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SPEECH BY MR ONG TENG CHEONG, MINISTER FOR LABOUR, AT THE
INAUGURATION OF THE NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY BOARD FOURTH
TERM OF OFFICE OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS AT PENTHOUSE NEGARA
ON WEDNESDAY, 15 JULY 1981 AT 8.00 PM

Last year our GNP grew by 10.2 per cent. To maintain a high rate of growth we need to restructure our economy and upgrade our level of productivity. Our primary aim for this decade is therefore to develop the economy of Singapore into a high technology and capital intensive industrial enterprise, so that we could compete more effectively in the world market.

To realise our aim, we have to develop our manpower resources simultaneously with the advancement in automation, mechanisation and technology. Towards this end, the Government has invested much resources in education and training. To supplement existing tertiary educational institutions, the Nanyang Technological Institute and the Commercial and Service Polytechnic are being set up. More vocational institutes are also being built to double the present vocational skill training capacity. Further, the Economic Development Board is planning a number of specialised training institutes to serve specialised areas of need such as computer system analysis and programming.

Our economic re-structuring to promote and attract capital intensive and high technology industries is beginning to show some results. The Economic Survey of Singapore showed that for the first quarter of 1981 productivity growth for the manufacturing sector surged to 10.5 per cent from 6.6 per cent for the same quarter a year ago.

To achieve further growth in productivity, we will need to train more people to man sophisticated and efficient machinery. The development of various educational institutions which I mentioned earlier provides places for our people to be trained to the highest possible

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levels required by the economy. However, we can only see the full impact of this in the middle or later part of the eighties.

Human resource development is a time consuming process. It is complicated. It has two major dimensions. The first concerns the acquisition of knowledge and skills. This is easy and is well-known to all of us. It can be measured. Singaporeans have demonstrated that they have the capacity to acquire skills and knowledge quickly. The second dimension concerns the attitudes and interest of workers. This, however, is rather complicated. Psychologists have spent years studying it. There is as yet no concrete proof of its nature and its measurement. Though this has not been treated as an exact discipline, we do, however, know that it can contribute significantly to our productivity effort. We know for sure that good labour management relations promote team spirit. They then create a conducive environment for workers and management personnel to put in their best.

The question is how do we go about achieving good labour-management relations. We know of such tools and techniques as work excellence committees, quality control circles, staff performance appraisal and zero defects. All these are mere labels. Unless and until the whole workforce and the population realise the importance of good labour-management relations not only to increase productivity but also to override crisis, and associate it with our survival, it will be difficult to put this message across convincingly. The real test, of course, comes when we are faced with it. But by then, the crisis could be so devastating that we may not be around to relate the experience thereafter. Herein lies the issue which the new Board of Directors of EPB will have to face.

Another approach to increase productivity is through maximising our physical resources. It is crucial that we make efficient use of the raw materials that we import for our industries, such as oil and its by-products, crude rubber, iron and steel, metallic ores and scraps and crude minerals. The other aspect is how to maximise the capability and strength of our workforce through reduction or elimination of accidents and industrial diseases.

In this connection, I am pleased to announce that the promotion of and training in industrial safety and health will be transferred from the Ministry of Labour to NFB. Initially, NFB will continue to conduct courses and seminars on industrial safety and health, administering the shipyard Safety Instruction Course on Accident Prevention in the Shipbuilding and Repairing Industry. It will also provide consultancy services, but will confine mainly to the design, fabrication and installation of safety devices. Eventually, the Board will take up the activities originally intended for the proposed Singapore Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. The main areas of the proposed activities are training, promotional services and the conducting of surveys on industrial safety related issues. Courses on occupational hygiene and health will be introduced and the number of safety courses will be increased. Besides the organisation of campaigns, competitions and seminars to promote safety and health in industries, an information resource centre will be set up. The centre will make available to industries a useful collection of books, periodicals, journals, films, tapes and other training aids on industrial safety and health.

All good practices and axioms will not be meaningful if no concerted efforts are put to propagate them. There is therefore another major responsibility of the NFB in the eighties, namely to accelerate the promotion of productivity consciousness among workers, trade union leaders, management personnel, entrepreneurs and the entire population including those in schools and the various educational institutes as well as those undergoing national service.

Having outlined the major roles and responsibilities of NFB in the eighties, I am therefore particularly pleased to announce the appointment of the following as Directors of the Board of NFB: Dr Wong Kwei Cheong (Chairman), Mr Goh Choo Wee, Mr V. Jayakody and Mr Liew Heng San, representing employees, Mr Foo Chee Chin, Mr Ting Lee Sen and Mr Wilhelmus Gerardus Maeijer, representing employers; Dr Chau Sik Ting, Mr T Kuroda and Mr Ong Teong Wan, representing professionals and academic groups and Mr Chuang Kwong Yong, Mr Poo Meng Tong and Mr Tan Peng Boo, representing the government. The Executive Director, Mr Lim Jit Poh, is also a member of the Board. This group of personnel has been drawn from various professions ranging from prominent industrialists, employers and trade

union leaders to professionals and public service officers. They have a wealth of knowledge and experience. I have no doubt that they will be able to discharge the responsibilities entrusted upon them.

One of the strategic plans the Board has to adopt is to consider seriously the involvement of more people from the industries and trade unions. I, therefore, hope that advisory committees for consultancy, training and the promotion of productivity can be established. These committees should comprise both Board Directors and others drawn from the industry and the trade unions. This is necessary as we have to bear in mind that productivity is everybody's business.

I would like to remind all that any plans to improve productivity however well they are conceived and drawn up, could not be successfully implemented if cooperation and trust do not exist between employers and employees.

We should see the eighties as an era for progress and new challenges for NPB and its Board of Directors. May I take this opportunity to wish them many hours of fruitful and rewarding deliberations. I look forward to their advice and guidance in promoting and increasing national productivity.
