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SPEECH BY MR PETER SUNG, MINISTER OF STATE FOR NATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT & FOREIGN AFFAIRS AT THE OPENING OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CASE HISTORIES IN  
STRUCTURAL FAILURES 1989, AT MANDARIN HOTEL  
ON 20 MARCH 1989 AT 9.00 AM

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Thank you for inviting me to open this International Conference on Case Histories in Structural Failures.

I have been told that delegates from more than 20 countries are attending this conference. I welcome you to Singapore and wish you a pleasant stay.

This conference is very timely. In Singapore, we are beginning a very significant era with the passing of the Building Control Act on 16 Feb 89.

For many years ago, control on construction practices was not strict. The conduct of the contractors was not closely regulated. Anyone could form a contracting company. Unskilled and untrained workmen were used; they were often supervised by a "kepala" who himself was often technically untrained. Architects and engineers were spread thin amongst the various jobs.

This situation was compounded during the boom years when developers pressed contractors to complete the projects in double quick time. As a result, quality was affected. Defects surfaced very soon after completion. The examples of defects in Hotel New World, Cheng Hong Mansion and Maryland Park are well known. In the case of Hotel New World, 33 lives were lost. This means great economic and social loss to the nation. For the relatives and friends of those killed, life will never be the same again.

Steps were quickly taken to prevent such occurrences.

- a A Commission of Inquiry was set up to study the Hotel New World Collapse.
- b A Building Control Working Committee than studied the recommendations in detail.
- c The result of all these efforts was a Building Control Act. The Bill was presented to Parliament in March 88. It was subsequently referred to a Select Committee. Several amendments were made as a result of the views, representations and recommendations.

The new Building Control Act was passed in Parliament on 16 Feb 1989. This Act includes several new measures to ensure that buildings are safe, and remain safe throughout its service life.

What will be the impact of the new Building Control Act on the construction industry?

- a Firstly, the Act spells out clearly the duties of all parties ie the contractor, the qualified person and his site supervisor. All have their part to play to ensure that the building works are carried out in accordance with approved plans and the Building Control Regulations.
- b Secondly, all structural designs must be checked and certified by an accredited checker before they can be

approved. This is to ensure that designs are checked to be safe before construction begins.

- c Thirdly, the law now recognises important role played by the contractor in the construction process. The contractor, together with the qualified person and the developer, will have to jointly apply for a permit to commence work. They are required to carry out all building works according to the Building Control Regulations and other technical requirements.
- d Fourthly, procedures have been established so that the Building Control Division (BCD) can conduct spot checks during construction to see if critical structural elements are properly constructed.
- e Finally, after completion, buildings will be subject to structural inspections once every 10 years for residential buildings and once every 5 years for commercial buildings.

So where do we go from here?

- a The BCD has set up an Accreditation Panel to register Accredited Checkers. The minimum requirement for accreditation is that the applicant must be a professional with at least 10 years' engineering

experience after registration with the Professional Engineers Board. To-date, more than 60 professionals have been shortlisted.

- b The BCD is implementing new procedures and guidelines. These include:
- \* guidelines on presentation of structural calculations and checker's evaluation.
  - \* guidelines on structural amendments.
  - \* guidelines on structural inspection.
  - \* new forms for progress reports and for monitoring quarterly structural work schedules.
  - \* guidelines on site supervision, site records and tests.
- c BCD will do an annual audit of the internal checking systems of HDB and JTC to ensure that they satisfy the Building Control Act.
- d BCD has compiled a list of existing public buildings, industrial buildings and condominiums for structural inspections over the next two years.

e Under the Act all site supervisors must, by 1992, have recognised qualifications. In order to achieve this, the CIDB will be training 500 clerks-of-works a year under its National Certificate in Construction Supervision Course. Mature candidates, who are above 35 years old and have more than 15 years relevant working experiences, need only to pass a short written test and an interview to obtain the certificate.

All these measures have been introduced to ensure that our buildings are safely constructed and continue to remain safe for occupation.

For those of you who are civil and structural engineers practising in Singapore, the new Act will enhance your status and importance. You will have a more important role to play in the safety of buildings here. You have to ensure that the materials used meet the standards and are put into place correctly. You are entrusted with the responsibility for the structural safety of buildings during and after construction. And you are called upon to inspect the structural soundness of buildings throughout their lives.

When I was asked to open this conference, I agreed to do so with delight. I was happy because this conference brings together very eminent professionals from many countries to discuss a subject close to our hearts. On this question of structural safety, we shall continue to learn. We will keep an open mind for new innovations to enhance safety whilst keeping an eye on economy. I hope your discussions of "Case Histories in Structural Failures",

which is the theme of this Conference, will highlight important lessons for all of us. On this note, I wish you all a successful conference with fruitful deliberations.

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