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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by Mr Chan Soo Sen, 31 Aug 99, 9 am

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR CHAN SOO SEN, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY

(PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE & MINISTRY OF HEALTH), AT THE LAUNCH OF THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL-CITIBANK TRAINING SPONSORSHIP SCHEME (CTSS) PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN ON TUESDAY, 31 AUG 1999 AT 9.00 AM AT BUKIT MERAH SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE, 141 REDHILL ROAD

Good morning

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very happy to join you today to launch the Community Development Council I-Citi bank Training Sponsorship Scheme (CTSS) publicity campaign. I hope that through the campaign, we could interest more to take part in skills training programmes.

2 As our economic outlook improves, we are all looking forward to a better time in the coming months. We hope for better jobs, better pay, and partial restoration of employers' CPF contributions. These are all good. However, I am concerned that we may start to lose our enthusiasm for skills upgrading as economic prospects improve.

3 Even before the recession, NTUC and government leaders have warned us of structural unemployment, which is unemployment generated from mismatch in skills of workforce and skills required by the jobs. The regional financial crisis brought the mismatch out earlier and more dramatically. Many of the jobs lost during the recession may be lost forever. To benefit from the new jobs require new skills. There must be no let-up in our effort in learning new skills. Having marketable skills is vital towards finding new and better jobs.

4 Market's perception of jobs has changed since the last generation.

When my father joined the workforce, he was looking for a career. He expected to devote his whole lifetime to a single employer. He also expected to do more or less the same job throughout his whole career, with little change in terms of technology and skills.

5 I started working with this mindset. However, this is no longer applicable today. My father's old office job is no longer relevant in this world of IT and Email. Few people nowadays expect to work with a single employer for the whole life. Even if the employer believes in lifelong employment, the employees are expected to learn new skills, and be re-deployed as and when the need arises.

6 How about my son's generation? A management guru put it starkly. He speculated that the trend is for a very elastic labour market. Each worker will market his or her skills in the market. Employers who need workers in certain skills for certain jobs will engage the workers from the market. When the jobs are done, employment ends and the workers return to the market. The more marketable the skills of a worker, the better he will do. Increasingly rapid changes in technology mean that skills and knowledge become obsolete even more quickly. Hence to remain marketable, workers will have to learn new skills and update their knowledge at all times. Seniority, age, and experience are relevant only if one has relevant skills and knowledge. Lifelong learning becomes a matter of necessity.

7 Sounds cold and cruel? We can see signs that this is beginning to happen. We see experienced workers and executives unable to find suitable jobs. On the other hand, we see jobs still looking for workers. The key word that explains this anomaly is SKILLS. "With skills will travel" will be the order of the millennium. Those with skills will be kings. I hope the publicity campaign helps to remind us this reality.

8 I am very happy to see many would-be "kings" amongst us today. The first batch of CDC-sponsored trainees have just completed module one of the NTC-3 courses, in Electronics, Mechatronics and Mechanical Servicing. They get the training free, and receive allowance through the Skills Development Programme (SRP). I hope their experience will encourage more to take up the training programme.

9 Perhaps some are worried that after having left school for so many years, they may face difficulties studying again. Bukit Merah Skills Development assured that they were aware of their concern and had tried their best to make learning trainee-friendly. We have also arranged for CDC volunteers to be their "buddies" to give them encouragement and moral support. We want every trainee to be successful in his endeavours.

10 I would like to take this opportunity to announce that the CDC Training Fund is extending its sponsorship beyond the retrenched workers to the unemployed who meet the same criteria of a family income of not more than \$2,500 pm. The workers can choose from the 26 Skills Development Fund Approved Courses ranging from computing to baking, to technical skills like crawler crane operation. If they complete the courses, they would have received at least 95% sponsorship.

11 I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our corporate partners for their generous support. I want to acknowledge Citibank for donating US\$100,000 as seed money for the training fund. With the CDCs' matching grant, we have more than \$600,000 in the CDC Training Fund. I would also like to thank the SBS, TIBS and SMRT for supporting our publicity campaign. SBS and TIBS Buses with the message "New Skills, Good Future" will ply selected routes to publicise the skills training message. Publicity posters will also be displayed in light-boxes at MRT Stations. These advertising space are given for free.

12 Together let's spread the message of skills training far and wide, so that more will benefit from the skills training programme and build a better tomorrow.

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