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**SPEECH BY MR LEE YIOK SENG, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT), AT THE PRIZE PRESENTATION CEREMONY OF THE NATIONAL CONSTRUCTION SKILLS COMPETITION AT THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY TRAINING CENTRE ON FRIDAY, 9 OCTOBER 1987 AT 3.00 PM**

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I am very happy to be here, once again, at the prize giving ceremony of the second National Construction Skills Competition organised by the Construction Industry Training Centre (CITC). I am also pleased to see this competition turning into an annual affair.

This is an appropriate occasion to remind ourselves of the need to restore the traditional pride craftsmen used to have in their work. Some of the skills required in the construction trades take many years of practice to hone and perfect. I saw examples of this in my tour of the workshop exhibits just now. I would like to congratulate those who are responsible for these exhibits. They should feel proud of their achievement.

The demand for quality products and services will increase as consumers become more affluent and sophisticated. Home owners who spent large proportions of their savings and income on their houses and apartments will expect plumbers, tilers and plasterers to deliver products of good quality. We therefore cannot afford any slackening of the standards of our construction craftsmen.

Skills certification is an important step towards the upgrading of standards. Besides motivating workers to improve themselves, it will encourage employers to train their workers to a high standard. The Construction Skills

Testing Programme was set up by CIDB for this purpose. Although there is a vast pool of experienced workers, so far only about 4,000 possess recognised trade certificates. I therefore urge those who have not participated in the Skills Testing Programme to do so now. To encourage greater participation, remedial training programmes will be organised by the Construction Industry Training Centre to help those who have difficulty in passing the tests.

Singapore has a limited pool of workers. The construction industry, in particular, has always felt the acute problems of manpower shortage. The recent slowdown in activities gave us an opportunity to take stock of our manpower resources. Over the last three years, CIDB has placed great emphasis on training new entrants for the industry through its full-time skills training programme. There is however, a significant pool of existing workers and supervisors whose contribution to the industry can be maximised. Upgrading this present lot is crucial in view of the limited number of new entrants into our labour market. We should not only try to improve the workers' skills in their present trades but also, where the need arises, teach them new trades. We shall certainly benefit if our limited supply of workers are more versatile and flexible. CIDB, together with other institutions, will therefore in the next few years increase their efforts in providing Continuing Training Programmes for existing workers and supervisors.

In this respect, I am pleased to note that the National Certificate in Construction Supervision Programme is starting next week. This programme is meant for supervisory personnel who though experienced, do not have the benefit of formal training. It is conducted jointly by CIDB, SCAL, Singapore Polytechnic, Ngee Ann Polytechnic and Ministry of Labour. Response to the programme has so far been encouraging. With this programme, it is possible that

in a few years' time, all supervisory work at construction worksites will be undertaken by people who possess recognised minimum qualifications. I hope all supervisors and clerks-of-work will take the opportunity to upgrade themselves through this programme. At the same time, employers are increasingly employing graduates of our tertiary institutions to supervise construction work. These developments auger well for the industry as it will lead to a much higher standard of construction work.

Finally, I would like to congratulate all the winners of the competition. To those who did not win, let me express my appreciation of your spirit of participation.

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