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**SPEECH BY BG(NS) GEORGE YEO,
MINISTER FOR INFORMATION AND THE ARTS
AND MINISTER FOR HEALTH,
AT THE LAUNCHING OF WALT DISNEY TELEVISION
(SINGAPORE)'S SATELLITE FACILITY
ON 26 MARCH 1995 AT 3.30 PM**

We in Singapore are delighted to become Walt Disney TV's gateway into Asia. The facility here will broadcast signals reaching tens of millions of households from China to Australia and from India to Japan. This is Walt Disney TV's first international facility. It will undertake a complete range of programming activities including production, post-production, origination and satellite uplinking.

We are committed to forging strong partnerships with programming companies like Disney. We will maintain a favourable regulatory environment, facilitate the work of broadcasters and help build up a pool of trained personnel in the creative and technical fields. Walt Disney TV Singapore holds the distinction of being the first to be awarded a private User Uplink/Downlink Licence by the Telecommunications Authority of Singapore.

Disney is of course not new to Singapore. There must be very few Singaporeans who have not heard of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, and certainly none among our children. I was astonished when I visited Disney headquarters last year to be told that, on a per capita basis, Singapore is the world's biggest consumer of Disney products. My own four children have no doubt added to this remarkable statistic.

In some ways, Singapore is still a conservative society where the family matters a lot and old fashioned values remain important. We are therefore very comfortable with Disney's

products and productions. In fact, moving into an era of many TV channels on cable, I hope that our own Channels 5, 8 and 12 can remain wholesome and family-centred like Disney's.

The magic of Disney is part of the genius of America. American culture as it evolved to settle and develop an entire continent has thrown up ideas and methods which have enthralled and inspired the whole world. Never before in history had the benefits of civilisation reached so far down the social ladder to the ordinary man, giving even the lowest, opportunities and hopes to reach the very top. We cannot imagine life today without American inventions like the light bulb, the sewing machine, the modern kitchen and countless other wonderful things. American popular education and entertainment have transformed the world, and made possible this new renaissance in Asia.

Disney's characters like Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck embody an optimism and an egalitarianism which is part of America's contribution to the world. It is not just fun, although fun is important as an end in itself. It is also values, of good vanquishing evil, of human friendship, of hope, of the prospect of a better tomorrow.

Alas, Hollywood has changed since the 60s. Mr Hsuan Owyang, Chairman of the Films Appeals Panel and Chairman of Singapore Broadcasting Authority's Programmes Advisory Committee told me that it used to be that scenes of a man and a woman together in bed could not be shot unless they were married in real life and, even then, only in proper pyjamas. Mr Owyang felt that no film made before 1966 by any of the big production houses like MGM, Paramount, 20th Century Fox and Universal needed to be censored at all. Of course, the whole world has changed, not only Hollywood, but Hollywood leads it and not always for the better.

Beavis and Butthead are part of the counter-culture. When I met senior executives of MTV in New York last year, I expressed the view that Beavis and Butthead would not find favour in many Asian societies. They assured me that the new MTV in Asia would be differently positioned.

The innermost values of a civilisation find expression in popular forms. Beavis and Butthead would not, could not, have appeared in America in the 50s. Equally, in the old Soviet Union and China, Mickey Mouse was rejected as a symbol of American imperialism.

The world is now going through a profound transformation. Fabian socialism and orthodox communism have both failed. The state writ large has failed. The devolution of power is taking place inexorably in countries as diverse as Russia, China, India and America. Society has to be re-constructed anew and afresh, from the bottom up - responsible individuals, strong families, civil communities. The resurgence of interest in Disney and other similar products all over the world reflect, I believe, this deeper renewal of human society. Whether human society at the molecular level reflects the wholesomeness of Mickey Mouse or the cynicism of Beavis and Butthead is as decisive as the genetic coding of an organism. This is partly the reason why the rest of the world feels unsure about the current influence of American culture.

Mickey Mouse and his friends have brought happiness, optimism and hope to countless millions of children and adults, princes and paupers alike. We cheer them on and we cheer that side of America on because we cheer ourselves on.

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