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Speech by Dr. Lee Chiaw Meng, Minister of State for Education,
at the Opening of the Pasir Panjang Vocational Institute on
25th August 1972, at 7.30 p.m.

As early as 1967, the Government realised that technical education and industrial training would have to be accelerated to keep pace with industrialisation which had been gathering momentum since 1965 and was reaching the take-off stage. The Technical Education Department was set up in 1968 to ensure effective implementation of this objective.

2. In the last four years, many changes and rapid advances in the field of technical education and industrial training have been made. In 1959, this government inherited 2 technical schools which had empty workshops and were in reality operating as academic schools. There were only 1,600 Secondary 4 students in the technical stream in 1968. This year, over 7,000 Technical 4 students will be taking their General Certificate of Education examination. We are planning to increase the output of the technical stream to 8,000. In contrast to the pre-1968 position, the response of students wanting to study technical education has been overwhelming. There were 16,000 applicants who applied to join the technical stream at the end of the Secondary 2 course last year. There will be as many if not more applicants interested in pursuing a technical rather than an academic-biased secondary-school course in the years to come.

3. Our major achievements, however, are to be seen in the industrial training field. In 1959, there was only one vocational institute. In 1968, there were only three vocational institutes in existence, two of which were functioning in borrowed premises.

4. We have now nine vocational institutes and a technical institute operating at almost full capacity. Our output of graduates from the industrial training institutions has increased more than ten-fold, from 105 full-time graduates in 1959 to 324 in 1968 and 4,000 this year. We expect to produce 5,000 full-time graduates from the vocational institutes when all our present plans are implemented in full.

5. All these achievements have been made possible with minimum cost by utilising and modifying existing facilities wherever possible and by stream-lining our industrial training system. A fine example of the pragmatic approach of this government is shown in the development of this institute. We took over this place which had been used as an army transport depot by the British Government and turned it into the biggest and the best institution offering training in the metal trades in this region. Of the \$3 million invested on this institute, a major share went into the purchase and installation of machinery and equipment whilst the existing nissan sheds and workshops were modified to save on capital cost. So it was with the establishment of three other vocational institutes at Geylang Serai, Ponggol and Aljunied.

6. Whilst concentrating on quantitative expansion, we have not overlooked the qualitative aspects of training during the last four years. We have introduced a system of training which enables students to acquire skills within the minimum span of time. The length of training has been adjusted according to the content and intricacy of the skill to be required, the learning rate of the individual and the needs of industry. We have embarked on many

training schemes to upgrade the skills and expertise of our teachers. Most of them are trained here locally by Colombo Plan and bilateral aid experts from the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and Germany whilst others have been sent abroad for further study in specialised fields. Sad to say, some of these well-trained teachers have left us to join industrial firms which require executive and supervisory personnel with technical skills and leadership qualities. You have heard from the principal just now of the international firms which have used this vocational institute for the training and recruiting of their skilled workers. Some of these workers have been sent abroad to Japan, Switzerland, and Germany for advanced training. All these activities speak well of our efforts in raising the level of the skills of our workers so that they can aspire to higher standards of living.

7. In the next phase of our development of industrial training, we will be concentrating on the upgrading of skill beyond the level of institutionalised training. This will be undertaken by the extensive promotion of apprenticeship schemes, the establishment of joint training centres, the expansion of overseas training programmes and the introduction of national trade tests in as many fields as possible. All these plans are geared to ensure that the skills of our workers are upgraded and given due recognition so that they can get the rewards they deserve.

8. We have faced many difficulties and handicaps during the last four years in our technical education and industrial training efforts. As an institution developed under conditions which are far from ideal, Pasir Panjang Vocational Institute has had more than its share of the problems met by the Technical Education Department.

Despite these handicaps, I am proud to say that it has become the hallmark of industrial training in our Republic and is on its way to be a centre of excellence in the training of skilled workers in the metal trades.

9. I must give credit and place on record the heart-felt thanks and gratitude of the Government to all the experts, principals and staff who have contributed to the establishment of this institute. I must, in particular, thank the British Government for their contribution both in finance and technical expertise to the development of this institute under the British Mitigatory Aid Scheme.

10. I have now great pleasure in declaring the Pasir Panjang Vocational Institute open.

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