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Singapore Government

MEDIA RELEASE

Media Division, Ministry of Information and the Arts, 140 Hill Street #02-02 MITA Building
Singapore 179369. Tel: 837 9666
For assistance call 837 9666

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OPENING ADDRESS BY MR LEE YOCK SUAN, MINISTER FOR INFORMATION AND THE ARTS AND MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, SINGAPORE AT THE JOINT OPENING OF THE 11TH CONGRESS OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN LIBRARIANS (CONSAL XI), ASIA INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR AND INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY EXPO ON 26 APRIL 2000 AT 9.00AM AT THE SICEC

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

National Archives of Singapore

I am happy to be here to participate in the opening of CONSAL 2000 together with the inaugural Asia International Book Fair and the International Library Expo. This is the first time that the Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians is held in conjunction with major supporting events.

2 In the new economy, industries are moving from the traditional process-based value-chain operations to adopt a new approach of value webs. Thus the new way of working would be to work in groups and networks that are linked and highly interactive rather than in hierarchies.

3 In this context where emphasis is on the ability to effectively apply knowledge in whatever we do, such value networks would take the form of knowledge networks or KNETS, spelled as K N E T S and pronounced as NETS. Generally, knets are often interpreted as electronic space that facilitates interaction and exchange of knowledge. The term knet was coined by Joy Palmer and Ian Richards, Directors of Interactives, a US-based knowledge management consultancy firm.

4 CONSAL has the potential of being one such knet - a network of knowledge entities working in concert with each other. CONSAL member libraries can leverage on the collective intelligence that lies in multiple connected knowledge nodes of what we call libraries today.

5 CONSAL as a regional grouping of libraries has the potential to create a new marketpace where knowledge products and services can be created, circulated, transacted and traded. It offers members of CONSAL an opportunity to support creation of new wealth for member nations by forming a viable knowledge network in the region to feed industries and individuals with timely information and knowledge. This will support business decisions and learning and help them to maintain the competitive edge.

6 Librarians as knowledge managers with certain skillsets can become knowledge entrepreneurs of the Knet Economy. This Congress offers ASEAN member nations the challenge of putting together a working model of a knetted economy.

7 Perhaps the following illustration will establish my point. In 1455, German goldsmith Johan Gutenberg succeeded in creating his masterpiece and producing a run of 200 typeset Bibles. By doing so, he unleashed the information era that rules to this day. But it was not Gutenberg who invented printing. The craft had emerged in 8th Century China using multiple characters carved on a single woodblock. In fact the moveable typeset was invented by Chinese printer Pi Sheng in 1040. Neither did Gutenberg invent the movable metal typeset. The Koreans did it in the 14th Century. What Gutenberg devised was the first Western movable type system that worked – so well that it

remained virtually unchanged for 350 years. His technique spread with stunning rapidity. By 1500 an estimated half a million printed books were in circulation.

8 This analogy illustrates how different parties capitalised on developments, innovated together and contributed to progress. In this example, the innovations spanned 8 centuries before having widespread results. In this modern age, changes take place often at Internet speed.

9 The challenge for CONSAL is to create significant value through a knowledge network which spans ASEAN. To achieve symbiotic linkages, the CONSAL Executive Board has deliberated and agreed on various areas of collaboration.

10 First, we will witness the formal admission of the Kingdom of CAMBODIA, the Union of MYANMAR, the LAO People's Democratic Republic and the Socialist Republic of VIETNAM as CONSAL Members. With this admission, all ASEAN countries are now members of CONSAL.

11 Secondly, the CONSAL EXECUTIVE BOARD has agreed to set up a permanent CONSAL Secretariat. Singapore under the auspices of the National Library Board will host the provisional Secretariat while the legal, fiscal and constitutional issues of setting up a permanent Secretariat are being finalised.

12 Thirdly, a CONSAL Website was launched to provide members with more information about CONSAL, its member country libraries and related information including the Congress. This has the potential of being CONSAL's marketplace and window to the world.

13 Fourthly, to enhance co-marketing and knowledge sharing, the Singapore National Library Board will extend access to its digital library services via TiARA, Singapore's flagship digital library services. TiARA is the acronym for Timely Information Access, Relevant and Affordable. CONSAL Member country libraries will be able to do a one-stop search of catalogues of major libraries in Singapore and request access to the National Library's Reference Services.

14 The NLB is also working with the major content providers to address licensing issues before TiARA's content-rich access can be extended to the region. For example, the Gartner Group, a leading information technology market research company, has agreed to provide a six-month free access to its renowned IT Journal and Business Technology Journal. This will be made available to the National and University Libraries of CONSAL member countries through TiARA.

The longer-term business model will be addressed with member countries before expanding access to more services.

15 I congratulate the CONSAL Board for taking steps to position itself as a relevant and important node in the knowledge web.

16 I wish all delegates to CONSAL 2000 a stimulating and fruitful conference over the next three days. I hope our foreign visitors will have a very pleasant stay in Singapore.

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