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SPEECH BY MR OTHMAN HARON EUSOFE,

MINISTER OF STATE FOR MANPOWER

AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE AMP SUBSIDIARY,

MERCU LEARNING POINT

ON SATURDAY, 25 SEP 99 AT 3.00 PM AT LE MERIDIAN

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1. I am pleased to join you this afternoon at this official launch of AMP's wholly owned subsidiary, Mercu Learning Point (MLP).

AMP's Role in Education and Training for the Malay Community

2. AMP has many years of experience providing, through its Education and Training Division, various education and training programmes to members of the Malay community. For students the programmes aim at strengthening the foundation of key subjects such as English, Mathematics, Science and Information Technology (IT) as well as the development of their creative and thinking skills. Students can also attend Enrichment Programmes to strengthen their moral values as well as motivate them to strive for excellence in their education. For parents there are

Parental Education programme, providing parents with skills and know how to support their children's academic and personal development.

3. AMP now wants to enhance its delivery structure and the quality of its training and education programmes especially for the Malay Community. Hence its Education and Training Division is hived-off as Mercu Learning Point which aims to be a leading Institute in developing talents. AMP leaders told me that this strategic move would empower AMP's officials and volunteers in the Education and Training Division to set the direction of the AMP's training and education initiatives. It will give them greater flexibility and independence to creatively expand AMP's training and education for the benefit of the community. AMP wants these officials and volunteers to have a stronger sense of ownership and be more accountable for AMP's training and education strategy.

4. Mercu will now provide the impetus for AMP's education and training objectives as outlined in its Second Wave in Education Plan and Training Plan 21 to prepare the community for the Knowledge-based Economy. Several new initiatives are included under the two Plans. They include the Parents School which will help parents to prepare their children for MOE "Thinking Schools", and the KBE students programme aim at getting more Malay/Muslim students to pursue post-secondary education to be better equipped for the Knowledge-based Economy (KBE). For workers especially those with primary education and below and without certified skills and qualifications, Mercu will run skills upgrading programme such as NTC3 and NTC 2. MLP will also set up a Workers Service Centre in Geylang. This is a one stop centre for career guidance, providing information on skill upgrading, the Knowledge-based economy and emerging industries. MLP will help to instil in the community a culture of lifelong learning.

Urgency of Manpower Development

5. Singapore's continued competitiveness will hinge largely on our ability to move quickly to a knowledge based economy. Manpower Development must therefore be given top priority. The recent economic crisis has demonstrated the importance of training and retraining of our workers. We suffered retrenchments last year and many of those who were retrenched were less educated and unskilled. They not only lost their jobs but also found it difficult to get new jobs quickly. Even though our economy is recovering, more companies are expected to restructure their operations to prepare for stiffer global competition. We will have to move up the value chain and make our living in a knowledge based economy or for short knowledge economy. This is the only effective way to remain competitive and create employment and wealth for our people.

6. To thrive in a knowledge based economy labour or manpower is no longer a mere factor of production. It must be the key source of creativity and innovation to create wealth. We will soon see that 2 out of 3 jobs in manufacturing and 3 out of 4 jobs in services will require skilled workers.

Meeting the Challenge of Structural Unemployment

7. We have to quickly solve the mismatch between workers who are available and jobs that are being created. Otherwise lower skilled workers who are displaced will suffer long periods of unemployment. There will be great disappointment and frustration if that there are jobs available and yet our workers

are not qualified for these jobs as they are not relevant to the job requirements. We have to quickly address this major challenge of structural unemployment. We must get our workers retrained and reskilled on a continuous basis to promote their employability. Serious structural unemployment can weaken our social cohesion.

A People Developer in the Community

8. Last Thursday at the Presentation Ceremony for the Productivity and Standard Board (PSB)'s People Developer Award, AMP was one of the 61 recipients of the Award. You may be aware, the People Developer Award is a Mark of Distinction presented to companies or organisations which invest in their staff and have a comprehensive system to develop their staff. Human resource development in any organisation or company is challenging but in a company or organisation the staff can see the benefits of training and development clearly in terms of the relevancy of the training programmes, their career prospects and wage compensation.

9. Mercu is now enhancing its role as a people developer in the community with the aim of maximising potential and talent in the community. There will be complex issues to deal with. Let me touch on two difficult tasks. First to get workers to change their mindset and to be ready to actively take training, retraining and reskilling on a continuous basis. Mercu will have to coax them continuously. Some workers may ask why do they need training. Others may not know the type of training that is necessary or relevant for them. Changing the mindset is a tough task and has to be carried out in a determined and patient way. Workers will also want assurance that the training will be beneficial to them, namely that it will open better opportunities for them in terms of better employment prospects as well as terms of employment. Next we need to build the trainees' confidence level. Those who participate in training and retraining programmes must feel comfortable and be confident they can cope with the training. Many long hours will have to be spent on many groups of workers to help them with any problems they may have and to provide them with emotional and motivational support to complete their training. To help them to focus their full attention on the training, more effort must be made to make learning and training interesting and enjoyable.

10. It bears repeating that Lifelong Learning is for everybody regardless of age or education level. In the Knowledge-based economy our skills and knowledge will get outdated very quickly. We have to keep pace with the development of new requirements in the workplaces. If we do not do so it will impede our employability and we will lag seriously behind. Greater efforts will have to be made to understand workers fears and concerns and to help them to overcome them as well as to inspire them to do their very best to succeed in their reskilling. The members of our community have to be aware of future trends in the workplace and be ready, flexible and confident to change and adapt to new requirements. AMP's many years of experience will not doubt be beneficial in helping the staff and volunteers to guide and counsel workers and to encourage them to go for training and retraining.

Sharing AMP's Experience

11. I asked AMP Leaders to share their experience and knowledge derived from many years as a successful provider of training and education programmes for the community. They advised the following points could be highlighted. Firstly the key role that parents play in their children's education and development. More parents are now investing in their children's education and development. Parents have to be more aware of the changing trends and interest of the youths of today.

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It is crucial that they develop better rapport with their children. To help parents to develop their children's potential they could join workshops on parenting skills. I mentioned earlier Mercu's new initiative namely the Parents School.

12. Another point which AMP felt important to be highlighted is that the community should set its targets in developing talents of the community. By doing so we would be in a better position to take advantage of the opportunities in the knowledge age. More Malay/Muslim workers should join Skills Redevelopment Programme (SRP) and Critical Enabling Skills Training (CREST) programmes which will help them develop knowledge and skills to work in industries in the KBE.

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13. I would like to commend AMP for its many initiatives to help the Malay Muslim community to achieve greater success. Mercu will contribute to the process of maximising the potential and talent in the community. However, its success will hinge greatly on the active support and commitment of the community.

14. Mercu's success will benefit everyone in the community. At the same time Mercu can contribute to Singapore's push to be a more competitive nation.

15. On this note let me wish AMP and its subsidiary Mercu Learning Point all the success in the future, Insyah Allah.

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