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Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY PROF S JAYAKUMAR, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND MINISTER FOR LAW AT THE
MENDAKI

AWARDS PRESENTATION CEREMONY

AT THE GRASSROOTS CLUB, ANG MO KIO AVENUE 8

ON SATURDAY 21ST AUGUST 99 AT 2.30 PM

Good afternoon,

1 I would like to thank MENDAKI for inviting me to this award ceremony. The annual ANUGERAH MENDAKI ceremony has become a significant event in the Singapore Malay/Muslim community's calendar. Over the years, MENDAKI has had much success in raising the educational performance of the Malay/Muslim community. The presence of some of the brightest and best young minds in this hall today bears

testimony to the community's achievements.

2 MENDAKI was the first community self-help group to be established. Self-help groups such as MENDAKI, AMP, CDAC, SINDA and EA (Eurasian Association) play an important role. These self-help groups are an effective way of getting successful people in an ethnic group to help others of the same ethnic group to do better. It is effective because of easier communication, greater understanding of the community's specific needs and problems. There is also better ability to address sensitive issues within the community. However, their achievements in raising the social, educational and economic performance of others from the same ethnic group are important not only for their own community. They are important for the nation as a whole because progress achieved by every community will contribute to the overall cohesion of our society as well as go towards enhancing Singapore's competitiveness.

3 At the same time there is much scope for the various self-help groups to share their experiences and learn from each other. The self-help groups, for example, have opened up their tuition centres to other ethnic groups. They have also jointly organised numerous parent education programmes and youth programmes. This is a move in the right direction. Pooling scarce resources and sharing expertise is an efficient and effective way of conducting the programmes. More importantly, it encourages exchange of ideas and interaction among the students.

4 I have kept abreast with the progress of the Malay/Muslim community over the years, especially in the area of education. Gone are the days when the role of education was merely to equip our young with the ability to read and write so that they could find some simple work after primary and secondary education. Now, post-secondary level is essential and good academic preparation at the primary and secondary level is necessary for entry and success in post-secondary education.

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5 I note that many more Malay/Muslim students have qualified for our four Polytechnics. In 1999, 1575 Malay students or 23% of the corresponding Malay Primary One cohort qualified for the Polytechnics. This is three times more than the 524 students or 8% of the Malay Primary One cohort who qualified for Polytechnics in 1990. As at 31 July 1999, the total number of Malay students enrolled at the polytechnics was 4158. Of these, about four-fifths were enrolled in the laboratory-based disciplines, while the remaining one-fifth opted for the non-laboratory based disciplines. The total enrolment of Malay undergraduates in the two local universities was 770. Of these, about three-fifths opted for the laboratory-based disciplines, while the remaining two-fifths opted for the non-laboratory disciplines. Some have even qualified for post-graduate studies with Masters and Doctoral qualifications. These are positive signs. I must commend MENDAKI for its initiatives in constantly reviewing and setting new strategies and goals to better prepare the community for new challenges.

6 The regional economic crisis of the last two years is a timely reminder of the kind of new challenges we have to face in the new millennium. Although Singapore has weathered the storm better than many of our neighbours, we cannot afford to be complacent. Some Singapore-based companies have already relocated part of their operations to other countries in the region that have become more cost-competitive. The Singapore economy must continue to upgrade and restructure in order to retain our competitive edge. Similarly, our workers will need to be continuously retrained so that they can keep up with technological advancements and be re-deployed in new areas of employment. In an increasingly competitive world, we have to make life-long learning part and parcel of the Singapore work culture.

7 I am heartened by MENDAKI'S effort in successfully training, in 1999 alone, 1579 (or 72%) of the 2197 applicants who wished to be re-trained. This is a step in the right direction. MENDAKI should continue to ensure that the right types of skills are transmitted to the workers. As Singapore develops into a knowledge-based economy, disciplines such as science, engineering and information technology will become more important.

8 With the support of the Government, self-help groups such as MENDAKI will be ever-ready to assist and guide you to realise your full potential. However, you will still have to play your part by continuing to strive for the best and be receptive to life-long learning.

9 Singapore's success over the last 34 years was built upon a strong and capable leadership, the drive of its people and their willingness to live and work together for the common interest. Whether we succeed, survive and prosper in the years to come will depend on the commitment of you and the future generations.

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10 On that note, let me conclude by extending to you and your parents my heartiest congratulations and best wishes.

Thank you.

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