

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO THE
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, DR. LEE CHIAW MENG, AT THE OPENING
OF THE CONFERENCE ON REGISTRATION OF CONTRACTORS AT THE
SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC ON SATURDAY, AUGUST 3, AT 9.45 A.M.

It is indeed a privilege to be invited here this morning to open this Conference on Registration of Contractors, a field with which I have been intimately involved professionally for almost 10 years; as an officer in the Government Engineering Service, a Lecturer and a Consultant to both the contractors, architects and engineers. I must congratulate the Singapore Institute of Architects for their initiative in organising this conference at a very appropriate time.

If we consider, as a whole, all the measures and bills introduced over the last few months by the Government, two very important aspects arise therefrom:

- (1) We must increase our productivity; and
- (2) We must raise the standard of quality of our products both in the construction and manufacturing sectors.

National Industrial Training Council:

You are aware that there is a high-power Ministerial Committee on Technical Education, which has been set up to plan, co-ordinate and supervise all matters relating to the development of our technical manpower. The sphere of operation of this Council is very wide and tied up with the work of most Ministries, but I will only deal with those that are relevant to this conference.

National Trade Testing Committee, Trade Testing Centres & Employment Exchange:

First, there will be a National Trade Testing Committee which will assume the responsibility of trade tests. Secondly, various Trade Testing Centres will be established soon under the joint efforts of the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education. Then, in connection with these, there is a new section on Employment Exchange in the Employment Bill, which has been passed by Parliament only this week. This will give legal recognition to the Employment Exchange and there is provision to enable the Minister, by notification in the Gazette, to require all vacancies to be notified, and filled through the Exchange.

Need for National Trade Skill Testing:

The need for trade skill testing is widely recognised:

- (1) It serves as an incentive to the worker to acquire or improve his skill, thereby advancing his own status.
- (2) It enables employers of contractors to ensure that the given job is competently accomplished.

- (3) At present, private firms and statutory boards have been administering trade tests to gauge the skill of craftsmen, and the standard and pattern of their tests vary. These will be unified.

National Trade Testing Committee:

My Ministry will shortly set up a National Trade Testing Committee which will establish, evaluate and maintain standard of trade skill. For the work of the Committee to be effective, fullest co-operation and participation of major employers of skilled workers will be necessary. The composition of the Committee will be announced soon.

Testing Centres:

While the Certificates of Competency will be issued by one central authority, the actual testing will be performed at centres where expertise in a particular trade could be found. The various Industrial Training Centres, which will be established shortly, will provide such facilities.

Employment Exchange:

When the machinery and regulations are ready, the provisions under Section 9 of the Employment Act, regarding Employment Exchange, will be effected. It may involve re-classifications and testing of all the registrants at the Exchange who claimed competence in certain trades, but do not possess recognised certificates. When we have produced sufficient skilled tradesmen, employers will be able to fill up their vacancies in a particular trade through the Employment Exchange with the right type of personnel with proper skill. This will in turn increase the productivity.

Registration of Contractors:

Once the apparatus is functioning, it will be possible for us to require, as a condition for the registration of contractors, that such contractors should have a stipulated percentage of skilled workers with proper trade certificates issued by the Ministry of Education for different classes of registration. The complex contracting and sub-contracting system prevailing in Singapore and the mobility of workers would require flexible approach in trying to apply the principle enunciated above. Nevertheless, it is felt that a start should be made.

I hope that today's conference will yield fruitful discussions and the National Industrial Training Council will be pleased to receive recommendations from this conference with regard to the setting up and the proper functioning of the National Trade Testing Committee.

Now, I have pleasure to declare open this Conference on Registration of Contractors.