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SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENCE, MR BERNARD CHEN,
AT THE KEPPEL UNION'S 11TH ANNIVERSARY MAMMOTH DINNER AT THE
KEPPEL SHIPYARD PREMISES ON SUNDAY, JULY 15, 1979, AT 7.30 P.M.

This evening's anniversary dinner of the Union of Keppel Shipyard Employees marks the first year of the union's second decade. Last year, when we celebrated the union's 10th anniversary, the forecast of the prospects of the shipbuilding and shiprepairing industry was a gloomy one. Both management, union and workers of Keppel solemnly pledged to do their utmost in their respective fields of responsibilities to ensure that Keppel would strive to survive the onslaught of the worsening slump conditions of the shipbuilding and shiprepairing industry as well as stronger international competition, and improve the shipyard's growth performance. In the event, Keppel managed to keep its head just above water and recorded another year of business, which falling far short of target, was still satisfactory, given the extremely difficult times we were in and the severe constraints imposed on the shipyard's growth prospects because of losses suffered in the older shipbuilding contracts.

The management is to be complimented on the efficient manner in which it has managed to steer the shipyard through yet another turbulent year. The substantial efforts put in by its marketing team to secure oversea orders ensured that the shipyard was kept busy throughout the year. This was achieved despite rising costs and keener competition facing the yard. The management was able to improve its works systems and make more efficient use of its labour to enable it to offer competitive quotes in the international market. Working hand in hand, our workers complemented management's drive for more business, by putting in their share of work and cooperation. The union served as the vital link between management and workers and played a key role in settling minor irritating problems and smoothed ruffled feathers, whether its management or workers. Keppel's performance is testimony that management, workers and union have all achieved their overall as well as individual objectives.

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In the midst of a hectic year of business, our union has managed to continue to look after the needs of its members. On successful completion of negotiating the new collective agreement with Keppel Shipyard which would cover the period July 1978 to June 30, 1981, union officials have also managed to conclude the first collective agreement for workers of Singapore Slipway and Gul Engineering, subsidiaries of Keppel. All workers in the Keppel Group are now covered by collective agreements which provide equitable and in some instances enhanced benefits for all categories of workers. As usual, members' needs for recreation and welfare were well catered for through outings to the Big Splash, services offered by our consumer co-operatives and various welfare schemes. As in the past years, we have sent union officials for oversea conferences to broaden their outlook and to pick up useful experience which can be applied to their work at home if they are found to be appropriate to our needs.

There remains one outstanding issue that need to be tackled more aggressively by both management and union. This is safety in the shipyard. The union has since October last year, set up a special committee with its central council to examine how safety can be enhanced and the measures necessary to minimise accidents. Safety courses are now being conducted regularly for workers in the hope that they will be more safety conscious. Management, on its part, is doing its best to ensure that all safety rules and regulations are applied to prevent accidents from happening. Yet, inspite of all these measures, accidents in Keppel, while less than previous years, still remain a serious problem. I would urge management and union to redouble their efforts in striving to achieve the target of an accident free year. Needless to say, workers have the largest part to play as ultimately they can be both the cause and victims of accidents should they ignore safety rules and become careless in their work.

However, in the unfortunate event that accidents do happen, we must be prepared to extend all possible assistance to those affected by such misfortune. At the Triennial Delegates' Conference of Keppel Union held in October last year, I mentioned that union

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was exploring the possibility of starting a group insurance scheme for its members with the management. I am happy to announce this evening that the management has since worked out an insurance scheme which will cover all daily-rated employees and monthly-rated junior staff who have at least two full years' of service with the company. Under the scheme, dependants of the employee will be eligible to receive a payment in the event of the employee's death or total permanent disability in the course of his service with the company. Such payments may vary from \$3,000 to \$10,000 depending on the number of years of service of the employee. The insurance scheme, to be funded entirely by the company, will be effected retrospectively from January 1, 1979. On behalf of the union, I would like to extend our appreciation to the management for the prompt manner in which it has acted to bring this insurance scheme into operation in such a short time. It remains for the union and workers to reciprocate the management's concern for their welfare by redoubling their efforts in assisting the management to achieve yet another year of good performance. Given the excellent cooperation between management, workers and union that have been forged over the last 11 years, I have every confidence that the targets we set for ourselves are within our reach. We may then all look forward to celebrating the 12th anniversary dinner in more prosperous circumstances.
