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Subject: (EMBARGOED) Speech by Mr Sidek Saniff, 14 Feb 2000, 10am

# *Singapore Government*

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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**SPEECH BY MR SIDEK SANIFF, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR  
THE ENVIRONMENT, AT YAYASAN MENDAKI SKILLS  
REDEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME GRADUATION CEREMONY ON  
MON, 14 FEB 2000 AT 10.00AM, WISMA MENDAKI, HALL 1**

National Archives of Singapore

Mr Sumardi Ali,  
CEO of Yayasan MENDAKI,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Good morning

1 Thank you for inviting me to join you for this morning's graduation and certificate presentation ceremony. Let me first congratulate the successful participants from the 1st and 2nd batch of the MENDAKI Skills Redevelopment Programme. I would also like to congratulate MENDAKI and NTUC for taking the initiative to organize such a training programme to prepare Malay/Muslim workers for future challenges.

2 Singapore went through a difficult period recently. But we have braved the situation together and the recession is now behind us. The recovery should raise our confidence and optimism for the future. However, we must never become complacent. We should not assume that the job market would recover immediately with the economy turning around.

3 Despite the economic recovery, employment level is still below the pre-crisis level due to restructuring and downsizing of companies. Even though overall job vacancies have increased, retrenched workers are not able to get re-employment quickly. Without skills, many are facing difficulty in meeting the skill requirements of newly created jobs. Others find it hard to adjust to a different work environment and perhaps a salary reduction.

4 This means that the idea of a lifetime job is no longer relevant. Correspondingly, the concept of a lifetime skill will become obsolete. Instead, workers who want to remain employable must constantly upgrade their knowledge and skills. Gone are the days when workers, regardless of their education and skill levels, had no problems finding good jobs. Companies are going to require fewer, but higher skilled workers. Those with obsolete skills will find their job opportunities shrinking rapidly. Hence without upgrading their skills, they may remain unemployed for long periods.

5 We should focus our efforts on building a knowledge-based economy that will create higher value added jobs for Singaporeans. Hence we have to upgrade all our workers into knowledge workers with higher skills and capabilities. Every worker must adopt the lifelong learning culture; continually acquiring new knowledge and skills throughout his or her working life. Workers must also be flexible to changing work environments of new industries.

6 Building a knowledge workforce is not going to be an easy task. It will require the collective effort of the workers, employers, unions, community organizations and the Government. The leaders of the Malay/Muslim community must be prepared for the challenges of the knowledge-based economy. Workers training is crucial for the community if it is to succeed in the knowledge-based economy. Several recommendations were surfaced during the KBE Convention, including keeping the Malay/Muslim community well informed on education and training opportunities and a mentoring scheme where successful employees can help motivate less skilled workers to go for training and even assist them in their career choice.

7           While we have seen tremendous improvements in the education of Malay students, there remains a large segment of Malay workers who possess secondary education or less. In fact, about 43% of the Malay workforce do not have secondary education, many of whom are engaged in lower skilled production or production-related jobs. This group will have the most difficulties in keeping up with changes as Singapore evolved into a knowledge-based economy. As long as Malay/Muslim workers are keen to improve your skills, you will also be able to join the ranks of the knowledge workers in due course. The desire to improve backed by community and Government's support, will enable many workers to upgrade their skills and remain employable in a knowledge-based economy.

8           While the Government and community can provide the infrastructure and support, it is ultimately up to the individual workers to take responsibility over their own learning and employability. As demonstrated by individuals from different backgrounds and age groups, who have successfully completed MENDAKI's SRP courses, skill upgrading is relevant to everyone and attainable by everyone. I would like to congratulate the successful graduates of the MENDAKI SRP courses. You have taken an important step in the journey towards lifelong learning. You will serve as an inspiration to others in the Malay/Muslim community to make the effort to enhance their employability. I hope that you will support the Workers' Mentoring Scheme being worked out by MENDAKI. Your experience will speak the loudest in convincing others that returning to the classroom need not be a scary episode. I wish you success in all your endeavours.

9           Thank you.

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