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Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR SIDEK SANIFF, SENIOR MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AT THE OPENING OF NORTHEAST-NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TRAVEL AGENTS SINGAPORE (NATAS) "IT FOR FAMILY LEARNING AND BONDING" HELD ON FRI, 10 MAR 2000 AT SINGAPORE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION AND EXHIBITION CENTRE, LEVEL 4, CONVENTION HALL AT 11 AM

Good Morning

NorthEast CDC Council Members,
Dr Kenny Goh,
President, National Association of Travel Agents Singapore

Mr Robert Khoo,
Chief Executive Officer,
National Association of Travel Agents Singapore

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentleman

1 In a tiny nation-state like Singapore with no natural resources, equipping our people with the relevant Information Technology or IT skills is a necessity, not a choice. We are living in an increasingly complicated world where IT will permeate into every aspect of our society – at home, work and play. We have seen an increasing number of companies moving into e-commerce and making their presence felt on the Internet through "dot.com" set-ups. Travel agents have also come to realise the vast potential of the Internet for tapping markets way beyond our physical borders.

2 However, underpinning this rapid growth in technology is still our key resource - people. Without an IT-enabled populace, we will not be able to tap into this new technology and use it to our advantage. Hence, the key to ensuring Singapore's future prosperity and survival is IT. One of our greatest challenges is therefore to help the community keep up with the changing technology. We need to reach out to Singaporeans to help them to develop the necessary skills to stay competitive.

3 As Singapore prepares itself to be an intelligent island, we must avoid the pitfalls of a digital divide that may arise from the information haves and have-nots. Everyone, including the underprivileged, must have the opportunity to embrace IT. The challenge is to find ways to get as many people as possible to become familiar with IT so that they can use it to improve their quality of life. IT must be seen to be relevant to all age groups and by people across all walks of life.

4 According to the Information Technology Household Survey launched by the then National Computer Board in 1999, 59% of Singapore households surveyed owned a home computer, ahead of Japan and US. In fact, the survey showed that there was a growing trend of households having more than one computer at home.

5 Nevertheless, there is still a substantial number who do not own a computer for various reasons. One of the main reasons is the comparatively high cost of buying one, especially for lower-income families staying in the HDB single to three-room flats, even though prices of computers have declined significantly.

6 It is important that the underprivileged are not left behind the IT bandwagon. Children should not be deprived of learning and using personal

computers due to their family background. It is therefore very encouraging to see that NATAS and the NorthEast CDC have come together to initiate the programme, “IT for Family Learning and Bonding”. This programme is a support scheme that focuses on IT as a tool and learning aid for under-privileged families so that they will not be disadvantaged. These families will each receive a brand new Pentium personal computer and colour printer. They would also get to attend subsidized IT-related courses. The programme enables the family members to explore common interests on the Internet, for the parents to guide and coach the children in school work as well as learning from each other as a family. All these activities increase interaction and help to bring the family closer together. A family that learns together will bond closer together.

7 “IT for Family Learning and Bonding” is not just about hardware, but it is also about “heartware”. The programme exemplifies the spirit of Singapore 21 where there are Opportunities for All. This is indeed a good model of collaboration between the people, private and public sectors, each leveraging on its competency to come up with a very meaningful and innovative programme. Everyone has a role in building a more caring and civic-minded community.

8 This programme is possible only because of the initiative and generous donation from the National Association of Travel Agents Singapore. I would also like to thank the Hewlett Packard Singapore Pte Ltd and Microsoft Singapore Pte Ltd for their support to this programme.

9 With that, I wish the organisers every success in the implementation of the programme and a successful fair. Thank you.