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SPEECH BY MR BERNARD CHEN, MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENCE,
AT THE SHIPYARD SAFETY AND HEALTH EXHIBITION AT THE WORLD
TRADE CENTRE ON FRIDAY, 27 JULY 1979 AT 10.30 AM.

It is appropriate that a tripartite committee, comprising representatives from the Employers, the NTUC and the Labour Ministry was constituted to organise this Shipyard Safety and Health Exhibition. Each of the three parties have a vital role to play in enhancing safety consciousness amongst workers.

If we analyse more carefully the statistics on accidents in shipyards, we can categorise the main causes into three areas. First and probably the most significant contributing factor, is carelessness on the part of workers, who ignore safety procedures, however detailed and elaborate they have been drawn up. Such carelessness is compounded by constant working on the same job. Workers then become used to the routine. Boredom sets in and complacency takes over. Too often, workers have been found to take dangerous short cuts. Nine times out of ten, they could get away with it. Inevitably, however, luck will desert them and nasty accidents happen. The second area of concern is ~~that~~ ^{the} lack of proper supervision and regular drills in the application of safety procedures. Supervision is necessary when workers themselves are not sufficiently competent in the type of work they are doing or when they are given new assignments they are not familiar with. Supervisors who possess a wider range of experience can guide the workers they supervise through their work safely. Regular drills in safety procedures ensure that important points of safety are not forgotten or overlooked when the job is being done. They will also to a certain extent, reduce the temptation to take short cuts. Thirdly, the working environment must also encourage safety consciousness amongst both workers and supervisors. The provision of proper safety tools and equipment, work sites cleared of dangerous obstacles and the proper harnessing of

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materials that may cause grave injuries, all contribute to enhancing the safety of the work place.

We will find that in each of these three areas, Government, Employers and Unions could make useful and in certain instances, crucial contributions to increase the safety margin. Unions can make their workers more safety conscious by conducting safety courses regularly. They could through the efforts of their officials, drive home the point that workers themselves must take their own initiative to protect themselves from harm. The workers themselves must also look out for one another's welfare and ensure that in working as an effective collective group, they can make work safe for everyone.

Management has the responsibility of providing a safe working environment. This will mean the provision of appropriate tools and equipment which may involve substantial capital outlay but are nevertheless essential to protect the workers. The work systems and procedures designed for the various jobs should also take safety into account so that all risky short cuts are done away with. Above all, management should make sure that supervision is efficient and effective. In some cases, they may run foul with the unions and the workers in enforcing strict safety discipline. Manager and supervisors must not compromise their insistence on adherence to safety procedures with their concern in remaining on the good side of the unions. On the other hand, unions should cooperate with the management in seeing to it that all the relevant procedures are strictly observed.

Finally, the Government through suitable legislation and regulations can ensure that both management and labour observe all the necessary safety procedures and mete out penalties to guilty parties, regardless of which side they belong to. The just and fair application of safety regulations is crucial if we were to expect all responsible parties to make it their mission to enhance the safety of the working environment. It calls for understanding, tolerance and patience on the part of labour, management and Government. This exhibition on safety epitomises the tripartite co-operation that we will have to promote.

It is my pleasure to declare open this Shipyard Safety and Health Exhibition.

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