

I by19990516a

To:

cc: (bcc: NHB NASReg/NHB/SINGOV)

Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by Minister Lee Boon Yang, 16 May 1999 at 9.45am

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

Media Division, Ministry of Information and the Arts, #36-00 PSA Building, 460
Alexandra Road, Singapore 119963. Tel: 3757794/5

=====

EMBARGO INSTRUCTIONS

The attached press release/speech is EMBARGOED UNTIL AFTER DELIVERY.

Please check against delivery.

For assistance call 3757795

=====

SPRINTER 3.0, Singapore's Press Releases on the Internet, is located at:

<http://www.gov.sg/sprinter/>

=====

SPEECH BY DR LEE BOON YANG, MINISTER FOR MANPOWER AT THE OUTING ORGANISED BY NTUC
FOR FOREIGN WORKERS HELD ON SUNDAY, 16 MAY 99 AT 9.45 AM AT THE JURONG BIRD PARK

National Archives of Singapore

Good morning, Ladies & Gentlemen

1 I am happy to see that so many workers from many different countries joining us in this celebration of May Day. I must thank NTUC and the Singapore Contractors Limited (SCAL) for their effort to organize today's event for foreign workers.

2 About 20 years ago, we welcomed the first non-traditional source workers

I by19990516a

from countries, such as India, Bangladesh, Thailand and the Philippines. Over the last 20 years, the number of such work permit holders has increased steadily, in tandem with Singapore's economic growth. Today, all in all, we have more than 450,000 work permit holders in Singapore. Most of the work permit holders are working in the construction, shipbuilding and domestic sectors.

3 Foreign workers form an integral and important part of our economy. You make important contributions to our economic growth. We are glad to be able to provide you with stable and rewarding jobs away from home. We welcome and value the contributions foreign workers make to our economic prosperity. We also hope that your stay with us will be an enjoyable and memorable one.

4 I would like to point out that foreign workers are treated equally under our laws. You enjoy the same level of protection as Singaporeans. In some instances, our laws even provide special protection to foreign workers. For example, the Penal Code was amended in 1998 to enhance penalties committed against female foreign domestic workers. Some common offences covered under the new provisions include simple hurt, serious injuries, molest, insulting a woman's modesty and wrongful confinement. The range of maximum jail terms for these offences were enhanced from between one year to seven years to between one-and-a-half years and ten-and-a-half years. This was to send a strong signal to our employers that they should not ill-treat their female foreign domestic workers.

5 While special efforts have been made to ensure that the interests of foreign workers are safeguarded, foreign workers also have the responsibility and obligation to observe and comply with all our rules and regulations. In particular, foreign workers should comply with the conditions laid down by the Ministry of Manpower for the issue of work permits. You should only work for the employer shown on your work permit. It is illegal for you to work for any other employer.

National Archives of Singapore

6 The Ministry of Manpower has from 1 Apr 99 issued a new work permit identification card to work permit holders. This new card, which bears the fingerprint of the foreign worker, will be issued in phases to all new and existing work permit holders. The card, with its enhanced security features, will enable our enforcement authorities to have an expeditious and efficient means of identifying foreign workers with valid permits from illegal ones including illegal immigrants and overstayers. Foreign workers are reminded to carry the new work permit identification card with them at all times for easy identification. Those who do not do so may have their work permits revoked and repatriated. Should you lose the work permit card, you should report the loss to the Police and the Work Permit Department within a period of 7 days. As the new identification cards are issued to work permit holders, employers should not retain the card or they will risk being debarred from future work permit applications.

I by19990516a

7 Finally, I would like to once again commend the NTUC and SCAL for organizing today's outing for our foreign workers as part of their May Day celebrations. This is an affirmation of the positive role foreign workers play in our economic development. I would also like to take this opportunity to urge employers to make a special effort to organize more social and recreational activities for their foreign workers as part of staff welfare. This will help build loyalty and trust and enhance worker-employer relationship in the longer term. At the end of the day, happy workers are also more productive and socially responsible workers.

8 On this note, I wish you all an enjoyable day. Thank you.

National Archives of Singapore