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Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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**SPEECH BY MR ABDULLAH TARMUGI,
MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
AND MINISTER IN CHARGE OF MUSLIM AFFAIRS
AT THE HARI RAYA AIDILFITRI GATHERING
AT THE ISTANA
ON FRIDAY 14 JANUARY 2000 AT 7.45 PM**

National Archives of Singapore

The Internet and e-commerce are changing rapidly the economy, society and politics. So rapid, that some have called this new world the Blur World. Nothing is certain. Everything is moving, and changing, so fast that it's a blur. It's not just blurring. It's also unsettling. This great unknown is full of promises as well as perils. We have just begun entering the knowledge economy. The internet and e-commerce is only one – albeit a major one – of many parts of the knowledge economy.

2 We are on a voyage into the great unknown. It is full of promises as well as perils. One flip side of this great unknown is what some call the Digital Divide – the gap between the Information Haves and Information Have Nots. And according to studies in the US, this gap is growing. This is something we should think hard about.

4 How would our community fare in this new world full of uncertainties? My greatest worry is that the Malay/Muslim community lags behind in trying to keep up with the changes that are coming our way.

5 We must move forward with the tides of the times, while at the same time remaining to be what we are -- with our own values intact. There is no reason why this cannot be so if we put our minds to it.

6 There are three ways to face change: to resist it; to run away from it, or to adapt to it. The first is to put up barriers to it. The second is to insulate and isolate ourselves from it. I hope our community belongs to neither of these. **To do so is to deny the realities that are going on not only around us but throughout the world. We will be isolated, sidelined and irrelevant!**

7 There are good and logical reasons for us to prepare for and adapt to change. It ensures that we move with the needs of the times and remain part of the mainstream. But we should adapt intelligently and not blindly embrace changes that can do us harm morally, physically, emotionally or spiritually.

8 This Ramadhan I met an Indonesian ulama at a breaking of fast function. I told him that Muslims in Singapore could pay their fitrah (tithes) through telephone. “Wah, its that easy. Paying fitrah without having to leave home and

come face to face with the street demonstrations!” he replied laughing.

9 So, the knowledge economy and what we must do to keep in step with it and what we are, as Muslims, should not be viewed as options which we can choose only one. The choice to be both KBE prepared and good Muslims is there for us to choose and strive for. And in this we can work together as a community.

10 At the KBE Movement Launch last year I mentioned the formation of a Facilitation Committee to drive, oversee and monitor the recommendations of the convention held earlier. I am glad to announce that such a Committee has been formed and will start work immediately. It is chaired by Prof Yaacob Ibrahim and assisted by Mr Hawazi Daipi as Dy Chairman. But the rest of the 12-member committee comprises mostly young Malay-Muslim professionals. This Committee will see to the implementation of programmes in the light of the recommendations already endorsed by the community.

11 In conclusion, let me reiterate my greatest concern: how do we prepare our young -- the next generations to keep up with the changes so as not to be left behind. The only way for us to make sure is they have a good foundation in education.

12 A good basic education serves as a foundation for ourselves and our children to be able to grasp the concepts, instructions and processes needed for jobs in the knowledge economy. It gives us the ability to be able to learn and relearn and thus add new knowledge. Therefore we must make sure that the education our children will receive can prepare them for the requirements of a knowledge worker. We owe this to our future generations and to the continuing

development of our community. This is the best legacy we can leave behind.

13 I wish you a pleasant evening and Selamat Hari Raya, maaf zahir batin.

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