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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by President S R Nathan, 12 Jan 2000, 8pm

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY MR S.R. NATHAN, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE AT THE HARI RAYA AIDILFITRI CELEBRATION
HELD BY JAMIYAH SINGAPORE AT WESTIN STAMFORD/WESTIN PLAZA
HOTEL ON 12 JANUARY 2000 AT 8:00 PM**

Mr Abdullah Tarmugi, Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs
Ladies and Gentlemen

1. My wife and I are very happy to join with all of you this evening to share in your celebration of Hari Raya Aidilfitri.
2. I note that many leaders representing the various races and religions are with us and joining in tonight's Hari Raya celebration. This augurs well for the national cohesion of our multi-racial and multi-religious society. It is also a recognition of Jamiyah's contributions in reaching out to the less fortunate, poor and needy of all races here.
3. The fastings by Muslims that are associated with the Ramadan is also a period of reflection. It is therefore appropriate that we, who are gathered tonight to

celebrate Hari Raya, also reflect on the many blessings we have enjoyed, as well as the challenges that we face, as a nation. Indeed, we have much to be thankful for. At this time last year, we, together with others in the region, were facing difficult times. We were then in the throes of the financial crisis. CPF, bonuses and salaries had to be cut. We went through a period of belt-tightening. Many families had to make difficult adjustments, especially for those whose bread-winners had been retrenched. We are fortunate that we have weathered through this recent crisis with a strong sense of national cohesion. And we are thankful for organisations like Jamiyah, which stepped up their welfare services and lent support by offering a helping hand to those in need, regardless of religion or race. It is especially heart-warming to know that Jamiyah also has schemes such as its "Meals-on-Wheels" scheme, whereby Jamiyah volunteers deliver daily free cooked meals for lunch and dinner to elderly destitutes who are living alone in HDB flats.

4. While our economy has since recovered, it would be prudent to remind ourselves that Singapore will face many new challenges in the days ahead, including on the social and welfare front. The increasingly globalised nature of the economy will mean good jobs for those who have the technical and managerial skills to work in and run world-class operations. But it will also mean that many existing lower-skilled jobs would disappear. Many Singaporeans, especially the older and less skilled, may find themselves displaced in the KBE of the future, unless they prepare themselves now. They need to take advantage of re-training and education, and be prepared to take on whatever other jobs that become available in a KBE environment.

5. Therefore, the challenge for us, including for Jamiyah, is to help meet the needs of the economically disadvantaged segments of the society in an effective manner. We need to encourage them to adjust to the changed employment market and take up those jobs that are available. If we should fail to help the large numbers of Singaporeans to be ready for the transition to a KBE, we run the risk of being a society divided.

6. A new challenge faces Jamiyah in the days ahead. I would urge Jamiyah to tailor its social welfare and educational services to meet this new challenge of helping our people transit to a KBE. Jamiyah has done commendable work in the past. I wish Jamiyah every success in the challenging work that awaits it in the days ahead.

7. To all our Muslim friends, my wife and I wish you Selamat Hari Raya Aidilfitri.
