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SPEECH BY MR CHUA SIAN CHIN, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS & EDUCATION, AT THE OPENING OF THE NATIONAL ROAD SAFETY CAMPAIGN AND POLICE WEEK 1977 AT THE VICTORIA THEATRE ON SATURDAY 4 JUNE 1977 AT 1100 HOURS

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Two and a half years have passed since the first nationwide Road Safety Campaign was held in 1974. Although the total number of road accidents and casualties dropped in 1975 by 8.2% and 11.6% respectively, it picked up again in 1976. In 1974 there were 31,506 accidents in which 2,674 persons were seriously injured and 288 killed. In 1976 there were 30,116 accidents with 2,587 persons seriously injured and 288 killed. In the first 4 months of this year the position has further deteriorated. The number of accidents has increased by 20.4% and serious injuries by 21.8% when compared to the corresponding period last year.

Accident statistics give us an idea of the situation that prevails on our roads. But they do not give the full picture of the human tragedy of breadwinners being killed or incapacitated for life. Many of the persons killed or maimed are young and well trained with a full productive life before them. The whole tragedy of it is that this killing and maiming through road accidents is senseless and unnecessary and can be avoided. And this can be achieved if there is more consideration and discipline on the part of all our road users.

A familiar sight that we see on our roads is the "Might is Right" mentality being displayed by drivers of heavy vehicles. They often drive with complete unconcern for other road users. Few of them ever give way. This has resulted in a rather deplorable record of accidents

and deaths caused by heavy vehicles. During 1974-76 heavy vehicles such as lorries, trucks, cranes and buses were involved in 32.6% to 35.5% of all road accidents whereas such vehicles accounted for only slightly more than 5% of the total vehicle population in Singapore. In 1976 heavy vehicles were responsible for 88 out of 288 deaths or 30.6%. Of the 88 fatal accidents involving heavy vehicles, 39 resulted in the negligence of the drivers of the heavy vehicles and 43 had to be recorded with an open verdict because of insufficient evidence or lack of independent witnesses to prosecute the drivers. This "Might is Right" on our roads mentality must be eradicated.

This of course does not mean that other drivers are free from blame. Anyone driving along our roads will notice that indiscipline such as weaving recklessly in and out of moving traffic and overtaking dangerously are also common occurrences.

In this nationwide educational drive every effort will be made to involve everyone old enough to be a road user. There will be equal emphasis on safe-driving and safe-walking and crossing. Everyone must be made to realise that if he practises a little bit of self-discipline whilst on the road, our roads will be that much safer for all. This message must be brought home in particular to the bully who bull-dozes his way on the road, the show-off who speeds and weaves his way in and out of the moving traffic or the jaywalker who leaves the dodging to the motorist.

In this campaign special attention is being paid on our over 500,000 school children. We believe that road sense and road safety habits are better inculcated from young. I hope parents and teachers will spare no effort to nurture these qualities in our children.

The months of June, July and August will be devoted to education, advice and persuasion to road users. Although the Pedestrian Crossing Rules will come into effect on 1st July it is proposed to begin fullscale ticketing of offending pedestrians as from 1st September. This should give ample time to educate our pedestrian population. To ensure that enforcement will be effective, a number of measures will be taken to tighten up the law and enhance penalties for the incorrigibles.

The Points Demerit Scheme was introduced on 1st March 1975 with the objective of identifying and suspending bad drivers from the road. In 1976 a total of 13,060 persons committed scheduled offences on our roads. However, only 63 persons or 0.48% were suspended from driving. 1192 persons or 9.16% were served with warning letters after they had accumulated up to 6 or more points. During the same year the number of accidents involving serious injury increased by 6.1% to 2,587 cases as compared to 1975. It is therefore necessary to up the demerit points to make the scheme more effective in reducing the number of dangerous drivers on the road.

For the offence of inconsiderate driving the demerit points imposed will increase from 5 points to 6 points. This means that a driver who is found guilty of the offence

on two occasions within a year will have his licence suspended for up to 6 months. Similarly, 9 points will be imposed for the offence of reckless or dangerous driving instead of the current 6 points.

The 3 Demerit Points schedule on 11 additional traffic offences will be brought into operation. These include speeding, disobeying signals, failing to give way, hindering traffic, forming up incorrectly when turning, crossing double white lines or road dividers and driving when the tyres are bald.

The Road Traffic Act as it stands provides for disqualification from driving for a second or subsequent conviction of reckless or dangerous driving. Such drivers obviously have not learnt from their first conviction of reckless or dangerous driving. To protect other road users such drivers should be taken off the road for a sufficiently long period. The Road Traffic Act will be amended so that on a second or subsequent conviction of reckless or dangerous driving the court shall order disqualification from driving for a minimum period of 1 year. Additionally the driver shall be retested before his driving licence is restored to him after the period of disqualification.

Motorcyclists and scooterists are often as guilty as motorists in committing offences. The measures that I have outlined will also apply to motorcyclists and scooterists. However, they have their own peculiar problems and additional measures must be taken to deal

with them. Unlike 4-wheeled vehicles, motorcycles and scooters are easily thrown off balance when they run at high speed over a hole, sand or oil patch. Out of 56 motorcyclists and scooterists who were killed in accidents in 1976, almost one-third met their fate as a result of skidding. For their own protection it is necessary to curb the tendency of motorists and scooterists to speed by imposing on them 6 demerit points, that is, twice the number of points that is being imposed on motorists for speeding offences.

In 1976 46% of the accidents involving motorcyclists and scooterists were riders holding Provisional Licences. Similarly 43% of the motorcyclists and scooterists who were killed were Provisional Licence riders. The law will be amended to impose a maximum speed limit of 50 kilometers per hour on motorcyclists and scooterists holding Provisional Licences.

It should be clear from what I have stated that the various measures proposed are for the road users' own safety. The suspension or disqualification of a driver from driving on the road is more a preventive rather than a punitive measure. It may be a blessing in disguise to a dangerous driver to have his licence suspended and thus avoid ending up killed or injured on the road. If he is earning his living by driving it is better to him and his family to have him change his occupation. Every road user has a vested interest in road safety. The theme of this year's National Campaign is therefore aptly entitled "Road Safety For You".

The Campaign starts off with a Road Safety and Accident Prevention Exhibition. The Exhibition will highlight some of the dos and don'ts for motorists as well as pedestrians. I urge all young and old to visit the exhibition and familiarise themselves with the causes of accidents and how to avoid them.

I now have great pleasure in officially launching this nationwide "Road Safety For You" Campaign.