

# Audit report unfair: inspectors

By Kris Chan

FACTORY inspectors yesterday claimed they were assessed unfairly by the Director of Audit.

In his report on Wednesday, Director Jeff Hutt accused the factory inspectorate division of the Labour Department of failing to reduce industrial accidents.

But the inspectors said this was an unfair standard to judge their performance by.

"While few people would judge the performance of the police by the crime rate, I wonder why our performance should

be judged by the industrial accident rate," said Mr George Kotwall, chairman of the Senior Factory Inspectorate Union.

The inspectors also claimed the standards used by Mr Hutt were outdated.

Mr Hutt criticised factory inspectors for spending too much time on office work and not enough time inspecting factories.

An audit review found they spent 33 percent of their time inspecting factories, compared with the recommended 50 percent.

Factories were inspected once a year instead of three times as recommended, according to the report.

But Mr Abdul Ghafoor, chairman of the Factory Inspectors Union, said these standards were "unrealistic" because they were set more than 13 years ago.

"Over the years, our work has become much more complicated with labour legislations more than doubled to 25 now," he said.

This meant inspection work also had become more complicated, he said, and it was unfair

to judge their work just by the number of inspections made.

His views were shared by Mr Kotwall, who said the entire philosophy and concept of industrial safety had changed since these standards were devised.

"At that time inspection was still seen as the only approach to prevent industrial accidents, but then it was found education and publicity should also be given more importance too," he said.

This meant more office work was necessary to plan these activities, he said.

Mr Kotwall said it also was

misleading to compare the standards of factory inspectors in Britain with local factory inspectors, because of the geographic differences.

The report stated Britain's inspectors spent 65 percent of their time inspecting factories.

"In Britain, factory inspectors may have to drive two hours just to inspect one factory whereas here, the 33 percent of time spent on checking factories (is) in fact concrete inspection work," Mr Kotwall said.

Mr Ghafoor added that sometimes it was inevitable their re-

ports would have to be long because of the complexity of industrial accidents.

"Many times, our reports would be used in court proceedings and it was important for us to have a report as detailed as possible," he said.

However, Mr Ghafoor agreed with the Director of Audit that the factory inspectorate should be expanded to cope with the increased workload.

He estimated the number of factory inspectors needed to be doubled to 400 if standards were to be maintained.