

# Singapore Government PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 • tel: 3378191 ext. 352, 353, 354/3362207/3362271

REC. NO. 81 0058 55

06-2/8/07/06

**SPEECH BY DR TAY ENG SOON, MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION AT  
THE INAUGURATION OF THE REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON TECHNICIANS TRAINING  
AT THE COLOMBO PLAN STAFF COLLEGE CONFERENCE  
ON 6 JULY 1981 at 9.00 AM**

*First of all may I extend a warm welcome to the foreign participants and experts who are attending this Regional Workshop. I hope that you will have a pleasant stay and will be able to see something of Singapore before you leave.*

The subject of your workshop is one which has been of considerable interest to Singapore and will continue to be given priority as we prepare our people to meet the industrial and economic challenges in the 1980's. When Singapore began to industrialise in the early 1960's, we had few technician training institutions to speak of. There were one or two trade schools which were training a few tradesmen and craftsmen. The Singapore Polytechnic was in its infancy having been started only in 1957. There was no engineering course at the local university. The engineering faculty at the university did not come into existence until 1969. If anyone had said that the availability of technician training is a prerequisite for starting industrial development, we would not have got started. But as is frequently the case, it was the establishing of factories and relatively basic industries on a modest scale that began to create a demand for technicians which stimulated the setting of training courses. The demand created the supply. It was not the other way round.

As the pace of industrialisation grew, the demand for an ever widening of skills led to the setting up of a variety of training organisations. Today, all industrial manpower training in Singapore falls into the classical 3 levels; graduate engineer training at the university, technician diploma level training at the two polytechnics and skill and craft level technician training at the 17 vocational training institutes run by the Vocational and Industrial Training Board.

By imposing . . . . .2/-

By imposing strict entry selection standards and demarking clearly between these levels, the numbers of students who manage to reach each level form naturally into a talent pyramid. The relative outputs at the 3 levels are roughly 1 to 4 to 16 which corresponds roughly also to what is required by the employers.

This last point is perhaps worth emphasising from time to time, voices are raised demanding that entry standards should be lowered, especially at the university level so that more people have a chance to do a degree. This is something that we have always resisted in Singapore. Time has proved this policy of adhering strictly to standards to be correct as indicated by the high esteem with which all qualifications at every level are held by employers and employees alike. Like any form of currency, qualifications have currency because of confidence people have in them. This is related to consistently maintained standards.

All the training institutions in Singapore are undergoing expansion at the present time. The out of degree engineers and polytechnic diplomates will be doubled the next 5 years. A most important underlying condition is that there should be no compromise of standards during this expansion.

The challenge that our training institutions face therefore is how to expand their intake of students and at the same time maintain or even improve on standards quality of the curriculum and training facilities. The key factor in this is the calibre of the teaching staff. During this period of expansion, we are therefore placing great emphasis on staff development. Singapore has also adopted an open door policy to encourage qualified persons from anywhere in the world to come to join the teaching staff of the training institutions.

To cope with the changing demands of industry particularly with the influx of new manufacturing and product technologies, the institutions have to re-examine their curricula. This not only calls for updating many aspects of existing curricula but also the introduction of new courses and specialisations in response to the new needs. Some good examples of these which were low in our training priorities 10 years ago but which will be of great importance in the 1980's are: automatic control, computer software and hardware, materials science, microprocessors, and so on. The challenge for the staff of our training institutions is .

institutions is that they themselves will have to master some of these new technologies in order that they can implement the new curricular.

Recognising that high calibre training staff is the key factor, our main vocational training organisation, the VITEB, is planning to build up a Resource and Staff Training Centre. This Centre will provide extensive training and retraining for not only VITEB's own staff but also for training officers from private industry. It will not just deal with methodology, but also with content, particularly in updating trainers on new technologies and skills. In addition RSTC will develop curricula related to VITEB's training programmes. These are not static. They have to be adapted frequently as demands change. VITEB has embarked on the modularised approach to its curricula. By breaking every course up in modules it is possible to create new courses or special courses to suit individual employer's needs by selecting and putting together the relevant curricula packages. The RSTC will become a centre of major importance to VITEB and for the industrial training needs in Singapore.

The industrial training scene in Singapore will therefore be undergoing momentous change during the next five to 10 years.

I hope that you will have very fruitful exchanges of information and experience on technician training during the next five days of your workshop. We look forward to learning from your experience just as I hope that we may be able to share with you from our own short history of industrial training.

On that note, it gives me great pleasure to declare this workshop open.