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Welcome Remarks by
Mr. Gunter Lehrke
Head, Media and Communications Department
Friedrich-Ebert Foundation
Germany

Ladies and Gentlemen,

we're here for two reasons:
to celebrate an anniversary together
and to assess the future of media, information and communication.
I'd like to say a few things about both.

But let me first pass on to you the greetings and congratulations of the Board of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Director of the Division of International Cooperation, and on behalf of our institution wish AMIC continuing success in work that is so important to Asia.

Because the Friedrich Ebert Foundation founded AMIC and has supported it ever since, we can still go back to the oldest AMIC Annual Reports. I quote from the very first, the one for 1971: "It must be remembered that AMIC is a fledgling organization; in fact quite a baby. While it may not as yet be able to do very much, anything it may be able to do at all - besides shrieking or crying for help - is a source of satisfaction for those responsible for its development and growth." Unquote.

After that, AMIC crawled on its belly for a few more years, learning to walk upright in the 80s. The shrieks have turned into discrete calls for help. Sired (ai) by the then FES staff member, Joachim Krause in 1967, the child has become an adult, though still unable to look after itself completely on its own. It still receives its staple food from the FES which has pledged to keep providing at least the rice for a few years yet. No-one can be certain about anything beyond the turn of the century. Right now there can only be faith and hope about the future.

Let me not paint too bleak a picture, though.
I'd much rather point to the achievements made and tasks to tackle.

The success of institutions also and always depends on the strength and skills of people who devote themselves to them. This is why our special thanks go to the two men who have made AMIC their life's work, if not their very lives:

Roy Daniel, who chaired the AMIC Committee for some 24 years and who as the honorary chairman is still the man at the helm not just in the background, and Vijay Menon, who has managed the business of AMIC for around 14 years. Without the input and achievements of these two men we would not be able to celebrate here today and without those achievements the development of media and communication in Asia would probably look a little different. Roy Daniel, though not the procreator, is the truly caring father.

And Vijay Menon is known worldwide as Mr. AMIC. Thanks are also due, of course, to the committee members from all over Asia and Australia who for many years have added to the quality of AMIC's work. And last but not least thanks to AMIC's staff who even under the most trying conditions never lost their motivation.

But what are the achievements of an institution concerned with what is now the most dynamic field of activity worldwide? AMIC keeps going in Asia discussion of the ways, communication and information are developing, and of the ways they are impacting on development of societies. AMIC informs through its library and its documentation, AMIC offers follow-up training, AMIC contributes to research, AMIC provides discussion forums, AMIC links nations - yes, perhaps it even helps to keep the peace. Without AMIC Asia would be poorer.
For the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
AMIC hasn't been primarily a child that needed raising
but always an important partner in development policy.
A partner one has to support
because every day, every week, every month, every year
that partner is contributing to human development
in the world's most important developing region.
Even if the Friedrich Ebert Foundation can continue the
institutional support for only a limited period,
AMIC will remain a partner cooperating with the Friedrich-
Ebert-Stiftung's offices in many Asian countries.

Development work in the area of media, communication and
information
is sociopolitically indispensable,
not only in the so-called developing countries
but in every society.
The challenges to it are changing all the time
and so, naturally, are the emphases of it.

Following its good traditions AMIC must continue to put the
human being at the centre
vis a vis technology and market mechanisms.
In its publications and conventions AMIC will always have to
argue that the modern information technology cannot replace
people who are educated and able to make decisions
and that, for example,
not even the "global village" could function without
journalists.
Unhindered access to information cannot displace education
and will of itself not help
make the world better, more just and peaceful.
More and more people tend to overrate the computer and modern
information technologies
and to invent myths about their world-improving effects.
AMIC will be called on
more and more
to contribute to development-related and development-enhancing
uses of technology,
to identifying chances and risks
especially for developing countries
and to offering solutions.
That's because AMIC is a facility contributing to development
of the region.
If the expertise is provided by an institution based in Singapore, that's also good for Singapore.

Not just in Asia, but more and more in Europe, too, the fear is being voiced that the beautiful new media world, represented by terms like "Multimedia" and "Telematics" and the control of them by ever fewer tycoons is destroying cultural and political pluralism. In the past AMIC has again and again also addressed cultural issues and will have to keep doing that.

For historical reasons the Asian region particularly "hooked" on progress and technology. That needn't be harmful as such, but it does result in those concerned by societal development and cultural issues having to try particularly hard to make themselves heard. And for these AMIC has always created forums and will have to continue that, too. For me, having spent five years of my life in Asia, it was always a joy to talk with Asian media experts and those politically responsible for the media. Many of those discussions centred on the responsibility to their populations of those putting the content into the media and communication. There's worry over this in Asia and it's worry that I share. We're looking worldwide at the phenomenon of the media developing away from the good task of "information and enlightenment" through "infotainment" to pure "entertainment". That can't suit anybody concerned with societal development and who sees development of media as an important and co-determining force. We of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung have no problems with the unfortunately often misunderstood debate about "Asian values" in journalistic issues as long as honest causes are at issue. If you inquire about these values more closely
(as AMIC did in the 1st issue of Media Asia, this year) you soon discover that they're the same for all of us, that is ethical and sociopolitical values. We do hold the view, though, that preserving these values is not primarily a task of the state, but that they have to spring from education, professional training, responsibility and commitment. It is not by any means wrong to discuss along with journalistic freedom the duties of journalists vis a vis the people they report about and vis a vis the people they report for. Another future task for AMIC is to keep this dialogue going and to break down misunderstandings about it.

And finally - and I think I speak for all the Germans here - we attach great importance to advancing the dialogue between Europe and Asia, to doing away with misunderstandings that still exist, to promoting commonality in development policy issues and to securing the political and economic future.

Dialogue with important forces of society in the countries where we work - and that includes especially media people - is very important to us. AMIC has been using every opportunity to promote dialogue between North and South, East and West and South to South, and we want to keep helping AMIC with that.

The important tasks AMIC has now and the perhaps even more important ones to come cause me to ask all of you here to help AMIC to finally establish itself as an independent Asian facility. The imminent move to Nanyang Technological University, where the Singapore government is providing free accommodation,
gives rise to the hope that Singapore will perhaps commit itself beyond that and by so doing prompt others in the region to contribute more as well. Institutions addressing the development of underprivileged countries and regions, trying to improve societal structures and trying to further the cultural debate rarely have the chance to make profits in this world. Institutions like that need help and AMIC deserves it.

Thank you for your attention.