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### **AMENDED SPEECH (please see para 26)**

**SPEECH BY MR DAVID T E LIM, MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENCE  
AND INFORMATION AND THE ARTS AT THE ASIA-EUROPE FORUM  
ON CULTURE IN THE CYBER AGE AT KYONGJU, REPUBLIC OF  
KOREA, ON MONDAY, 23 OCTOBER, 2000, 3.15pm (Korea)**

### **Arts, Culture and the New Economy**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

### **Introduction**

1. I would like to begin by offering my congratulations and also my thanks to the organisers for bringing us here to this beautiful and historic city for this conference. The conference theme is very broad: Culture in the Cyber Age. But I am sure that with such an eminent gathering of people steeped in culture and the arts, your discussions over the next few days will be very productive. Allow me to share a few thoughts to begin this process.

2. Europe and Asia are culturally different and distinct.

3. An Asian might be forgiven for not being able to tell an Austrian apart from a German, if they both dressed alike in their Bavarian folk costumes. Likewise, a European might be excused if he mixes up a Thai and a Cambodian, if they both performed in their ceremonial dance outfits. But none of us would expect anyone to mix up a French opera singer with a Beijing opera performer, or fail to tell the difference between a gamelan group from Indonesia and the latest rock band from England.

4. But our differences mask the similarities of our hopes and aims as we enter a new millennium. All of us seek peace, so that our economies can grow, and our people prosper. And we seek to better understand each other, so that we can build closer ties that allow us to explore global markets and opportunities together.

5. Over the past weekend, national leaders from the ASEM countries met in Seoul to discuss how our countries can work more closely together in the new economy. This morning, I would like to continue this process by focussing our attention on co-operation through the Arts and Culture.

### Understanding Each Other Through The Arts

6. The Arts is an essential means through which culture is expressed, stored up and passed on from one generation to the next. Whether in literature or song or dance, or through paintings or sculptures or theatre, the arts expresses the way our different communities think and live and relate to each other. And through the arts, members of each community are drawn closer to each other. They enjoy and explore and share experiences that shape their values, and give meaning to their lives. They forge identities, in towns, countries and regions.

7. But in the new economy, the Arts take on an additional and important role. They also become a medium through which we can explain and make ourselves known and understood to people outside our own community.

8. Culture is difficult to explain. It is not a science that can be expressed exactly with symbols or mathematical equations. In science, the ideas transfer easily from one culture to the next, because an electron is an electron, and a gene is a gene, whatever language or cultural setting I put it into.

9. But culture is more complex. I cannot explain in mere words alone what filial piety means in Seoul or in Stockholm. I have no doubt that people in both cities love their parents. But how this love is expressed, how it shapes behaviour, or how it eventually translates into practical arrangements within a society for the care of the old and elderly – that is more difficult to explain.

10. The arts allow us to express the complexity and nuances of human relationships in multi-dimensional formats. This is why it is such a powerful and effective media through which we can learn about other cultures.

11. In the new economy, working co-operatively and globally will require a new set of skills. These skills we need are much more than knowing whether to greet each other with a handshake or a bow. Rather, we need to understand how we function both cognitively and emotionally as individuals, and as communities. In short, we need to understand the cultural context of our global business partners.

12. Fortunately for us, the technologies that enable us to build a new global economy also provide us with tools to foster such closer cultural ties and understanding. Take for example, the Internet.

13. The Internet overcomes one of the key impediments that has limited human interactions – the lack of contact between people. When jet travel became possible 50 years ago, it speeded up contacts between the political and business leaders of countries, and enabled more collaboration and international trade to take place. But the number of people who could travel was relatively few.

14. Today, with the Internet, a similar revolution is taking place. Except that the contact is no longer limited to a small group of people. Increasingly, more and more people, from all levels of society, have access to the Internet. According to one estimate, more than 300 million people will have access to the net by the end of this year. But actual growth more often than not outstrips the forecasts. Whatever the forecasts, there are already millions of young people today who chat everyday in cyberspace, exchanging information and opinions, and sharing their hopes and aspirations for the future.

#### Closer Asian-European Ties Through The Arts

15. Cyberspace therefore offers new opportunities for exchanges in the Culture

and the Arts. And for Asia and Europe, this opens up new possibilities for our two regions to be drawn closer through the Arts. Let me enumerate some of the ways this can take place.

16. Firstly, the Internet makes it possible to reach a larger audience, and cater to a wider range of interests. In the physical world, scale often limits the types of arts events that can be staged. For example, it is not economical to stage a concert for 50 people. On the other hand, finding 500 people to fill a concert hall in a small city may be difficult. But in cyberspace, scale is easy to achieve. 5 people from 500 cities can easily create an economic sized audience.

17. The possibilities can be very exciting. A new play from Stockholm could premier to an audience across Europe and Asia that even the largest performance hall could not accommodate. A new composition by a Korean troupe could reach appreciative audiences in Asia and Europe that would otherwise never have witnessed the performance.

18. Secondly, what the Internet can do to connect artists and audiences, it can also do to bring artists from different cultures together - to collaborate, explore and innovate new art forms. Asia and Europe are culturally distinct. That makes it all the more interesting for our artists to seek out each other's artistic expressions, and all the more likely that new and creative ideas will emerge from their interactions.

19. Thirdly, the Internet opens up a new media for Arts exploration. Cyberspace is a multi-media environment. While it cannot provide the same visceral touch and feel as the physical world, it offers possibilities that the physical world cannot. Just like oils and watercolours are different media that allow different expressions, cyberspace offers artists a new playground for exploration and discovery.

20. For example, one aspect of art in cyberspace that is rich with potential is inter-activity that allows artist and audience to communicate in new and exciting ways. In cyberspace, there can be less distance between the artist and the audience. Indeed, there might even be less distinction between the artist and the audience, as audiences can be drawn into participative roles.

21. The technology to do all these things exists. We can bring a concert to an audience over the Internet and we can create multi-media links between artists and artists, and artists and audiences. But such technology is not yet widespread in use. This is partly a chicken and egg problem. If the infrastructure is there, people will use the network to access the arts and other contents. This is one more reason why

we should speed up the development of Internet infrastructure both in Asia and Europe, and encourage the emergence of an e-ASEM network.

### Towards an e-ASEM Arts Network

22. ASEF, through its people to people contacts, can also help to speed things along. I would like to offer 3 ideas for this conference to consider.

23. Firstly, ASEF could collate and provide information about artists, arts groups and arts events in the different ASEM countries. Such a database will be of great value to arts administrators and event organisers everywhere. It can also develop into a resource for research into the Arts, and a network for artists to look for partners and collaborators in their works.

24. Secondly, ASEF can promote web casting as a way of introducing artists from Asia to Europe and vice versa. If well subscribed to, this can also become a channel for the discovery of new talents, for whom finding an appreciative audience is the first hurdle to cross. Over time, new arts niches that would have been too small to develop nationally could emerge internationally.

25. Thirdly, ASEF can contribute to the development of e-ASEM by promoting more arts interaction across the network. By promoting e-arts activities, such as e-arts exhibitions and auctions, or e-arts dialogues and discussions, ASEF can help to build up more applications that will add to the viability and vitality of the e-ASEM network. This will strengthen the case for building more infrastructure for e-activities between Asia and Europe, and open up more opportunities for cyber contacts and exchanges between our artists and our people.

### Concluding Remarks

26. Ladies and gentlemen: We live today in a world where what was once thought impossible can now be contemplated. One example of this is, the peace that we all hope for one day between North and South Korea.

27. Likewise, in the world of science and technology, amazing advances are being made that will change our world as we know it. These changes will challenge our ability to adapt and adjust – not just as individuals, but also as societies and global communities.

28. The advent of cyber-technologies, for example, are welcomed by some and feared by others. Internet, and other related technologies like 3rd Generation Phones and Wireless Application Protocols, will change our lives. The impact will be just as strongly felt in the economy, as in the areas of culture and the arts.

29. Those who welcome it see the new opportunities and benefits that technology will bring – faster economic growth, higher standards of living, and richer and meaningful lives. Those who fear it, are concerned about how they will disrupt our way of life, destroy traditions and values, and displace the safe and familiar with risk and uncertainty.

30. In reality, both are equally valid views. But it is not a matter about which we have much choice. The capabilities and benefits of the new technologies are overwhelming and seductive. Young people have taken to the Internet like ducks take to water. Communication is after all a basic, human instinct. And the Internet and its cyber cousins do nothing if they don't do communications well.

31. A better strategy for us, therefore, is to learn to tap the power and opportunities that cyber technologies offer. In the area of the arts, these technologies can help us nurture and develop new arts groups and provide wider access to the arts so that more people can appreciate and enjoy them.

32. And by using the Arts to bring Asia and Europe closer together, we will also be helping our people to better know each other and themselves. Instead of weakening cultural identity and national pride, we will strengthen it as we deepen our understanding of how we are the same and also different from people of other countries.

33. I hope that some of the suggestions that I have put forward this afternoon will spark of even better ideas on how we can harness these technologies for benefit. That is the way the Internet works best – one idea, sparking off another, leading eventually to ignition and blast off. I hope that these creative sparks will indeed fly during the course of your discussions over the next two days.

Thank you.