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**Title : 2ND ASEAN - CHINA ICT WEEK 2006**

H.E. Tan Sri Dr. Koh Tsu Koon  
Chief Minister of Penang

H.E. Dato' Sri Dr. Lim Keng Yaik  
Minister of Water, Energy and Communications, Malaysia

H.E. Mr. Wang Xudong  
Minister of Information Industry, People's Republic of China

H.E. Mr. Ong Keng Yong  
Secretary General of ASEAN

H.E. Mr. Nguyen Thanh Hung  
Chair of ASEAN TELMIN

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. I am delighted to be here with all of you today and may I take this opportunity to convey my deepest appreciation to the Ministry of Energy, Water and Communications Malaysia for inviting me and also to the State Government of Penang for their cooperation and hospitality in ensuring the success of this program. I would also like to extend a warm Malaysian welcome to all our foreign friends who have come from far and wide to be with us today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

2. ASEAN today stands at a crossroads in a world filled with numerous and ever changing complexities. It is, for ASEAN, a time of contemplation of its future role as an important grouping in the world, and more significantly, it is a time for reflection on the immediate and real benefits that this grouping could generate for the peoples of ASEAN. In the face of harsh realities of the current global economic climate – soaring energy prices, volatile markets and cut throat competition – ASEAN must be more dynamic than ever before in responding to changes in the global scenario.

3. As we are all aware, it is the recognition of the facts which I have just mentioned that has led ASEAN to continue to adopt changes which will benefit this group of nations in various ways and prepare member countries for the challenges ahead. It was this recognition that led ASEAN to adopt the Kuala Lumpur Declaration in December of 2005, in which the ASEAN Charter will be established, which will be a landmark constitutional document embodying fundamental principles, goals, objectives and structures of ASEAN cooperation capable of meeting the needs of the ASEAN Community and beyond.

4. Among the most important developments within ASEAN has been the strengthening of relations with China. Indeed ASEAN regards China as a most important partner, as can be seen from the declaration at the Ninth ASEAN-China Summit in Kuala Lumpur last December, that this year, 2006, is a "Year of Friendship and Cooperation between ASEAN and China." For ASEAN, China is not just an important partner for trade and industry, but also for technical cooperation, and for the exchange of technology and expertise.

5. I am pleased to note that cooperation between ASEAN and China in the area of ICT has been progressing well since the MoU for that purpose was signed in 2003. And it is heartening to note that the Beijing Declaration on ASEAN-China ICT Cooperative Partnership for Common Development, which was signed last year, has further strengthened ASEAN-China collaboration in the field of ICT. I am certain that this ASEAN China ICT week, will further enhance ASEAN china cooperation in this area.

Ladies and gentlemen,

6. It can no longer be denied that ICT is absolutely essential for the growth and development of nations in the modern age. ICT now permeates every aspect of international trade and industry. Nations which possess technological superiority are in far more advantageous positions compared to those which do not. No Nation in the world today is oblivious to this stark reality.

7. Yet the fact of the matter is whilst some nations have done extremely well in their effort to embrace technology, others have faltered. Financial constraints, hostile geographical terrain, political instability and a host of other factors have impeded the growth of ICT and development of ICT infrastructure in many parts of the world. In our region too we cannot deny that there are such disparities between nations.

8. As it stands, many countries in the region are finding it difficult to establish what can be truly described as an information society. Connectivity is only concentrated in urban areas, whereas rural areas are sometimes devoid of even basic telephony, let alone high-speed internet connection. In many cases, we find that beyond infrastructural deficiencies, there is also the problem of attitudes and technological illiteracy. We still find communities who are still unaware that they must soon compete on a global level; that they must acquire new skills; that markets are increasingly liberalizing and because of that their traditional means of earning a living may no longer be sustainable.

9. It is in this context that the ASEAN-China cooperation on ICT is most important. There has to be a concerted effort by all ASEAN member countries and its partners to work towards a more even and widespread development of ICT across the region, both in terms of physical development as well as better public education and awareness, especially in remote and rural areas.

10. In the 2005 Beijing Declaration on ICT of which I spoke earlier, ASEAN and China have agreed to focus on a number of key areas which include ICT infrastructure development, universal service, and human capacity building, among other things. These areas are absolutely critical in narrowing the digital divide by means of empowering peoples and communities through ICT. It is therefore imperative that mechanisms be put in place so that those objectives outlined in the Declaration can be fulfilled. Indeed all the best intentions in the world would mean nothing if they remain as mere words on paper. We must all resolve to translate the goals we have outlined for ourselves into tangible measures from which our peoples can truly benefit.

11. Furthermore, for real progress to be attained, government initiatives alone may not be sufficient. The private sector of respective countries too must be involved. It is thus equally important that in deliberating on approaches to enhance infrastructure, services and human capacity in ICT, ASEAN member countries and their partners must look into ways of encouraging private sector participation on a bigger scale. If ASEAN and China are able to formulate cooperative frameworks for workable solutions in those key areas, I believe there is every reason to be optimistic that the problem of the digital divide in the region can ultimately be addressed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

12. ASEAN and China are indeed fortunate, because when the technological revolution first emerged in the mid nineties and the information superhighway became not just a vague concept but a life-altering reality, we found ourselves right at the heart of this global phenomenon. With the advent of internet technology and the emergence of a new borderless world, China and many countries in ASEAN benefited from a deluge of new investments and spectacular growth . Consequently, a few ASEAN countries became known as the economic tigers of Asia, and China was then known as the awakening giant. Today China's economic success is literally incomparable and is the most talked about subject in international forums big and small. Such was our experience with the first wave of the ICT 'revolution'.

13. At this point in history, the question to ask ourselves is what next? Do we rest on our laurels, be content with our achievements and wait to see what comes next and hope to ride the wave again? Are we content to capitalize on the technological advancement of others and simply make our fortune as technology traders and consumers? Or dare we contemplate creating our own 'Next Wave' that would change the way modern man lives and works just as internet technology did only a decade ago?

14. I raise this matter now because I believe there is an excellent opportunity here. The collaboration between ASEAN and China, may well foster the right environment for new discoveries which may extend the frontiers of information communication technology. Indeed, there is no reason why the next quantum leap in ICT shouldn't emerge from our part of the world. There are numerous areas in ICT research and development in which ICT companies and technology experts from China and ASEAN countries can collaborate. Indeed there is much that ASEAN countries can learn from China, not the least of which is the nurturing of home-grown ICT corporations to become global players. This is something ASEAN countries ought to emulate.

15. China, on her part, ought to be commended for being extremely forthcoming and committed in lending a helping hand in developing ICT for the region. Already China has agreed to train technicians and telecommunications managers from ASEAN countries and I believe greater technical cooperation is in the offing as we move forward towards the fulfillment of the Beijing Declaration goals. ASEAN countries must take advantage of this opportunity to work closer with China for our mutual benefit.

16. I am also delighted to learn that a Business Forum was held as a part of this ICT Week program. I believe such forums provide an excellent platform for business networks to be formed and strategic partnerships and alliances to be established and I certainly hope that future ASEAN-China ICT programs would continue to encourage the participation of the private sector for this purpose. To the business communities of ASEAN and China, I urge you to take full advantage of conferences such as this to foster strong regional business partnerships which would not only make good business sense, but would also lend a hand towards the fulfillment of our common objectives of closer regional cooperation and integration.

Ladies and gentlemen,

17. As all of you participate in this ICT Week, I hope you bear in mind the crucial role that each of you play in improving the lives of your peoples through better connectivity and integration into the digital and wired world. Because of ICT, we now have an opportunity to develop our countries and our peoples at a pace and scale unprecedented in human history. Let us take this opportunity to ensure that there are no pockets of society still left in the dark. Lets ensure that the future of every individual -whether they are in the cities and cosmopolitans or whether they are in the rural heartlands and mountainous regions- Let us ensure that their future is brighter and more promising through the use of technology.

18. With that I wish you the very best of luck in your deliberations and endeavors, and it is with great pleasure that I now declare the 2nd ASEAN-China ICT Week open.

Thank you.