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Subject: [EMBARGOED] Speech by PM Goh Chok Tong, 4 Dec 99, 3pm

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

Media Division, Ministry of Information and the Arts, #36-00 PSA Building, 460  
Alexandra Road, Singapore 119963. Tel: 3757794/5

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SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG AT THE LAUNCH OF THE MALAY/MUSLIM COMMUNITY  
KBE MOVEMENT, ON SATURDAY, 4 DECEMBER 1999 AT 3.00 PM AT NANYANG POLYTECHNIC  
AUDITORIUM, 180 ANG MO KIO AVE 8

The KBE Challenge For The Malay/Muslim Community

I regard this Launch of the Malay/Muslim Community KBE Movement as a major milestone for the Malay/Muslim Community. Like the National Convention in 1982, which led to the formation of MENDAKI, this initiative will begin the climb by the Malay/Muslim Community to the next peak.

2 We all know that the world in the 21st century will be different from the world in this century. Trade barriers are coming down. Capital and talent flow freely across national borders. Technology and the Internet will demand new skills. Many existing jobs and skills will become redundant. Young start-ups will upstage old established giants, and young innovators and entrepreneurs will become instant millionaires, and in some cases even billionaires.

3 China has reached an agreement with the United States on the terms of its entry into the WTO. China's entry will give the emerging economies in Asia, including Singapore, greater access to the huge Chinese market. But there will also be challenges. China will enjoy Most Favoured Nation treatment under WTO. Quotas restricting its export of textiles and garments to the United States will be removed by 2005. We do not produce textiles and garments but Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines do.

4 China will build up its electronics industry. It will be a formidable competitor in the higher end of electronic products, which Singapore now produces.

5 The world is not standing still. We, therefore, cannot stand still. We have to open our mind to new ideas and explore new ways of solving problems. Otherwise, we will drown in the backwash of global change.

6 In the new millennium, it is not enough just to be hard working, disciplined and efficient. You have to create new products all the time just to stay ahead. These new products can be a toy like Tamagotchi, a craze like Pokemon, sports shoes with air cushion, golf clubs with titanium heads, financial products like warrants and derivatives, or computer software programmes.

Banana Economies

## National Archives of Singapore

7 I was reminded of the plight of those who could not keep up with changes at the recent Commonwealth meeting in South Africa. Several leaders were bewildered by globalisation. Their countries were unable to cope with it. One leader moaned that his country had to produce three times more bananas than 10 years ago to buy the same type of machinery as before. He lashed out at the inequity of the international trading system. But the main problem really is that his country was trading unskilled labour for knowledge – labour that went into growing bananas for skills and knowledge embodied in machines, cars, computers and software.

8 As I listened to his and a few other leaders' lament, I told myself that Singapore must succeed in becoming a knowledge-based economy or KBE. Or else we will find ourselves in the same boat as the BBes, ie banana-based economies of the Caribbean.

9            You do not require much technology and knowledge to grow bananas. Many countries with the right soil and climatic conditions can grow bananas. In fact, the world can produce more bananas than the Americans and Europeans can eat. So bananas are cheap and the standard of living of the BBEs will remain low.

10          The bananas today look and taste the same as those of 10 years ago. But the machinery, equipment, radios, TVs and cars of today, are different from those of 10 years ago. Knowledge and its practical application have made them better. And every year, new products appear.

11          Malaysia used to be the largest natural rubber and tin producer in the world. But the Malaysians saw what was coming - new knowledge and new products such as synthetic rubber and plastic that would knock out their rubber and tin industries.

12          So they diversified into oil palm, manufacturing and tourism. They have converted depleted tin mines into useful assets. The Mines Golf Course where Tiger Woods won his World Cup of Golf was once one of the world's largest opencast tin mines. Malaysia also hosted the Formula One Grand Prix. The circuit was carved out of former rubber plantations. These two prestigious world-class sporting events are exciting new ideas to put Malaysia on the world map. According to reports, some 300 million people watched the Grand Prix and some 600 million the World Cup of Golf. Malaysia has not stood still.

#### Malays Only in Singapore

13          Just imagine for a moment a Singapore comprising only the 440,000 Malays in our population. That would make the Perdana Menteri of Singapore the leader of a small state, like Bahamas in the Caribbean (population of nearly 300,000) or Solomon islands in the South Pacific (population of 440,000). What would the Prime Minister of such a Singapore say when he participates in a debate on globalisation at Commonwealth or other international meetings? Would he plead for help from the international community on account of Singapore's geographical disadvantages? Would he argue about the inequities of globalisation and international trade? Would the bigger countries listen? Or would he explain how his people are preparing for the future through education and training, and how his population of 440,000 Malay Singaporeans will secure a high standard of living producing new products for the world market?

14          Of course, in reality, Malays are not the only people in Singapore. They have both contributed and benefited from working and living side by side with the Chinese, Indians, Eurasians and other people here. I made the point about the 440,000 Malays going it alone to illustrate vividly the challenges for the Malay community. It is to drive home the message that Singaporean Malays must progress in tandem with global trends and embrace globalisation and a KBE. The Malay community has to get itself ready for the knowledge era now, not just the few at the top but the entire community. Otherwise, in time to come, the community may be as vulnerable as the people in the smaller Caribbean and Pacific countries while the rest of Singapore prospers.

Education is very important

15 This brings me back to the point I have made constantly to the Malay community: education is very important for the future of our young and their families. In fact, the key to good jobs and wealth in a KBE is the ability to acquire and apply knowledge, and better still, to create new knowledge. This means that education will become even more important in future. Can we improve the educational performance of Malay students? What kind of education will best prepare our young for a KBE?

16 I have been tracking the educational performance of Malay students in our national schools. Here, the community has indeed made significant progress. For example, 91% of Malay pupils passed the PSLE this year. This is a massive 16%-points higher than the 75% achieved 11 years ago. This year, Yusrina Yusofff, a Malay student, obtained the highest score in the PSLE. I hope that she continues to do well, and that there will be more like her in future.

17 But much more remains to be done before the community is ready for a KBE. In the knowledge era, our young will need a sound grounding in English, Mathematics and Science. These subjects will provide the foundation upon which they could acquire skills and knowledge in IT and other areas critical to success in a KBE. At GCE 'O' level, Malay pupils' pass rates are still low. In 1998, only 6 in 10 passed English. It was the same for Mathematics and Science. I believe that Malay pupils can and should do much better. Fewer Malays are doing engineering and the other hard sciences in the universities, as compared to the national average. The community should see how it can increase the GCE 'O' level pass rate for Malay students and get more of them to do engineering and other hard sciences.

Every Singaporean Matters

18 In 1993, I highlighted the high school dropout rate at my National Day Rally. The Malay community worked with the Ministry of Education (MOE) to reduce the dropout rate. Today, the dropout rate has improved. For the Malay community, 1.3% of students dropped out of national schools before Primary 6 in 1998 as compared with 4.6% in 1990. At the secondary level, the dropout rate for Malay students has fallen from 7.7% in 1990 to 5.9% in 1998.

19 But we must do more. I have asked MOE to review its position on compulsory education because I want every Singaporean to be fully prepared for a KBE. MOE tells me that a significant proportion of those who did not register in national schools enrolled in full-time madrasahs. I appreciate fully the contribution of madrasahs. There will be a role for them. But the Malay community should ask what are the implications if more and more Malay/Muslim students want to enrol in full-time madrasahs. How many ulamas and asatizahs would the community need? What is the optimal number of madrasah graduates to serve the needs of the Malay community? Would it help the community in a KBE if more and more Malays attend full-time madrasahs instead of national schools?

20 These questions go beyond the standard and content of teaching in madrasahs and the academic performance of their students. It's about the kind of future the Malay/Muslim community wants for itself. You should look at the question of education from the longer-term and larger interest of the Malay/Muslim community. Which is better for the bulk of Malay/Muslim students? A good grounding in secular education complemented by part-time religious education or a full-time religious education with some secular subjects taught?

21 MUIS tells me that there is a long queue of students for madrasahs. So this question is of some urgency for the Malay/Muslim community. But your KBE movement should not be bogged down by the issue of compulsory education and madrasahs, important as it is. There are other aspects of community development and the KBE that you have to deal with. Compulsory education and madrasahs is only one of them.

22 The Government will take the advice of the community's leaders on these questions. I have only posed the questions and spelt out their implications against the harsh realities of a competitive world. This is why I said at the outset that your Launch today is a milestone. The recommendations that have been adopted will affect the future of the Malay/Muslim community for generations to come.

23 The Malay/Muslim community has made remarkable progress over the last 35 years in every sphere of life in Singapore. I hope that you will build on the gains you have made. This you can do only if your community is prepared to look at old issues against the background of global changes, critically and rationally.

#### Malaysian Example

24 In Malaysia, Dr Mahathir has done that. He has urged Malay students to follow the examples of Chinese school students in their diligence and enthusiasm in studies to achieve high academic standards. I did not know until I read in Malaysian Chinese newspapers recently that there were a sizeable number of Malay students attending Chinese medium primary schools. In 1994, the number was 25,000. In 1998, it had increased to 30,200.

25 Mahathir had also spoken out against building a university just for bumiputra students only. He believed that such a university would lead to lower academic performance. He has also elevated the importance of English in Malaysia, overcoming the political objections of those who wanted Malay to remain the sole medium of instruction.

26 It appears to me that Malaysia is trying to produce a new generation of Malays who will be at home with the KBE.

#### Learning, Creative and Confident

27 Let me now turn to the Convention. I note that you had discussed several recommendations under your theme of "Creating a Learning, Creative and Confident Malay/Muslim Community." They include the review of the teaching of English and Mathematics in Malay/Muslim kindergartens, the provision of computer training and the setting up of a Malay/Muslim IT Network.

28 Your recommendations are sensible. Here, I have three suggestions. First, this is but the first step the community should take towards meeting the KBE challenge. The next step is to implement the adopted recommendations and monitor their progress and effectiveness. For this, the community should appoint a high-level group to take charge. This would ensure that there is proper co-ordination and follow-up to what have been discussed and adopted. Also, you may wish to ask an external panel to audit and evaluate the effectiveness of your programme once every 3 to 5 years.

29 Second, there is need to prioritise the implementation of the recommendations. While it is good to take a comprehensive approach, it is also necessary to differentiate the important recommendations from those that are good to have but less essential. My own view is that the community may want to pay more attention on education and worker training for a start. These two areas have major impact on the preparedness of the community for a KBE. As far as possible, the community should avoid diffusing its focus and dissipating its energies on too many programmes and activities.

30 Third, it is very important to galvanise the ground, get the whole community to understand the challenge and secure the people's support and commitment to the measures being carried out. This Launch will forge a consensus among the key groups of the community on the way ahead. It is an important first step. After this, you should spread the message to parents, teachers, professionals, religious and social workers and other opinion multipliers in the community. Whether you succeed in meeting the KBE challenges will ultimately depend on the extent of support you receive throughout the community.

31 Your programme may require more funds. The Government will consider providing the necessary funds so long as your programme is practical, effective, and well run. The exact formula for co-funding and the quantum will be taken up by the Ministry of Community Development and the Ministry of Finance.

Concl usi on

32 Let me end by welcoming once again this initiative by the Malay-Muslim community to prepare itself for the knowledge era. It is a very timely move. The community's action plans will complement the various strategic plans at national level that have already been implemented, such as Industry 21, Technopreneurship 21, Manpower 21 and Thinking Schools. The Government will assist the community in its endeavour to be part of the KBE.

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Ucapan Perdana Menteri di Konvensyen KBE untuk Masyarakat Melayu/Islam pada 4 Dis 99

Saudara-saudara

Dalam kehidupan apa negara pun, terdapat saat-saat kritikal yang menentukan masa depan dan kejayaannya. Bagi Singapura, saat pertama yang menentukan masa depan negara ini ialah ketika perpisahan dari Malaysia. Setelah itu kita mengambil keputusan mercu tanda untuk mengubah ekonomi kita dari sebuah pusat dagangan entreport kepada sebuah ekonomi yang berorientasi pengilangan dan perkhidmatan dengan melompat jauh ke hadapan negara-negara lain di rantau ini. Kita sekarang berada di satu lagi titik peralihan yang kritikal – bagaimana hendak mengubah Singapura menjadi sebuah ekonomi berteraskan ilmu yang berteknologi tinggi, inovatif dan kreatif. Untuk menjayakannya, kita perlu mengubah rangka minda dan sikap kita, terutamanya terhadap pembelajaran kemahiran di dalam dan di luar sekolah dan tempat kerja. Pendidikan akan menjadi kunci untuk membuka peluang-peluang pekerjaan pada masa depan dan menjamin daya laku kerja sepanjang hayat.

2 Masyarakat Melayu/Islam di Singapura menyedari bahawa dunia baru ini adalah berbeza daripada dunia lama. Masyarakat Melayu/Islam telah menunjukkan kesungguhan untuk mengharungi arus perubahan ini. Sikap positif ini amat memberangsangkan. Hanya dengan memberikan respons secara sepadu dan penuh tekadlah masyarakat Melayu/Islam tidak akan ditenggelami oleh kuasa-kuasa perubahan. Pemerintah akan melakukan segala yang ia mampu untuk membantu dan untuk menguatkan azam masyarakat Melayu/Islam untuk mencapai taraf yang lebih tinggi.

3 Sekarang, izinkan saya meneruskan ucapan saya dalam bahasa Inggeris.