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Singapore Government

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**OPENING ADDRESS BY RADM (NS) TEO CHEE HEAN, MINISTER FOR
EDUCATION AND SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE AT THE
OPENING OF ITE BUKIT BATOK AND THE OPENING OF THE 4TH
NATIONAL SKILLS COMPETITION HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 28 JUN
2000 AT 1000 HRS AT ITE BUKIT BATOK**

**TECHNICAL EDUCATION – STAYING ON THE CORRECT SIDE OF
THE SKILLS DIVIDE**

Mr Peter Chen, Senior Minister of State for Education

Dr Law Song Seng, Director & CEO, ITE

Staff and Students

Ladies and Gentlemen

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It gives me great pleasure to join you this morning in celebrating the Official Opening of ITE Bukit Batok and the Opening of the 4th National Skills Competition.

Challenges Ahead

2 In the coming years, our nation will continue to face many new challenges. We hope to transit quickly into the knowledge economy, characterised by rapid technological changes and intense global competition. The nature and content of work in future will increasingly be knowledge-based. To succeed in this new economic landscape, our students entering the workforce must not only be skilled and technologically savvy, but also be creative and adaptable. They must be able to think critically, come up with innovative solutions to problems, and work effectively as individuals and in teams.

3 Globalisation and the rapid advances in science and technology require nations to build up their intellectual capital. Our students and working adults must be innovative knowledge workers, committed to lifelong learning.

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4 In a globalised world, there will be an increasing divide between those with the knowledge and skills that are in demand, and those without such skills. There will be certain types of talent, knowledge and skills for which demand is high, and supply on a worldwide basis is not enough. These include new growing fields in information and high technology, and in particular in those skills that are difficult to teach and difficult to learn. Employers are prepared to pay a premium for such people. And if skilled Singaporeans do not find sufficient reward for their talents here, they will be tempted to find work at attractive salaries in Silicon Valley and

elsewhere. Incomes for such people therefore tend to be pulled up to world levels.

5 On the other hand, there is no shortage of unskilled workers in the world. Every year millions enter the workforce throughout the world with little or no skills. And they are prepared to work for very little. Companies where labour makes up a big part of their cost will move to where unit labour costs are lowest. Wages for low skilled workers will therefore tend to be pulled down when workers elsewhere are prepared to do the same job for less.

6 The widening of the income gap is inevitable on a global basis. But here in Singapore there is every likelihood that the vast majority of our workers will benefit from globalisation and stay on the correct side of this divide compared to workers in other countries in the world. The main reason is that we have the facilities and the opportunities for our people to acquire those skills that are in demand - before they join the workforce, and while they are in the workforce. Every Singaporean needs to constantly train and re-train to equip themselves with the skills that will be in demand. We want as many of our people as possible to be in the skilled and knowledge worker category able to command a salary premium in the world labour market; and we want as few as possible in the low-skilled and unskilled category, where wages will remain low. Employers, the unions and government are working hand-in-hand to help Singaporeans acquire the skills that they need to stay on the correct side of this global divide.

7 Against the backdrop of these evolving challenges, the Ministry of Education has spelt out the Desired Outcomes of Education for each level of the educational system. This plan outlines the strategy to maximise the potential of each student and prepare him for the intense, total and exciting challenges of the

new economy.

8 Our school system prepares students for post-secondary education in our institutions of higher learning, where they can acquire valuable skills and knowledge needed for different career options. As an established post-secondary technical institution, ITE offers an excellent option that prepares our students for specialised occupations in a knowledge economy.

9 Every year, ITE takes in about 10,000 school leavers and 30,600 adult learners into its full-time and part-time courses respectively. And equally if not more important, ITE's accredited training centres and certified on-the-job training centres (COJTCs) train another 64,500 students each year in part-time and continuing education programmes. ITE's investment in new state-of-the-art training facilities is proof that ITE is gearing itself up to do even more.

New ITE Curriculum Model

10 To prepare students for the new economy, ITE has reviewed its curriculum and formulated a new model for the next five years. The **ITE New Curriculum Model** is designed to meet the challenges posed by the new economy and will be implemented from July 2000. The Model is an important breakthrough, as it is based on a modular, credit-based and competency-based training system. It also aims to encourage a more broad-based education, by requiring students across related courses to take common core technical modules to build up a technical foundation. At the same time, to cater to the diverse abilities and interests of students, a range of **elective modules** will be introduced. This will provide students with the opportunities to acquire knowledge in other fields beyond their

immediate areas of specialisation. Where possible, students from **different disciplines** will be grouped and tasked to work on **projects**. In this way, their innate creativity and the spirit of innovation will be nurtured. This will create a conducive environment for students to apply problem-solving skills, discover and develop their talents, and learn to work in teams.

11 In addition, ITE will seek to inculcate students with the skills to make them the “**knowledge workers**” and “**thinking doers**” of tomorrow. The **employability skills modules**, focusing on creative thinking, problem-solving, interpersonal and group effectiveness skills will be a course requirement for all students. To this end, conscious efforts will also be made to integrate the testing of these employability skills as well as students’ understanding of the underpinning technical concepts in their practical skill assessments. This comprehensive training will give ITE students a better foundation for the rapid changes in technology and work environment.

A New Pedagogic Model

12 To support the new Curriculum Model, ITE needs to change its current way of teaching and learning. It will introduce a **new Pedagogic Model** that advocates a process-oriented approach to teaching and learning. The Model will focus on contemporary teaching methodologies such as case studies, problem-based learning and group work, and the immersion of students in an IT-based learning environment. Students will be encouraged to be more proactive, inquiring and independent in learning. They will be expected to plan their learning with their teachers, explore available resources and ideas, put into practice the procedures learned, and demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have acquired. The Model

will help students to be competent technically, methodologically, and socially. Teachers will have to take on the role as facilitators of learning. They will have to coach from the sidelines instead of taking centre stage all the time, so as to encourage greater interaction and more active learning.

13 In a fast-changing world where technologies will become obsolete quickly, the key factors of success for individuals, institutions and nations alike will be a continual acquisition and application of knowledge and skills. ITE will continue to work closely with MOE to ensure that its students are well prepared to meet the challenges of the new economy. ITE's Breakthrough plan and its related initiatives will help the Institute to position its students for the future workplace. The new ITE Bukit Batok campus represents the Government's continuing commitment to ensuring the best education for ITE students.

National Skills Competition

14 I am also pleased to note that this year's National Skills Competition, the fourth in the series, has grown in size and stature, covering more skills areas and attracting a higher number of participants, including students from secondary schools. The Competition serves as a good platform to highlight the importance of technical skills in Singapore. Our participation in the International Youth Skill Olympics will help benchmark our skills against international standards and give us a better feel for global competitiveness.

Concluding Remarks

15 In closing, let me congratulate ITE on the official opening of ITE Bukit Batok. I commend the tremendous efforts that the Institute has put in to help

prepare all Singaporeans for the new economy – to prepare them to be on the correct side of the global skills divide.

16 For those participating in the 4th National Skills Competition, I wish you a fruitful and enjoyable time.

17 Thank you.

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