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Welcome Address

By

Vijay Menon
WELCOME ADDRESS BY MR VIJAY MENON, SECRETARY-GENERAL, AMIC, AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE UNCRD-AMIC-NCB EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON INTEGRATING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING, SINGAPORE, 31 OCTOBER 1988

Hon. Tan Chin Nam, Chairman, National Computer Board, Mr Hidehiko Sazanami, Director, UNCRD, Mr David Thorup, Regional Representative, UNDP, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of AMIC, to welcome you to this Expert Group Meeting.

Information technology has been described as the driving force behind a revolution in which we are all participating. We can then describe this gathering as a meeting of revolutionaries. Not destructive but constructive revolutionaries, fostering a beneficial revolution.

There are a number of critical issues surrounding the spread of technology. The appropriateness of technology led growth is often questioned in the developing countries, for resources are usually scarce and alternative uses many. And performance does not always match promise. However, with Information Technology the question is not whether it will have an impact but how great will be the impact and how quickly it can be harnessed to moderate growth and development. Indeed as a statement at a recent seminar (TIDE 2000) aptly summed it up, information technology is a major new force in the development of our economies and societies. The implications of this force are so persuasive, so diverse, so radical, and so profound, that almost
no human action, no industrial and other economic activity, and no social organisation will remain untouched by it.

But the exploitation and optimization, of opportunities presented by IT call for planning. The initiative taken by the UNCRD in organizing this meeting to examine the many aspects of integrating information technology in development planning is both timely and highly commendable.

We are glad to have the National Computer Board as a co-sponsor. It provides an outstanding example of what planning and determined action can achieve. "NCB leads Singapore into the future", said a recent headline. That is indeed what it has done. To cite just one example, that of manpower development, the number of computer professionals has increased almost ten-fold since 1980 - from about 850 to 8,000. In the short span of its existence the NCB has built up an enviable record of achievement. It is therefore ideally positioned to advise and assist other countries in the region in the adoption and utilization of IT.

The United Nations Development Programme has done invaluable work in assisting developing nations to acquire IT skills by providing equipment and expertise. We are glad to have the UNDP's Regional Representative with us today.

We would also like to recognise and thank the IDRC - the International Development Research Centre of Canada which has sponsored some of the delegates to this meeting. It is also assisting us to computerize our documentation facilities and,
more importantly, actively aiding the formation of regional networks.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with our organisation, I would like to tell you briefly about AMIC or the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre, to use our full name. AMIC is a non-profit regional organisation, serving the cause of mass communication in Asia from its secretariat in Singapore. It was founded in 1971 with the joint support of the Government of Singapore and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, an independent foundation in the Federal Republic of Germany. Today, AMIC strives to assist in the raising of standards of teaching, training, research and the practice of mass communication in the region. It does this through five principal activities: Documentation, Publication, Research, Training and Consultancy Services. AMIC also organises workshops and seminars, such as this one, at which problems of concern to Asia are discussed, issues clarified and recommendations for action formalised.

What is most gratifying is the support extended to us by so many institutions and individuals. This is best exemplified by our seminar participants, many of them have travelled long distances to be with us today.

I would like to thank our chief guest for being with us this morning. His presence is indicative of his deep interest. It is my hope that the NCB will play an active role in any follow-up activities that may result from this meeting.