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SPEECH BY DR WAN SOON BEE, MINISTER OF STATE,
AT THE LAUNCHING CEREMONY OF THE SASAR PRODUCTIVITY MONTH
ON SHIPYARDS CAMPAIGN HELD AT THE PUB AUDITORIUM
ON MONDAY, 5 NOVEMBER 1984 AT 9.30 AM

Since the early 1960s the government and the leaders in the trade union movement in Singapore realised the importance of productivity in ensuring success in our industrialisation programme. This was reflected in the speeches made by them over the years. Singaporeans were told to be more productive so that our products and services were competitive.

But it was not until 1981 that we stepped up our drive for higher productivity. We started the Productivity Month in 1982 and this is the third year that Singapore is organising this event. The response from the workers, the unions and the employers to higher productivity has been most encouraging. Most people now realise that higher productivity would bring benefits to both the employers and the employees.

Today is the fifth day of this year's Productivity Month. Already, highly visible activities related to productivity are in full swing throughout Singapore. I am told that Productivity Month 1984 has been organised on a decentralised basis. Some programmes, such as those in the Civil Service, were launched as early as April.

The slogan for this year's Productivity Month is "Come On Singapore - Let's All Do A Little Bit More". This means more action at the workplace - at the office, the factory, construction site, and the shipyards.

I am pleased to note that SASAR has for the third year running teamed up with their unions to organise this industry-wide Productivity Month Campaign. I am told that SASAR's activities began with a Poster and Slogan Competition. This morning, a Forum on Productivity will be held with speakers from the NPB, SIPM, and the Singapore Institute of Material Management. This afternoon, SASAR is organising the first Inter-shipyard QC Circle Convention, with presentations by eight circles. The climax of SASAR's activities will once again be the Inter-shipyard Team Productivity Competition, with 12 competing teams of tradesmen from member yards. This is action at the workplace.

I have described SASAR's activities in some detail as I believe that these are good examples of the type of action that workers expect from management. True, it takes time, effort and money for management to organise such activities. But the returns, such as, motivated employees, better labour-management relations, company loyalty, and increased productivity, are surely worth all the efforts.

The shipbuilding and shiprepairing industry which is largely local-owned and managed is one of our three largest industries based on direct contributions to GDP. In its brief history, the industry can claim many achievements. In shiprepairing, we are leaders in the retrofitting of Crude Oil Washing (COW) and Inert Gas (IG) Systems. In shipbuilding, we have moved up the ladder from building simple barges and tug boats to the construction of supply vessels, patrol crafts and LPG carriers. In 1981, Singapore was the world's leading builder of jack-ups and second only to the US in oil rig construction.

Like many industries, however, the shiprepairing and shipbuilding industry is cyclical in nature. It has its ups and downs. The last few years had been difficult years for the industry. There is however some signs of a possible upturn in oil rig construction for 1985. In shipbuilding perhaps our shipyards should diversify. One area which the shipyards can do is to specialise in the construction of high speed light crafts such as hydrofoils and catamarans. These vessels, would be needed for regional transport and for offshore applications. I am told that we will not see the boom days of the late 70's for the shiprepairing industry. Nevertheless, shiprepairing will still remain the mainstay for most of our shipyards.

Even though many shipyards have modernised, the industry is still very labour intensive. People are therefore the most important asset. All things being equal, the competitiveness of a yard is largely decided by the quality of the workforce.

And here, I am not talking about local competition. Shipyards have to compete in the whole world as a single market. It is a global industry and the competition at international level is fierce. The people factor must give us the competitive edge.

I am confident that with continuing emphasis on upgrading productivity, our shipyards will be ready when the upturn comes. On this note, it is my pleasure to declare open this launching ceremony of Productivity Month in the shipyards.

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