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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by Minister Lee Boon Yang, 11 Feb 99, 10 am

Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY DR LEE BOON YANG

MINISTER FOR MANPOWER

AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE BUKIT MERAH

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

ON 11 FEBRUARY 1999 AT 10 AM

Prime Minister

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning

## INTRODUCTION

1 First, I would like to thank the Prime Minister for gracing this occasion. I also thank all our distinguished guests for taking time to attend the opening of the Bukit Merah Skills Development Centre.

2 Since the formation of the Ministry of Manpower less than a year ago, upgrading and retraining our workforce has been a key priority of the Ministry. This is because we realised very early that to enhance our competitive advantage, our workers' capabilities must be on par or better than the best in the world. We need more skilled and innovative workers to drive our transformation into a knowledge-based economy. Unskilled workers of today need to upgrade themselves to become the skilled workers of tomorrow. Skilled workers who are in demand today may find their skills irrelevant a few years down the road as our economy restructures. They too have to continuously retrain and upgrade themselves to remain employable for life.

## SRP - ENHANCING WORKERS' EMPLOYABILITY

3 That is why the Government has implemented the Skills Redevelopment Programme. The objective of the SRP is to upgrade the skills and employability of our workers. Since its launch in December 96, the SRP has made excellent progress. Prime Minister, in your May Day Rally speech last year you noted that the programme had met with good response from employers, and had potential to reach out to more workers. You announced the Government's decision to contribute \$50 million to support the expansion of the SRP, with the MOM overseeing this expansion in collaboration with the NTUC, PSB, EDB, SNEF and ITE.

4 I am pleased to report that as at January 99, about 13,800 workers are committed to SRP training. 5,500 workers have been trained and 2,800 more are currently undergoing training. Under this programme, 43 new skill certifications have been developed to meet the needs of industries.

## BMSDC - BRINGING ADULT EDUCATION TO A HIGHER LEVEL

5 In expanding the SRP, we noticed that the existing training infrastructure was inadequate. In the first year of SRP, most of the trainees attended part-time courses in the evenings with many going for courses at the various ITE campuses. We felt that this was not ideal. There was a growing need for a facility to provide not just part-time but also full time training for workers. This led to the development of the BMSDC as the first government run and funded centre, dedicated to the training needs of adult workers.

6 Currently, the centre offers 5 regular courses: NTC-3 in Electronics, Mechatronics and Mechanical Servicing, and CoC in Autonomous Maintenance and Electronics Manufacturing. 460 trainees have enrolled in BMSDC for training and 147 trainees have completed training in these courses since its operation in November 98. At present, the centre can train 1750 people annually during the day and about 600 in the evenings and weekends. When fully equipped, it will be able to train 3,500 people during the day and another 1,200 in the evenings and weekends annually. This will be a substantial addition to the training capacity needed to cope with the expected higher numbers to be trained under SRP.

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7 I had the opportunity to visit BMSDC about a week ago. I noted that within 6 months, the BMSDC has become a dynamic, responsive and well-equipped skills training centre. BMSDC is specially designed to respond quickly to the training needs and requirements of industries. This means that the centre is able to conduct training programmes to suit the schedule of companies to enable the trainees to obtain national skill certification. It is also able to conduct customised training programmes appropriate to the training needs of companies. Courses can be modified and new courses conducted based on demand for the various training programmes. In addition, other training facilitators or industry lead bodies can make use of BMSDC's facilities to conduct training programmes with similar national objectives of upgrading workers' skills.

8 Besides its dynamism and responsiveness, BMSDC is also well equipped with facilities. The centre has air-conditioned training laboratories, multi-media instructional laboratories, lecture rooms and classrooms that are fitted with up-to-date training equipment, specially designed to meet the training needs of adult learners. For example, teaching aids and textbooks are in large print to make it easier for the older workers to read. Special equipment which makes it easier for the trainees to pick up new skills are also used for teaching. This helps to instill confidence in the trainees as they undergo the training programmes. There are also sports and recreational facilities available to cater to trainees' recreational needs. Such a conducive environment for learning has contributed to enhancing trainees' motivation. The trainees I met during the visit were keen and serious about acquiring new knowledge and skills.

#### CONCLUSION

9 The opening of BMSDC is a significant step forward in our manpower development strategy. It is symbolic of the new emphasis and commitment by the Government to provide opportunities for continuously upgrading the capabilities of our workers to enhance their employability.

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