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SINGAPORE (AP) - Jobs will be lost to other Asian nations if Singaporeans don't improve their English literacy, the manpower minister said Wednesday at the launch of the city-state's **Speak Good English** campaign.

"Other countries in the region are making the English language part of their schools' curriculum," said Manpower Minister Ng Eng Hen. "In a few years time, countries like Malaysia, Thailand, Japan, Korea and China may catch up or even surpass us in their English language ability."

Ng said Singaporeans must "redouble our efforts" to maintain a competitive advantage.

The annual monthlong campaign -- first launched in 2000 -- features a blitz of brief English lessons in newspapers, via the telephone and over the radio. It aims to make trade-dependent Singaporeans more understandable to the people they do business with.

The campaign is among a slew of regular government-sponsored drives -- like the Singapore Kindness Movement and Romancing Singapore -- aimed at modifying local behavior, which some Singaporeans consider condescending.

This year's campaign specifically targets working adults in the service industry who will be able to use English to impress and woo back more tourists and visitors, Ng said.

Most Singaporeans already speak a British-accented English inherited from colonial times but the multiethnic population also uses its own patois -- known as Singlish -- to communicate.

Singlish is a blend of Chinese dialects, Malay, Tamil and English.

Public elementary and secondary school courses and the business of government are conducted in English and 71 percent of the tiny island nation's citizens are already literate in English.

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