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SPEECH BY MR ZAINUL ABIDIN RASHEED, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (FOREIGN AFFAIRS) AND MP FOR CHENG SAN GRC AT THE MUSLIM CONSUMER SHOWCASE '99 AT 5.30 PM ON WEDNESDAY, 17 MARCH 1999 AT THE SINGAPORE EXPO

Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen.

Assalamualaikum wr wb

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I am delighted to be here this evening to officiate the opening of the Muslim Consumer Showcase '99. This is one place where we can safely say, come shop with a mission, but do invest with a vision. Let me explain, but first, allow me to express a few congratulations.

As you can see, this brand new Singapore Expo is a celebration by itself. It is about tomorrow's state of the art, today. It's about vision too -- Singapore's vision, as translated by PSA, the owner of this jumbo showcase of an expo world.

I was told that the Muslim Consumer Showcase '99 is the third exhibition to held here, but the first to be opened to the public. My congratulations to Mazni, Indrus & Banafie Marketing and Communications (MIB) for thinking big.

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In these challenging days of economic crisis and strategic alliances, may I also congratulate MENDAKI for thinking bold and creative. It is collaborative partnerships such as this that will make many more things possible.

Though the economy still looks gloomy, it is comforting to see that the zeal to carry on business is much alive. This is a good sign and augurs well for all of us - businessmen as well as consumers.

In good times, it is said, everybody can do business. In bad times, only the good and the tough will be around. In other words, they mean business.

In bad times, the soft and fearful ones see only dangers and difficulties; the hardy and resilient ones see opportunities galore.

In tough times, the competition gets stiffer, because what is at stake is not only the size of profits but also survival. To just stay alive, you will have to adapt, be pro-active and if necessary create the demands and the market. I was told, that's what this consumer showcase is about.

But I am sure this is a showcase with a difference. Before we get all too 'consumed' by this glittering array of goods and services today, we will soon be reminded of the need to invest for tomorrow. MENDAKI is here to remind us of that, not just with the big stick, but the carrot too.

We will learn that the need to push the community towards better education, better skills and the knowledge-based environment is so urgent that it calls for both the hard-sell and the creative and friendly touch.

And MENDAKI is not alone in this. AMP, Nury's Early Childhood Programme, The National Library, The National Heritage Board, the NTUC's SRP programme, among others will be quick to remind you that the showcase to life does not end with short-term consumption. In fact, it begins with long-term investment in education, skills, in being creative, in life-long learning and in thinking societies. In short, in making a success of our knowledge-based economy (KBE) and environment.

A knowledge-based economy is staring hard at us in the face and if we are not ready to exploit the opportunities that come with it, and face them squarely, we risk being sidelined.

The abbreviation MIB reminds me of the concept of Melayu-Islam-BerRaja in Brunei Darussalam. But for our purposes here in the Republic of Singapore, MIB can be taken to represent, Melayu-Islam-Berilmu. And if I may add, in the context of multi-racial Singapore, THINK MIB(S).

I remember SMS Haji Sidek Saniff once told me, when Rasulullah (saw) created the first Muslim state in Medina, he called it Darussalam and not Darul Islam. To me it carries an important message that the substance is more important than the form.

I am also glad to see that MENDAKI and MIB have combined forces with Malay/Muslim organisations, national service providers and the private sector (including some big international players like Hewlett Packard, Samsung, Regent Motor, Mayer Marketing, Digiland Singapore, Royal Crowne Plaza) to complete the picture.

In a move as big as bringing the society to gear for KBE, we need to get all parties involved. It calls for a concerted collaborative effort to shoulder the responsibilities together.

There is no room for any misunderstanding and misconception about what KBE stands for. I am most glad if Malay leaders and individuals who are unclear about it to speak up to clear the air. After, Minister Abdullah Tarmugi has at the outset when he first raised the need for the community to prepare for KBE, called for a concerted and united effort for this. That was the reason why preparations are now in progress to ensure greater participation for all major Malay/Muslim organisations in this effort. The call by Ustaz Haji Abu Bakar Haji Hashim in his Berita Harian commentary that for the Muslim community, KBE should be in consonance with Islam is welcome. KBE, in my mind, is indeed Islamic as we all know that, long before the term KBE was used, the Holy Quran has already signalled its importance.

Allah did not chose that the first word revealed in the Quran be "Iqra" or "Read" for no reason. It is through reading one gets information, knowledge and through them wisdom. Iman (faith) afterall has a lot to do with knowledge too.

The six to seven centuries of the Golden Age of Islam was also made possible because of the value given to knowledge and its ethical application. This is our call for KBE too.

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Let's not get intoxicated with wrong examples given to what KBE means. We know the advent of IT and the internet comes with certain abuses including the wider availability of pornographic material, for example. Our challenge there is to contain, if not eliminate them, but certainly not to stop promoting IT or the use of internet because of those ancillary problems.

For those of us who have followed the Parliamentary debate on the KBE will know that the same concern about ambiguity for what KBE stands is also true among the other communities. In fact the whole of Singapore. Thus the need for a better understanding of what KBE spells is serious.

Whether through the examples of the simple Tee Yih Jia roti prata that was given value added and going global or the billionaire Sim Wong Hoo Creative Technology story that fascinates even the icons of Silicon Valley in the US, we must find ways to reach out to the ordinary workers and individuals to woo them to this new

world of the KBE.

I am sure the Malay/Muslim community too will have its own homespun stories. For example, the Annapoorna murtabak by Haji Jalaldeen going regional. Or better still, the Muslim technopreneur who invented the electronic door key that also doubled-up as an electricity saver for Hotel Hilton Intercontinental. What about re-examining the potential to can the world famous satay for the international market? What about improving the use of sophisticated technology for religious-related products like prayer times and direction of the Kaaba?

We must resort to creative but simple ways to reach the ground to make them appreciate not only the mechanics of what KBE is about but also the ramifications it holds for the future. KBE will have such a profound impact on our lives that practically all areas of study, work and family life would be affected.

Even the way we teach religion to our children will undergo a 'revolution' in the years to come. Present day exchange or debate on religious matters, both on contemporary Islamic issues, and those affecting other communities and religious groups, is so dynamic that without the knowledge of the use of IT and the internet, we would not be able to contribute to the debate, let alone correct the aberrations or misinformation, whether deliberate or otherwise.

I am glad that this Showcase has allotted valuable time during each of the four days of the exhibition to explain what KBE is all about. It obviously calls for more efforts.

To wait for the many civic organisations to organise such, would take some, even a long time. This KBE revolution really calls for an 'individual' effort. Each and everyone of us owe it to ourselves to reach out to understand what KBE is all about and to make the necessary preparations, be it in terms of re-education or re-skilling.

Whether community leaders, asatizahs (religious teachers), parents, businessmen, students or other individuals, we need to pull together in the same direction. Together, we have to put our shoulders to the wheel of change. THINK about it.

Thank you and may you have a successful Showcase.

Wabi lla hhi tau fi q wh ws wr wb.

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