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**SPEECH BY DR AHMAD MATTAR, ACTING MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND
CHAIRMAN, VOCATIONAL AND INDUSTRIAL TRAINING BOARD,
AT THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE SECOND TERM OF OFFICE OF
THE FASHION ARTS TRADE ADVISORY COMMITTEE AT THE VITB BOARD ROOM
ON FRIDAY, 21 DECEMBER '79 AT 1.00 PM**

The fashion and garments industry in Singapore has undergone remarkable growth in the past decade. The workforce in the industry grew $2\frac{1}{2}$ times, from 12,690 workers in 1970 to 32,792 in 1978. The number of establishments employing 10 or more workers has sprouted from 1,838 in 1975 to 2,378 in 1978, an increase of 540 establishments in just three years.

The rapidly growing number of tailoring and dressmaking shops, boutiques and sales outlets for off-the-peg clothes reflect the development of the industry. The growing internationalisation in clothing styles throughout the world during the last decade has also contributed to this development.

In the past growth of the industry, dependence on mass production and volume sales played a large part. This in turn depended on the availability of a large and cheap pool of labour. However, the recent restructuring of our economy calls for a change towards more automated production techniques, more advanced technology and higher value-added products. Better design and finish of products will be required not only for export but also to satisfy the increasingly sophisticated fashion demands of the local clientele.

The Vocational and Industrial Training Board has been conducting full-time courses in the fashion trades at Baharuddin Vocational Institute and Boys' Town Vocational Institute. The graduates from the Dressmaking, Men's Tailoring and Fashion Arts courses have obtained employment as designers, cutters or tailors

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in fashion houses and garment factories. Some have branched out to set up their own shops or engage in free-lance work.

In developing these courses, liaison has been maintained with the Singapore Master Tailors Association and the Singapore Garment Manufacturers' Association. The employment requirements of the industry have been subjects of discussion. The launching of the Industrial Sewing Machine Mechanics course recently is an offshoot of this dialogue. In addition, avenues are being explored to start a course to train pattern-makers who are at present in short supply in the market.

The Fashion Arts Trade Advisory Committee has in its first term of office provided valuable assistance in reviewing the training syllabuses. It also endorsed the trade test syllabuses for Dressmaking and Men's Tailoring besides helping the Board to arrange in-plant training programmes for its staff.

The Board recognises that a large number of workers have been trained by companies or private tailoring and dressmaking schools. These workers will soon have an opportunity to have their skills assessed against our national standard when the Board introduces Public Trade Tests at National Certificate Grade Three level in Dressmaking and Men's Tailoring in February next year. The institution of these Public Trade Tests will help the industry to ascertain the basic skill level of their workers and promote training schemes to raise workers to the NTC-2 level, which is the accepted level of a skilled worker. In this way, the industry can work towards raising the standard of techniques and skills in the industry.

To register for these tests workers must have a minimum of two years' working experience. Applicants who have not undergone institutional training will be required to sit for a simple screening test to identify their ability to sit for the test. More information on the procedures will be announced by the Board next month. I hope employers and unions would encourage their workers and members to take the test and obtain certification.

On behalf of the Board, I extend my appreciation to the out-going Chairman, Miss Irene Lim, and members of the Committee for their unstinting efforts in carrying out their functions. The success of the first term of office of the Fashion Arts Trade Advisory Committee was achieved mainly through the work accomplished by them.

It is my pleasure to congratulate Mr Kwan Chun Kiew on his appointment as Chairman for the next term of office of the Fashion Arts Trade Advisory Committee. He brings with him wide experience as Chairman of the Singapore Master Tailors Association and thirty years of experience in the trade.

The Board is pleased to reappoint the following members: Mr Lie Kian Tiong, Mrs Rosie Fang Ong and Mr Peter Tan. I also welcome the following new members: Mr Chai Fah Sin, Mr Jackson Chang Kok Mun, Mr Lam Thian, Miss Joyce Lee and Mr Tham Fow Wan.

The Committee has a wide pool of expertise drawn from men's and ladies' garment manufacturers, master tailors and designers. Their combined experience will prove valuable in the Committee's deliberations in identifying the training needs of the industry, upgrading of present courses and in formulating new training programmes.

In its new term of office, the Committee will be examining the implications of the new economic policy on training required in the industry. Such implications will affect both mass production garment manufacturers and custom tailors. Early this month a survey was launched on the employment experiences of past graduates in the dressmaking and tailoring trades. I suggest that the Committee consider the findings of this survey to help it determine the direction in which the Board should proceed to assist the industry. Training schemes to upgrade skills and techniques up to master tailor level could be another area of study. Perhaps the Committee could study the possibility of conducting a national tailoring competition to generate wider publicity for the industry and help improve its image.

I look forward to the discussions and decisions of the Committee and wish the Chairman and Members success in their term of office.

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