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SPEECH BY DR AHMAD MATTAR, MINISTER IN CHARGE OF INDUSTRIAL TRAINING AND CHAIRMAN OF THE INDUSTRIAL TRAINING BOARD (ITB) AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE TOP OF THE TRADE EXHIBITION AT THE LUCKY PLAZA ON TUESDAY, 19 DECEMBER '78 AT 11.00 A.M.

I am indeed happy to be here this morning to officiate at the opening of this exhibition which, I must say, is an appropriate event to round off the various activities of this year's Top of the Trade Competitions.

In two short years, the series of 'Top of the Trade' television programmes have come a long way in bringing home to the average Singaporean the meaning and importance of skills training in the technological development of Singapore. The programmes have shown most vividly the high standards of skills that can be attained by the young boys and girls who are prepared to go through a systematic programme of training at the various training institutes and training centres of the Industrial Training Board and the Economic Development Board.

This exhibition will, I hope, in a way drive home the same message.

Besides the many good quality articles that were fabricated by the trainees in the course of the competitions, visitors to the exhibition will be able to see attractive graphic panels explaining the training systems adopted by the ITB and EDB and the roles they play in producing skilled manpower to meet the future demands of industries.

With the implementation of the Revised Secondary Education System (RSES) in January next year ITB and AEB will be entrusted with the responsibility of providing vocational training to the academically less-inclined pupils.

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Towards this end the ITB and AEB have made strenuous efforts to ensure that every pupil who is channelled is given a place and as far as possible into a course of his or her choice. It is our hope that where this is not possible parents will be enlightened enough to respond positively to those offers on their children's behalf. The types of training places are created to meet the requirements of the industries.

Beginning next year a total of 2,799 pupils will be channelled into courses conducted by the ITB and AEB under the RSES. Of this number, 1,434 who were in Secondary One will be channelled to pursue three-year courses in a total of 17 different trade areas. Our statistics show that out of this number, 706 (or 49 per cent) were placed in courses of their choice while 489 (or 34 per cent) were given places in second choice courses. The remaining 17 per cent were placed in courses that were not their first or second choice. The second group comprised 1,365 Secondary Two pupils who will be channelled to study two-year courses in a total of 18 trades. Here again statistics show that 840 pupils (or 62 per cent) were offered first choice courses while 320 (or 23 per cent) were given places in second choice courses. The remaining 15 per cent were again placed in courses that were not their first or second choice.

Here it may be pertinent for me to mention that in the recent public intake exercise conducted by the Board a total of 1,880 Secondary One, Two and Three pupils who were not affected by the RSES applied to take up courses in the ITB. The fact that such a large number of pupils would on their own apply to pursue vocational training courses can only mean that more and more parents are beginning to realise that blue collar jobs can be as rewarding and satisfying as white collar ones.

This is as it should be. However a lot more still needs to be done in order to change the attitudes of our youths, parents and the general public towards work that require the use of the skills of one's hands. The effort of the Science Council in organising this exhibition and the series of Top of The Trade Competitions is making a significant contribution to bringing about this change. It is my hope that more of such exhibitions will be organised in the future.

On this note, I now declare the exhibition open.