

## **Safer? Workers shouldn't be on lorries at all**

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I REFER to yesterday's report, 'Workers on lorries get more protection'. I am deeply disappointed with this decision to keep transporting workers on the cargo decks of goods vehicles and urge its reversal.

Are these goods vehicles meant for passenger transport? No. So they are inherently unsafe and as Dr Joseph Thambiah, head of National University Hospital's orthopaedic trauma division, has said, those sitting on cargo decks could still sustain injuries if they are flung against one another or to the back of the lorry.

The death rate in accidents arising from this mode of transport is reported to be six times lower than in other accidents. But this category of casualties should not even exist. Singaporeans who take other modes of transport choose to do so, but workers have no choice but to risk death or injury while transported in this manner.

I believe most developed nations do not transport workers in this manner.

According to the Land Transport Authority website, the work group which reviewed this practice did not include the voice of the most important stakeholders - affected workers. Migrant workers' non-governmental organisations were not included. Given a choice, it is clear that workers would choose passenger vehicles over cargo decks of goods vehicles.

I support Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's far-sighted call for workplace safety in April last year during the launch of the National Workplace Safety and Health Campaign.

He said Singapore felt bad if it was a Singaporean worker, 'but even more so if it was a foreign worker, who had come all the way here at considerable expense to earn a living and support his dependants back home, but whose efforts to improve his life had instead ended in disaster for himself and his family'.

PM Lee also rightly linked safety in the workplace to sound business sense and pointed out that injuries and deaths result in not only costs but also 'loss of reputation'. He urged employers to see 'good safety and health practices as an investment for the future, not an additional cost burden'.

I believe these comments are equally applicable to the safe transport of workers.

I also agree with the point made by Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Community Development, Youth and Sports and Transport) Teo Ser Luck that safety is paramount. If it is, then it should be the final determining factor, not cost.

**Isabel Vadivu Govind (Ms)**