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**SPEECH BY MR CHUA SIAN CHIN, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS,
AT THE ANNUAL DINNER AND DANCE OF PRISONS DEPARTMENT
AND SINGAPORE CORPORATION OF REHABILITATIVE ENTERPRISE
(SCORE), AT MANDARIN BALLROOM, MANDARIN HOTEL,
ON SATURDAY, 3 SEPTEMBER 1983 AT 8.00 PM**

Since the establishment of the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises or SCORE in 1976, there has been a fundamental change in the regime of our prisons. This has been achieved by the introduction of various innovations in the treatment and rehabilitation of our prisoners. These innovations were also introduced in our Drug Rehabilitation Centres (DRCs) to benefit the inmates there.

We started off by making the work programme as the mainstay of our rehabilitation effort. We provided employment to inmates on a 44-hour week by attracting industries from outside to establish workshops in our prisons and DRCs. We introduced the Day Release Scheme to help ex-prisoners in their return to society. A significant milestone in our penal reform was reached when in October 1981 we introduced the individualised treatment programme under the charge of the Prison Welfare Service in addition to the institutional programme making it a two-tier rehabilitation system. More recently, we introduced vocational training in skilled trades. This will enable trainees to sit for Public Trade Tests leading to VITB Certificate of Competency.

We can now say with some satisfaction that we have succeeded in evolving a programme of rehabilitation that is not only enlightened and progressive but also

effective in inculcating work ethics and discipline and a sense of social responsibility. In working out the programme we have always been conscious of the fact that there has to be a balance between the element of punishment and the need to rehabilitate the prisoners. While we should provide the facilities and the environment for prisoners to reform, we should not at the same time make prison such a comfortable place that it will not deter those with criminal intent from committing crime and ending up in prison. Our approach to rehabilitation has been a pragmatic one.

The acid test of the success of a rehabilitation programme is the relapse or recidivism rate of prisoners after their release. From a study conducted early this year on the rate of recidivism of our prisoners, we found that the overall relapse rate is 34.5 per cent. This is low compared to other countries such as the United States which has a recidivism rate of 75 per cent and the United Kingdom 55 per cent. Our overall recidivism rate of 34.5 per cent is based on all categories of prisoners which include those who went to prison because they could not pay the fines imposed by the court. However, if we exclude the fine defaulters our recidivism rate is much lower at 20 per cent. The recidivism rate of our Criminal Law Detainees is even lower at 10.3 per cent.

Here I would like to specially commend SCORE and our prison staff without whose contribution and effort in the last seven years, it would not have been possible to successfully implement our rehabilitation programmes. SCORE had the difficult task not only to attract a wide variety of industries outside to come in and operate in our prisons and DRCs but has also sometimes to build the workshops as well by using its own funds. But it discharged its role with initiative, grit and imagination.

As a result of these innovations, our prison staff had to undertake additional burdens. This was made more difficult by the manpower shortage as a result of vacancies. Prior to the upward revision of prison officers' salaries in June 82, 15 per cent of the posts in the custodial grades were vacant. Earlier the vacancy was as high as 35 per cent. Now recruitment efforts have been more successful and vacancy is expected to be down to three per cent. However, the position of our officer grades has still not improved. It has a vacancy of 25 per cent.

To cater for the work programme of the inmates, there are now a total of 45 workshops comprising 20 in prisons and 25 in DRCs. Twenty-one of them were built in the last five years. However, with the present number of workshops available, only 67 per cent of the employable inmates in prison and 60 per cent in DRCs are now employed. Thus to get more employable inmates to be employed it is necessary to build more workshops. But every available open space within our prisons and DRCs has been used to build these workshops. There is therefore an urgent need for new prisons and DRCs to be built to provide the additional workshops required as well as to relieve the present overcrowding in our prisons and DRCs.

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs Study Team Report completed in 1981, the prison population is expected to rise by 0.8 per cent per year over the next 10 years. The DRC population on the other hand is expected to rise by 0.8 per cent per year for the next five years and thereafter to drop around 3,500 in 1993. From this projection our prison population will go up to 4,000 by 1988 and 4,250 by 1993. The present accommodation capacity of our prisons is 3,000 though they are now accommodating much more. Thus we shall need to build a new prison for 1,000 inmates within the next few years.

However, in the case of DRCs, except for the Jalan Awan Centre, all of them have been built on TOL land. We therefore need not only to build new DRCs to cater for the increase of inmates but also to replace those built on TOL land.

Our Prisons Department has been re-organised to provide a more efficient administration and to be able to meet future challenges. Mechanisation and automation have been introduced to cut down manpower and to enhance physical security. Inmates' records and earnings have been computerised. Thus the administration and the physical security system of our prisons have been modernised and brought up to date.

To enable our prison officers to cope better with these developments and the challenges ahead as well as to maintain and improve morale, we are paying particular attention to training and upgrading of professional skills. This should accompany the career development of our officers.

Where possible, overseas training and attachments will be made available. Extra-mural courses at the National University of Singapore (NUS), the Civil Service Institute (CSI) and the National Youth Leadership Training Institute (NYLTI) are being planned. They include courses on basic programming, introduction to management, financial administration, written communications, effective supervision, youth leadership and personnel management. The NUS has also agreed to run a one-year non-graduating course in Social Studies to train officers in social work methods and practice. The first such course is expected to commence in the academic year 1984/85. It will comprise subjects like contemporary social service, crime and delinquency, criminal law, introduction to behavioural science and management.

The other vital component is in-service and on-the-spot training. The present in-service courses in the Prisons Training School consist of basic courses for officers and custodial staff, eg basic course for recruit warders/wardresses (of 12 weeks), basic course for recruit officers (of 12 weeks) and one-week courses on firearms training. All the courses are under review with the aim of upgrading and improving them. Refresher training programmes will be introduced to keep staff abreast of latest developments.

Thus the future of our prison officers is full of promises as there are challenges. It requires not only a lot of hard work but also some sensitivity and good judgement in the handling of the inmates. The job is no longer just custodial but is more of that of guardian, particularly to the younger prisoners. As the result of our universal education, more and more of our prisoners will be better educated. However, I am confident that you will rise to the challenge and try your best to succeed. I wish you all the best.

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