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Paper No. 5
OPENING SPEECH

By

ROBERT IAU
Chairman
Asian Media Information & Communication Centre
WELCOME ADDRESS BY CHAIRMAN AMIC, CHENNAI, INDIA.

Distinguished Guests, Speakers, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

May I bid you a very warm welcome to the 8th Annual Conference of the Asia Media Information and Communication Center (AMIC) held here in Chennai, India. There is a touch of profundity in this gathering, as Chennai is a city rich in heritage and culture with a history dating back almost 400 years. We of the 20th Century poised to enter the 21st are gathered against this backdrop of history to deliberate and discuss issues of the future hopefully drawing upon the inspirations of the past to tread with confidence into the future.

The theme of this Conference "Asia: Information Poor to Information Rich – Strategies for the 21st Century" is a rallying cry and a challenge. It has become more than evident that regardless of the imbalances visited upon Asia in the century just ending the strategies to be adopted for the following century must be put in place by minds and visions that are unfettered by the burdens of history. There can be no precedent or previous experiences to guide the way. Asia in the next century could not depend on proven successes or failures. It must break new ground.

Over the next three days, this conference will debate and discuss this unprecedented phenomenon and how Asia could engender the growth of information wealth and move it from confabulation to reality. There is an overwhelming body of evidence to support the staggering potential that this part of the world could represent. Take the Internet market as an example. In 1997, against the international average growth
rate of 28% for host and PC's, Asia recorded a growth of 239% per annum. A forecast made in 1996 estimated that the number of users in Asia could grow by 6 million between 1996 and 1998 but the actual outcome far surpassed the forecast. The Wall Street Journal estimated that the number of users totaled about 17 million in Asia Pacific in 1998. And the numbers are still growing at an increasing rate.

But information wealth is by its nature no different from other measurements of wealth. There is a distinct flavor of superficiality when viewing its growth in macro technological and economic terms without considering the position of the have's and have not's within a single societal entity. The growth and pervasiveness of technology would signal a need to revamp the societal infrastructure and mindset to accept and exploit a new denomination of wealth: information wealth.

After seven consecutive Annual Conferences held in various parts of South East Asia, the 8TH Annual AMIC Conference has come to South Asia. This is a happy and historic occurrence that signifies the convergence of interests and the importance of regionalism and globalization when addressing the next millennium. Perhaps in the twilight of a departing millennium, will come the realization that the anachronism of jingoism must reconcile with the importance of information wealth, not only as a symbol of development success but also the quality of life and reasons for living.

Over the next three days, I sincerely hope that you will be highly stressed. There will be 20 plenary and parallel sessions. Some 50 speakers will share their thoughts, experiences and visions to the 200 participants from 15 countries. There will be opportunities for you to network among the communication professionals and
institutions. The challenges of managing communication, media and information flows are not likely to go away. We are addressing a rare and profound phenomenon.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the many supporters of this Conference. In particular, The Hindu, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Public Relations Society of India who have joined hands with AMIC to work for the success of this Conference. I would also like to thank a number of individuals and institutions that have assisted us in a variety of ways. The presence of Prof. Monroe Price, for instance, is due to the understanding and support of the United States Information Agency.

To all speakers and participants may I thank you most sincerely for your support and presence. I wish you a most fruitful and exciting Conference.
INFORMATION HIGHWAYS: PATHS TO PROSPERITY
OR POVERTY?

By

JAVED JABBAR
Former Minister of Information
Pakistan

A. JAYANATH
National IT Council
India

DAVID LAZARUS
United Nations Information Service
Thailand