

Singapore Government

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**SPEECH BY MR SIDEK SANIFF, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR
THE ENVIRONMENT, AT THE OPENING LAUNCH OF THE ASIAN
EDUCATIONAL CONSORTIUM (AEC) CENTRE ON WED 16 AUG 2000
AT 10.30 AM IN THE AEC CENTRE, 141 MARKET STREET**

YM Tunku Iskandar
Group Chairman

Mr R. Jayapal
Group Executive Vice-President

Lecturers and students of the Asian Educational Consortium (AEC) Group of
colleges,

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1 I would like to first thank Tunku Iskandar for the kind invitation to grace
this occasion. It has always been my firm belief that education is a fundamental
tenet of society, which explains my long involvement in the educational field, even

up to today.

2 There is no doubt that education play a key role to support economic development. The economic powerhouses such as US, UK and Japan all have well-entrenched and comprehensive education systems. The importance of education is all the more apparent as the new knowledge-based economy in this Information Age continues to grow and supplant traditional ways of doing business. Countries will need to cultivate a new breed of technology-savvy entrepreneurs or technopreneurs to continue to compete effectively in the global market. Correspondingly, our educational system must continue to evolve its emphasis, from the raw acquisition of knowledge to the development of skills to apply and capitalise on the knowledge gained.

3 Singapore, being a small island nation, must keep up with these changes or risk being left behind. Our people are our only resource. To survive and progress as an independent nation, it is imperative that we continue to develop our human resource fully. Only then can we respond quickly to new challenges and new demands created by changes in the world environment.

4 It is thus no surprise that the Government has placed a high premium on education. In fact, our budget for expenditure on education is about 3.6% of our Gross Domestic Product this year. The teaching service has been enhanced and our local tertiary institutions have been making progress in their strive to be centres of excellence in teaching and research. The Government places great emphasis on ensuring that basic education is available to all and there are comprehensive schemes to ensure that no child is denied an education for financial reasons. Even working adults are encouraged to adopt life-long learning, training and re-training as a way of life as we prepare ourselves to face a fast-changing economy.

5 With our small population base, we also need to continue to attract and retain talents to work and contribute to our economic growth. Developing Singapore into an Education Centre with a well-established and renowned education system is one way to attract foreign talents to study and work here. Our efforts can be seen in the increasing numbers of top foreign students that have come to study here in Singapore at all levels.

6 Privately-run educational institutions can complement our public education system. Foreign universities are allowed to run courses in Singapore and offer their own degrees. These foreign universities link up with local institutions like the Asian Education Consortium (AEC). This concept has worked well to adapt to

local needs and provide educational opportunities for students who wish to study at their own pace to develop and broaden their skills.

7 I am told the AEC is one of the leading private educational institutions with over 1,000 students in Singapore and 14,000 abroad in similar centres in Malaysia, Myanmar, Cambodia, India and Sri Lanka. The wide range of programmes available at AEC from 'O' level right up to Ph.D. level from accredited institutions, prestigious partners and universities in the UK, Australia, Netherlands and the US provide life-long learning opportunities to locals and foreigners alike. To meet the needs of corporate clients, I was told that the AEC also custom-make training and skills development programmes. Such initiatives and the AEC's dedication to provide quality education would stand the company in good stead as it proceeds with plans to open more centres in Hong Kong, Nairobi, Indonesia and London later this year.

8 I mention earlier that I believe education is an important tenet of society, not just in terms of facilitating economic growth, but also in building a foundation for a strong and cohesive society. Educators are important role models for imparting sound moral and social values. It is my hope that local institutions, both public and private, would continue to play their part in fostering all-rounded learning and provide their students with opportunities to extend their learning beyond their books and the classroom for the benefit of society.

9 I would like to congratulate the Chairman of the Group, Tunku Iskandar, a qualified Management Scientist, former PATA (Pacific Association of Travel Agent) president and a prominent industry leader in the region for the success and growth of the AEC. I would also like to commend Mr R. Jayapal, the Executive Vice-President of the Group, whose flair for innovation has made the AEC a success in Singapore's education sector. I am confident that the AEC would continue to contribute to the success of Singapore as a first class regional education centre in the years ahead.

10 I hereby declare the AEC Centre in Singapore open.

11 Thank you.

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Please contact Mr Viki Puri of AEC at Tel: 2223500 (O) / 97557093 (Hdph) for further clarification

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