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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by Minister Teo Chee Hean, 26 April 2000, 8 pm

Singapore Government

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**SPEECH BY RADM (NS) TEO CHEE HEAN, MINISTER FOR
EDUCATION AND SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, SINGAPORE
AT THE GALA DINNER, 11TH CONGRESS OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN
LIBRARIANS (CONSAL XI) ON WEDNESDAY, 26 APRIL 2000 AT
RAFFLES BALLROOM, WESTIN HOTEL AT 8 PM**

Libraries and Learning in the Knowledge Economy

Dr Tan Chin Nam, Chairman, National Library Board,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. Knowledge is the key to economic development and wealth generation in the new economy. Where the wealth creating potential of a country used to be measured in terms of the richness of its arable land, the longevity of its mineral reserves, the bounty of its harvestable seas and the mass of its mobilisable population; governments throughout the world, in both developed and developing countries, now accept that the key ingredient in making the best use of their available resources and uplifting the economic well-

being of their peoples is the possession and creation of knowledge.

2. Globalisation and the information revolution are the driving forces transforming the world economy. Education, life long learning, innovation, research and development - these are the buzzwords of the new knowledge economy.

3. In such a world where the harnessing of knowledge in more efficient and effective ways becomes a critical success factor, libraries take on a role which has renewed significance.

4. The traditional roles of a library remain relevant. First, as a repository of knowledge, measured by the comprehensiveness and depth of its collection. Second, providing access to this vast storehouse, as measured by the number of users, the frequency and volume of access, and the comprehensiveness of its geographical outreach. Third as a knowledge guide, helping to structure, classify, organise and index this knowledge, to separate the wheat from the chaff, to help users know what is there, and to help them find it.

5. But the library itself has been transformed by these very same forces - globalisation and the information revolution - that have given it a renewed significance. These forces which on the one hand can make traditional book bound libraries obsolescent, also provide many new opportunities for libraries to rediscover themselves. Libraries therefore need to understand and actively contribute value to the new knowledge and learning infrastructures of their nations.

6. While the process of learning in our education systems will still fundamentally revolve around the teacher-pupil relationship, students will also need to engage in active learning by drawing on the resources of other partners in learning networks. Through a more project-based approach, teachers and students can engage in innovative learning experiences that allow interaction with researchers, industry experts, librarians and technologists.

Modern libraries can facilitate such interactions through the enhanced technological platforms now available, and allow students to have access not only to the published thoughts of writers, but to meet and exchange ideas with knowledge creators through electronic channels of communication.

7. In this environment, the role of libraries and librarians will move beyond just being repositories of knowledge and passive providers of information, to active participants in the dissemination, multiplication and validation of knowledge. Libraries should also play the critical role of helping to sift through the ever expanding mass of new information, and separate the information nuggets from the information garbage. In this way, libraries can help ensure that the widening corpus of knowledge around the world and across disciplines will contribute to the development of our peoples and societies and our region as a whole.

8. The opportunities for CONSAL in the new century are great. I trust that through your discussions during this Congress, you will review the options that will help to position the libraries in this region as key partners in the education and learning experiences of our societies. Since the 1960s, Singapore has contributed to and benefited from the sharing of technical expertise with other developing countries. As a country whose only resource is her people, Singapore believes in investing in a learning nation for economic and social progress. We are extending this commitment by working with our friends and neighbours to develop human capital within the region. The National Library Board has successfully organised two regional cooperation programmes for top and senior librarians from ASEAN countries in 1999; and some of you present here today are part of the ASEAN Fellowship Programme for Directors of National Libraries. I am also pleased to announce that through the Singapore Cooperation Programme, funds have been set aside to provide similar training opportunities for more ASEAN librarians over the next two years. We hope that with more such opportunities to interact and share experiences CONSAL member countries will be able to increase their

collaborative efforts to prepare themselves to meet the needs of the future.

9. On this note, I wish you a successful meeting and invite you to enjoy your dinner.

National Archives of Singapore