

Speech by Mr. Tang See Chim, Minister of State for Finance, at the Press Conference on Standard Export Documents to be held in the EDB Board Room on 22.12.70 at 3.00 p.m

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Singapore's trade last year reached the \$10 billion mark and this year's total trade at the end of November has even surpassed the 1969 total, though not at the same rate of increase, registering a 12% increase as compared to 22% for 1969. Whilst we are energetically developing our industrial and tourist promotion programmes, we have to bear in mind that trade remains as important to Singapore's economy as ever, especially as it serves as a channel for the exports of our own manufactured goods. The Government's policy, therefore, is to ensure that trade is allowed to develop without unwarranted restrictions, in keeping with Singapore's trading tradition of an entrepot port serving the interests of the region. It is in line with this policy that the Trade Division is introducing standard forms of export documents in an effort to streamline and improve trade documentation.

2. A large number of documents are used in connection with exports, ranging from governmental permits like import and export permits and exchange control permits to private sector documents like invoices, bills of lading, insurance certificates, etc. Though all these documents contain a number of items of common information, e.g. description of goods, amount and value, destination, etc., these documents are of different sizes and layout. The result is that each form has to be completed separately in the necessary number of copies. Such separate completion is wasteful of effort and time and is much more vulnerable to errors. Documentation under the present method can therefore be improved as has been done in the European countries by the use of aligned series of standard export documents.

3. The basic principle behind the aligned series of export documents is standardization, i.e. as many forms as possible are printed on paper of the same size, and common items of information thereon are arranged to occupy the same relative position in each form. Forms designed in this way are known as an "aligned" series. It thus becomes practicable to record the information required in the series on a single reproducible master document. The required number of copies of each form in the series can then be run off from the master document; any detail in the master document not required on any particular form being omitted by the use of masks at the reproduction stage. You will shortly see a demonstration of this comparatively simple method of reproducing information contained on the master document on to various export documents.

4. There are several advantages in the use of standard export documents: In the first place, it is only necessary to type one master document for the aligned series, eliminating therefore much repetitive typing of individual forms. It ensures accuracy and eliminates checking of individual forms. Once the master document is correct, the accuracy of the information in the aligned documents is assured. Checking of the documents in the office and by other organisations such as the banks and the shipping offices, are also facilitated, so is the handling, filing and storing of all the forms in the series, as they are of standard international size. Finally, the reference to the master document will show the facts contained in all the forms in the aligned series and there is therefore no need to search through individual forms to ascertain particulars entered. Additional copies are also reproduced without risk of typographical error and at minimum costs.

5. One of the problems which the Government faces in introducing these documents is that not every exporter has a spirit or other suitable duplicating machine. Whilst the full benefit of the aligned series of forms is obtained by using such machines, it is not essential. It does not mean that the forms can only be used or completed with such machines. Where a duplicator is not used, the several documents can still be completed manually or by typing as at present with the use of carbon paper. However, if this is done, then there will only be the fringe benefits obtainable from the use of these documents, namely:

- (1) easier handling and filing of uniform-size documents;
- (2) greater facility in relating the several documents at checking points, e.g. banks and shipping offices;
- (3) quicker training of staff in the completion of different forms which look similar.

The full advantages of the exercise do not therefore accrue to exporters who do not use these duplicating machines. Exporters will no doubt consider the cost/benefit of using such machines now that the Government is introducing these standard export documents.

6. With the various advantages of the scheme in mind, the Government in May this year held a meeting with various organisations connected with exports to seek their views on whether the standardized export documents should be adopted in Singapore. The move was welcomed by all the parties concerned and they agreed to help and co-operate in drawing up the necessary documents and finalising them for introduction. In this regard, I wish to thank the organizations which have nominated representatives to assist us in this matter, namely, the Airline Operators'

Committee, the Association of Banks in Malaysia-Singapore, the Chambers of Commerce, the General Insurance Association, the Singapore Manufacturers Association, the Singapore Shipping Association and the Singapore Shipowners' Association. Various Government and quasi-Government departments have also given us their full co-operation. The Organisation and Methods Branch has been particularly helpful, and credit for the printing of the first set of documents in use goes to the Government Printing Office. To all of them, I wish to register my sincere thanks.

7. Finally, I wish to say that whatever advantage the new system may have, it could only work with the co-operation of the traders, the users of the system. I would, therefore, request for their full co-operation. A particular request to the shipping and insurance firms: The standard documents we are introducing include the standard bill of lading and insurance certificate forms. Though individual insurance firms and shipping lines may have their own forms and bill of lading, we hope that as many shipping lines and insurance companies will find it possible to adopt these forms. In this way, they can also contribute to the general effort towards simpler export documentation.

8. These new standard documents will come into use as from the 1st of January, 1971.