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PRESS RELEASE

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(English text)

SPEECH BY MR SIDEK SANIFF, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND DEPUTY
CHAIRMAN, KBE STEERING COMMITTEE AT KBE CONVENTION FOR THE MALAY/MUSLIM COMMUNITY
HELD ON SUN, 14 NOV 99, 12.45 P.M. AT TEMASEK CONVENTION CENTRE, TEMASEK POLYTECHNIC

Minister Abdullah Tarmugi,

My parliamentary colleagues,

Heads of Malay/Muslim organisations, mosques,

Grassroots Leaders, Community Leaders,

Friends, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

Assalamu' alaikum Wrh. Wbh.

1 We have had a very good session this morning. The discussions have been candid, the opinions frank and pointed, and the atmosphere very congenial. We could not have asked for a better outcome. There has been strong support for some recommendations. And there are also some new concerns, which we have to consider as we chart a direction for our community into the new millennium. Hence, our job is very clear and our task ahead is very challenging. But we will do so as a community

supporting each other, reinforcing one another, and reassuring everyone that we are in this together.

2 Allow me to share some observations about our entire effort at preparing the community for the new economy. This effort is about consensus building within the community. Consensus can only come about if there is a sharing of ideas, exchanging of views, and the forging of a common ground. The process that we have put in place such as the focus group discussions, roundtable discussions, the various roadshows, and the many press conferences held by our Minister is in that spirit of sharing, exchanging, and forging a common ground for our community. I am confident that many have accepted this new process. I am told that there were frank and honest discussions within the working groups. Perhaps time is not on our side to discuss every aspect of the challenge. But more importantly is that the process we have started should lead to many more discussions and deliberations within the community.

3 Our job does not end with this convention. A lot more thinking, reflecting, and action are needed. But a vision and framework have been established. These should therefore provide the signposts to guide our future discussions. Hence, this effort has achieved more than just a set of recommendations. It has managed to put in place a new modality of discussion and consensus building within the community. We should therefore work on this success to ensure that we can achieve a lot more for our community.

4 This achievement which I spoke about would not have been possible without the efforts and contributions of many people who have given their best for the past 5-6 months. The members of the working groups come from all walks of life and of different background and age groups. This mix was purposeful on our part. We wanted a sharing and a sense of continuity to take place in the working groups. The members have worked very hard, met over several nights, discussed with many members from within and outside the community, and endured some inefficiencies quietly. They wanted to do a job and they did well despite the constraints. Without the working groups it would not have been possible for us to be present here today. My warmest and sincere thanks to all of the members. And I do hope that if you are called upon in future to contribute, you would do so with the same gusto and spirit that you have shown for the last 5-6 months.

5 Consensus building needs a transparent airing of views and ideas. We have opened our discussions to the media and press so that they can report to the rest of the community of what transpired. The media has played a crucial role in our effort. They reported candidly what was discussed, agreed, and disagreed. The coverage they gave to the effort is a testimony of their willingness to be a part of this process of consensus building. Hence it is no surprise that the media figures prominently in our recommendations. As an institution it has a significant role to play in shaping values, attitudes, and outlook. They have done a good job in communicating to the rest of the community of what we have been trying to do. Without their support, I believe we would have been hard pressed to reach out to our community in this important endeavour.

6 There are also many people who have worked quietly and tirelessly behind the scenes to make this effort a success. My sincere and warmest thanks go to the members of the Advisory Panel, Steering Committee, Executive Committee, and of the various sub-committees. They know that they have an important responsibility to

the community. But I believe they have discharged this with the sense of quiet confidence that we all should be proud of.

7 Finally, to all of the participants present today, my sincere thanks in taking time off on a Sunday morning to be here for this important event. This effort is about our community and its future. Your presence here bodes well for this, as it reflects a deep-seated concern about our community and its place in the Singapore of the 21st century.

8 We are about to embark on a journey into the 21st century. There will be challenges and opportunities. There will also be minefields. How then do we prepare and position ourselves for the future?

9 Firstly, by not forgetting the PAST. The Al-Quran has taught us that we should transform knowledge, which includes science, technology and industrialisation, into VALUES. KBE is about how we transform knowledge into values, including the value system that we inherit from our culture and in particular, our religion. Let us indulge ourselves with the surah in the Al-Quran in particular Al Imran (3: verse 191-192), As Sabak (34: verse 10-12), Al Hadid (57: verse 25) and Ar Ra'd (13: verse 17).

10 There are also many other references in relation to the essential industries, semi-essential industries and comfort industries. Where food is concerned, surah Al Mukminun (23: verse 20-21), Al Hajji (22: verse 20), An Naba' (78: verse 14-16), 'Abusa (80: verse 24-32), Al Waaqi'ah (56: verse 71 and 73), Al An'aam (6: verse 141) and An Nahl (16: verse 14) are relevant. The same is true for the Clothing/textile industry (surah An Nahl (16: verse 80)), Shelter/housing industry (surah An Nahl (16: verse 80) and Al A'raaf (7: verse 74)), semi-essential industries (surah Al Kahfi (18: verse 31), Ad Dhar (76: verse 13) and Al Ghaasiyah (88: verse 15-16)), transport and communication industry (surah Ibrahim (14: verse 32), An Nahl (16: verse 8 and 15), Taahaa' (20: verse 53), Al Hajji (22: verse 65) and Faathir (35: verse 12)), defence industry (surah An Nahl (16: verse 14)) and finally the comfort industry (surah Attaubah (9: verse 72), Taahaa (20: verse 131), Al Hajji (22: verse 23), Ar Rahman (55: verse 22, 54 and 58) and Ad Dhar (76: verse 21)). I believe those of you who are more knowledgeable would be able to quote other surahs that I missed listing down.

11 The sunnah of the Prophet details out the Quran. Dealing with the above puts the proper attitude and spirit that must be imbued into one who desires both material and spiritual bliss. What more when the Quran has established that :

11.1 The Quran promises, rather than impedes industrial activities

11.2 Allah's bounties are to be utilised to the fullest but not in forms that contradict goodness and justice

11.3 Mankind has to be sufficiently conscientious before they can reap the benefits inherent in many of Allah's bounties

11.4 The Quran may not contain many explicit statements on industrialisation per se, but it does define a picture within which the priority needs of mankind are identified

11.5 The establishment of industries or the undertaking of industrialisation is not an end by itself, but rather a means to achieve a more holistic form of success, culminating in a blessed above in the hereafter (excerpted from "A Study of Industrialisation from the Quran, The Surah and the Islamic Civilisation" by Aidit Hj Ghazali)

12 The study cited above was made on six relevant regions, namely Al Maghrib, Egypt, Al Andalus, Iraq, Oman, and Anatolia from the 8th to 17th centuries AD). The author concluded that it was their concept that no indulgences may be simple by today's standard of achievements but when it comes to the question of attitude and spirit, they might have fared better than many of today's Muslims".

13 Secondly, I used to say years ago that yesterday's solution or formula cannot solve today's problem. Today's formula cannot solve tomorrow's problem. Tomorrow needs its own solution. While this is true, we must also ensure that there is continuity between yesterday, today and tomorrow. Peter M Senge, the author of The Fifth Discipline – the Art and Practice of The Learning Organisation, added another dimension and said that "today's problem came from yesterday's 'solutions' ". He told about a merchant who sewed his most beautiful carpet but which had a large bump in the middle when laid. He stepped on the bump to flatten it out – and succeed. But the bump reappeared in a new spot not far away. He jumped on the bump again, and it disappeared – for a moment, until it emerged once more in a new place. Again and again he jumped, scuffling and mangling the rug in his frustration; until he finally lifted one corner of the carpet and an angry snake slithered out!

14 This book drew comments from Fortune Magazine which told us to "Forget your old tired ideas about leadership. The most successful corporation of the 1990's will be something called a LEARNING ORGANISATION." Every strata of society is involved as a Team.

15 I believe it is this new spirit of not forgetting the past of consensus building and of engaging everyone in the community that will be our best preparation for the future. Let us be inclusive and allow a thousand flowers to bloom in our community. Then and only then can we face a world, which is constantly changing and redefining itself with confidence.

Thank you. Wassalam.