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SPEECH BY MR CHUA SIAN CHIN, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS, AT THE PRISONS DEPARTMENT AND SCORE ANNUAL DINNER AND DANCE AT THE MANDARIN HOTEL ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17, 1981, AT 8 P.M.

It is not often realised that the Prisons Department makes just as important a contribution towards the maintenance of law and order as the police and the courts. It is a vital component of our criminal justice system. Its function is not merely custodial, that is to keep prisoners in safe custody and prevent their escape. Its most important contribution is the rehabilitation of prisoners so that when they are released they will not return to crime. This is the crucial test of success of any penal institution. We have therefore concentrated our efforts on rehabilitation.

When SCORE was established five years ago it introduced a new form of rehabilitation by getting the prison inmates to work eight hours a day in workshops in the same way as they would have done in factories outside. In return they were paid a fair wage. This was to inculcate in them work discipline. A proportion of the wages they earned was kept in a POSB savings account which could be used to assist in the upkeep of their families. This was to build up their sense of responsibility and to enable them to face the future with confidence and dignity when they return to society.

SCORE reorganised the old prison industries and brought in 'new' industries ranging from knitwear manufacturing, rosewood furniture making to metal stamping and bicycle parts assembling by bringing private sector participation in running the prison workshops. The goods produced in the prison workshops are comparable in quality to any produced by our best factories in Singapore. They have now found their way in overseas market. Thus significant strides have been made in this field of institutional rehabilitation for which credit must go to SCORE and in particular its chairman, and also to those prison staff who have put much effort into it.

More recently we have made further progress by introducing the Day Release Scheme, first for ex-drug addicts from our Drug Rehabilitation Centres (DRC) and then for our criminal law detainees. They were

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found jobs outside and only return to the day release camps after work in the evening. This is based on the half-way house concept. It is to enable them to adjust to the life outside in preparation for their full release. Under this scheme they would also be more or less assured of a job when they are released.

We are now planning to introduce vocational training courses in our prisons. This will enable them to be trained in specific trades and improve their skills so that they can get better paid jobs when they are released. A committee has been formed to work out a programme for the introduction of vocational training in the Reformative Training Centre (RTC). This will be a pilot project. SCORE will implement it with the assistance of the Vocational and Industrial Training Board (VITB). The possible areas of training are welding, plumbing and brick-laying. If the pilot project succeeds the scheme will be extended to other category of prisoners.

We are also now setting up a special DRC for treating and rehabilitating hardcore addicts. They will be given a more specialised programme of rehabilitation, with more intensive counselling. More trained staff will be needed.

All these developments have and will continue to further stretch the administrative capacity, manpower resources and functions of our prisons. The staff of the Prisons Department have, to their credit, done their best to cope with these increasing burdens that have been placed on them. The Ministry of Home Affairs has therefore decided that the Prisons Department should be re-organised and its facilities upgraded. A Prisons Study Team has been appointed comprising officers from the Ministry's Planning and Research Division with the following terms of reference:

1. To streamline the operations of the department by recommending a re-organisation of the department along functional lines.
2. To recommend areas suitable for mechanisation/computerisation.
3. To probe weaknesses in the system and recommend solutions.
4. To look into population trends in the prisons so as to enable a proper assessment of the facilities required over the next five years.

The report is expected to be ready by the end of November this year.

However, the re-organisation will not produce results if we do not have adequate trained staff to man the new organisational set-up. The Prisons Department has been experiencing difficulties in recruiting staff to fill vacancies caused by resignations. The Ministry of Home Affairs has in late August this year submitted comprehensive proposals to the Ministry of Finance on a general upward salary revision in the Prisons Service. The proposals are being considered by the Ministry of Finance. When approved, the new salaries should help to attract as well as to retain good calibre officers for the service.

For those of you who are in the Prisons Service the future holds as much promise as there are challenges. Standards of service and professionalism need to be continuously raised. Much work needs to be done. I am sure most of you will rise to the challenge and we shall succeed in developing one of the best penal systems which is as forward-looking as it is pragmatic.

Finally, I would like to thank you for inviting my wife and I to this annual dinner, and I wish you all every success.
