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SPEECH BY MR CHOR YEOK ENG, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (ENVIRONMENT)
AT THE SEMINAR-CUM-WORKSHOP ON PRODUCTIVITY
AT Ngee Ann Polytechnic on Saturday, 13 November 1982 at 9.00 AM

I have much pleasure in addressing you on this opening ceremony of the productivity seminar cum workshop jointly organised by Ngee Ann Polytechnic and Jurong Engineering Pte Ltd.

The construction industry in Singapore came into existence long before industrialisation took place. However, until today, most of the local construction and engineering firms still remain very much family concerns. It would be fine if the industry were not faced with any competition whatsoever. But the fact is, we are living in an acutely competitive world. We, therefore, cannot afford to allow such circumstances to persist.

As I am sure all of you are aware, the ASEAN region with a population of some 200 million has been classified by the world's top economists as being the most potential market for development, growth and industrialisation. Naturally, it would be of mutual benefit and advantage if there exists among these countries greater co-operation in the field of development and construction.

But, we have yet to see local companies going international and comparable to international names like Hyundai of Korea, Paul Y of Hong Kong, CDCP of Manila or Kajima of Japan.

Therefore, unless the engineering and construction firms in Singapore are prepared to advance themselves in technical know-how, upgrade the skills and expertise of their workforce, mechanize and adopt modern management approaches, they would soon be edged out by the internationally known companies in the local market, let alone the ASEAN market. In other words, we have to be more productive to compete with international companies.

How then /2.

How then can we effectively increase productivity? Awareness of the need to be productive is of utmost importance. As reported recently, American workers, faced with a prolonged recession, were settling for both lower and no pay increases and producing more. Why is this so? Well, it is not because the Americans have not heard or understood the concept of 'productivity', but rather, they have come to realise the need to be productive. Hence, faced with threats like their livelihood being jeopardised, and forced to be aware of that need, they have no choice but to be productive. Otherwise, they and their immediate families will be directly affected.

Fortunately, Singapore does not have the same unemployment problem or two-digit unemployment rate like USA and Europe. But, we definitely cannot afford to be complacent and wait till problems fall upon us. Of course, we may think of ways to remedy the situation when problems come. But I still believe in the old saying - Prevention is better than cure. We should channel our thoughts to means of avoiding the problems.

Thus, this seminar on 'How to Increase Productivity in the Construction Industry' is very apt for not only the participants from NP and JEL but also the industry in Singapore as a whole. Through the seminar, the participants from JEL can impart their practical experience to the participating students. In return, the students can take this opportunity to share their ideas, perceptions and understanding of 'productivity' with the staff of JEL. Together, through discussions and talks, I strongly believe that the awareness of the need to increase productivity can be enhanced.

On this note, I wish all of you a fruitful, enlightening and beneficial discussion.

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