

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR LABOUR, MR. JEE YEUN THONG,
ON HIS VISIT TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEFENCE
TRAINING CENTRE, KOLAM AYER, ON 7TH APRIL, 1964.

As you all know, President Soekarno of Indonesia issued a declaration on 21st September, 1963, severing economic relations with Malaysia. We foresaw the actions of Indonesia long before confrontation was declared by that country. In anticipation of such an event, we started to prepared ourselves to meet this eventuality as early as July last year. When Indonesia embarked on its economic confrontation against Malaysia at the end of September last year, local industries dealing in rubber, copra, coffee, rattan, sago and the shipping trade felt the full impact of confrontation. As we are in the front line, we have inevitably been hit hardest, with the result that workers in the industries affected had to be laid off from work. Indonesian economic confrontation did not, therefore, take us by surprise for, no longer was confrontation declared, the Government immediately put its plans into operation and set up the Department of Economic Defence on 4th October, 1963. The Department's immediate task was to organise a Scheme of monetary assistance to help the workers who were laid off from work. To date, a total of about 4,500 workers have been registered by the Department of Economic Defence. Of this number, about 4,000 have already benefited by way of two-thirds of their normal wages, of which one-third is paid by the Government and one-third by the employer. The Scheme to give monetary assistance, however, cannot last indefinitely. It was only designed to alleviate the economic hardship of the affected workers for a period of six months. To administer the Scheme of monetary assistance on a fair, impartial, comprehensive and effective basis, the Economic Defence Ordinance was passed and brought into force towards the end of last year.

The Government was conscious of the fact that mere monetary assistance would not solve the problem of unemployment caused by economic confrontation. To this end, therefore, the Government also introduced the Economic Defence (Direction of Employment) ordinance at the same time. The latter Ordinance provides for selective direction of employment. This has been done in order to effectively and expeditiously absorb the affected workers in other industries. Two Orders have been made by the Government; one covering the Pioneer Industries and one covering all private employers who employ more than 50 workers. As a result of these Orders, about a thousand vacancies have been notified to the Department and workers on the Department's register are now being considered for these vacancies.

The Government was also aware of the fact that several young workers who are affected by the economic confrontation had no training, whatsoever, in any skilled trade apart from their limited experience in the unskilled or semi-skilled jobs pertaining to their particular field of work previously. To fit such workers into alternative employment, the solution lay in training. The Government, therefore organised training courses in the building trade and, to date, we have 69 persons who are undergoing training in carpentry and joinery, brick-laying and plastering, and concreting and reinforcing. These trainees have very bright opportunities for them in the building trade for there is a shortage of skilled workers in the building industry, not only in Singapore but also in the other territories of Malaysia.

It is vital for everyone to understand that the coming six months is crucial because whether confrontation succeeds or fails, or whether Indonesia crushes us or we crush them, will depend on how we tackle the problems arising out of confrontation. We are confident that we can succeed

because we have the determination and the will to fight for our own way of life and, in the face of these qualities, I am sure the Indonesian aggressionists would meet their "Waterloo".

The trainees at this Centre are also playing an important role in the fight against Indonesian confrontation. The skills that they have learnt, as a result of which they will find alternative employment, will show the Indonesians that no matter how badly confrontation affects us our people have the capacity and the courage to adapt themselves to meet new situations and, with this spirit, we will succeed. I wish all you trainees will complete your courses successfully and obtain more lucrative jobs than those you had previously. You will, therefore, have done the very thing that the Indonesians have tried to prevent. You will be issued with a certificate on your successfully completing your training course and this certificate will be the standing testimony of the part that you have played in our fight against the Indonesian confrontationists.

APRIL 7, 1964.

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