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**SPEECH BY MR EUGENE YAP, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (LABOUR),
AT THE OPENING OF THE SEMINAR ON "SAFETY OF TOWER CRANES"
AT EQUATORIAL HOTEL (FRENCH ROOM)
ON TUESDAY, 30 OCTOBER 1984 AT 9.00 AM**

Over the past two decades, the construction industry has grown by leaps and bounds, contributing significantly towards maintaining a healthy economy. The industry has responded rather well to the Government's call for greater mechanization and automation. At most major worksites today, we see much evidence of mechanization eg flying forms, material hoists, telescopic and tower cranes etc. Such mechanical devices would have greatly raised productivity at worksites. But I am equally convinced that while such equipment helps man to get buildings up faster, more efficiently and conveniently, they also, at the same time pose serious problems and danger if they are not used with proper care and supervision.

In a tight labour market, mechanization and automation is inevitable. Machines cut down on much that is tedious and unpleasant, and even the dangers. But machines are not danger-proof; they require special kind of handling and maintenance. Negligence, poor supervision, improper use and lack of maintenance can bring out untold misery and hardship. Thus, in order to improve supervision and maintenance, to ensure the safe and proper use of sophisticated equipment, particularly tower cranes, there is an urgent need for close co-operation among the different categories of personnel involved - the contractors, professionals, workers and supervisors.

We must work safely right from the very start. By this, I mean that when a piece of machinery is installed at a worksite, contractors should exercise every care over the proper erection of the machine, say, a tower crane. If this job has been passed on to sub-contractors, then all the more contractors should observe extreme care in ensuring that sub-contractors do the job competently and in accordance with procedures prescribed by the accepted standards, or by the manufacturers. Contractors should avoid taking the proverbial short-cuts which somehow inevitably lead to disaster. Observance of the relevant codes and standards is obligatory and no contractor can afford to be indifferent to them or the necessary preventive measures vital to safety.

In conjunction with the Ministry of National Development, the Ministry of Labour has planned and implemented various measures to promote the safe use of tower cranes and I would like to take this opportunity to commend all those, including the Construction Industry Development Board, who have assisted the Ministry in the implementation of the various programmes.

On the other hand, I am aware there are contractors who have yet to introduce proper control measures at worksites. Let me urge them to take immediate action to ensure the proper planning, installation and safe use of tower cranes or any mechanical devices at worksites.

No one can be too careful when it comes to the siting of a tower crane. There are special considerations which require special attention. One particular area is the foundation. Conditions vary from site to site and the recommendations of the suppliers must be counter-checked by professional engineers to ascertain that the soil conditions of that particular worksite are indeed suitable for the recommended foundations. An oversight or a lax attitude to requirements can bring tower cranes toppling down. That would be disastrous.

However, when the machine or mechanical aid, like the tower crane has been properly installed, it certainly does not spell the end of problems or troubles at the worksite. A proper maintenance programme for tower cranes and related equipment should be followed through. This in turn should be accompanied by a properly maintained documentation of any defect or malfunction and the remedial action and maintenance carried out. In other words, there should be a log book for each crane. It is only common sense that when large sums of money have been invested in mechanical equipment to raise productivity, that their operations should come up to expectations. It certainly would be most unfortunate if such machinery becomes useless or dangerous for use through the lack of a proper maintenance programme. This should be inconceivable in a hard-headed Singapore contractor!

Contractors who make it a habit of using old cranes or cranes of unknown history should seriously consider upgrading their equipment. Old equipment needs even more stringent maintenance and contractors have to be even more vigilant because old equipment records higher incidence of failure and accidents.

When all is said and done about the equipment, attention should then be paid to the training of the proper personnel for the operation of such equipment. A tower crane is only as efficient and safe as the person who operates it. Many employers are aware of the need to comply with standards in equipment, but alas many do not realize that in order to achieve these standards, training and retraining of employees are indeed necessary. The operator must have a proper understanding of the limitations and capabilities of the cranes and above all, possess the correct attitude towards all lifting operations to avoid unnecessary risks or dangers. The operator should be fully instructed in his responsibilities towards others at the worksite.

Perhaps in this respect, it is necessary to identify safety training requirements as part of day-to-day work. Safe work procedures must be taught as an ongoing programme. With each new work procedure or machine, new hazards are introduced. Even with the same machine but a different operator, there will be different operating hazards. All these hazards must be constantly identified, taught and re-taught. Periodic meetings or seminars like this should be arranged to instruct and re-instruct in factors relating to safety programmes.

It will be of interest to all of you to know that my Ministry will be introducing regulations to regulate the use of tower cranes, and the training and certification of operators. These regulations will lay down detailed requirements pertaining to the operation of the equipment and clearly spell out the responsibility of contractors and operators. During the interim period, the Ministry will exercise stringent administrative controls to ensure that contractors maintain the necessary safety standards. All these will go a long way to promote safety at worksites. Of course, in the case of tower cranes, public safety will also be further protected and ensured.

The professionals have a major role to play in checking the installation of tower cranes and conducting relevant tests and examinations. I hope this seminar will be a useful platform for professional engineers and managers to exchange ideas and pool their expertise in improving the safety of tower cranes and to work towards a safer working environment.

It gives me great pleasure now to declare this seminar open. I wish you fruitful deliberations.

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