive Chua Thian Poh is donating \$1 million, because he agrees with Mr Lee's belief that "bilingualism is a key to Singapore's future survival".

Mr Chua, who is president of the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations and the immediate past president of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, also said he will "rally friends and business associates to support this worthy cause".

Similarly, The Straits Times understands that the family of the late property tycoon Ng Teng Fong donated \$5 million as "an investment for Singapore's future and out of a recognition of the importance of having young Singaporeans who are effectively bilingual".

Hotelier Ong Beng Seng is donating \$2 million, and the Khoo Teck Puat Foundation, \$1 million.

Also donating to the fund are Mr Lee's three children: Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong is giving \$100,000, and Fraser and Neave chairman Lee Hsien Yang and neurologist Lee Wei Ling are giving \$50,000 each.

The Government will match donations dollar for dollar, up to a cap of \$50 million.

Mr Lee Kuan Yew said he hopes the fund will reach over \$100 million: "I hope those who are concerned for the future of their children and their grasp of their mother tongue will donate generously."

The fund can supplement efforts by the Education Ministry to expose young Singaporeans to mother tongue and English at a time when they are most receptive to learning new languages, as shown by studies, he said.

Guests at the book launch welcomed the focus on learning mother tongue as early as possible.

Nanyang Girls' High School principal Heng Boey Hong said she noticed a big difference between the language standards of students with parents who encouraged the learning of language from young, and those of the students with parents "who just send their kids for tuition".

Renowned Singapore architect Liu Thai Ker said that learning Chinese early will help Singaporeans grapple with the nuances of a language that operates by association and not reason or logic: "The earlier you learn, the more you remember and the more fluently you will be able to express your thoughts later on."

Potential donors to the bilingualism fund, and those interested in buying the signed copies of the book, may call Straits Times Press at 6319-8347 or e-mail stpressbooks@sph.com.sg

All donations will qualify for tax deductions of 2.5 times the amount donated from this year to 2015.