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Headline: Technology should benefit all of society: German President

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A magazine cover paints a grim picture of the future, with robots on their daily routines rushing past a human begging on a busy city sidewalk. German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier highlighted it yesterday as he spoke about ways Germany and Singapore can work together to steer the digital revolution to benefit society as a whole rather than to profit a few.

Dr Steinmeier, in Singapore for a state visit, cited four areas of cooperation, with innovation being the key for both countries' success.

This hinges on technological leadership, research and a highly skilled workforce, he added at the Ho Rih Hwa Leadership Lecture at the Singapore Management University School of Law.

Steps have been taken for such collaboration between the two countries' universities, research institutes and businesses, he said.

But people must not be left behind as technological change sweeps society, he added.

Illustrating his point with the magazine cover, he challenged his audience of 800 students, educators, government officials and diplomats to think about the future they want for their own countries.

He said: "I want technology not to increase inequality, but to reduce it, not to exclude people but enable them to participate, not to create poverty and disease, but eradicate them."

Three other areas where both countries are aligned are free trade, the rule of law and cooperation via multilateral institutions.

He noted that both believe in the benefits of an open and interconnected world, rather than a "small-island mentality", adding that it is important to defend the free and fair exchange of ideas, innovations, goods and services.

Another shared belief is that peace depends on the strength of the law, not the law of the strong.

He added: "So let us join forces in defending the rules, for example, in the interest of all concerned, we must work together for freedom of navigation in the South China Sea."

Finally, the importance of multilateral institutions and cooperation has already drawn both to work together on trade policy, climate change and cyber security.

Dr Steinmeier also spoke about how the ideal of Western liberal democracy has been challenged by issues in the European Union and



Berlin's Brandenburg Gate. German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier noted that both Germany and Singapore believe in the benefits of an open and interconnected world, rather than a "small-island mentality". PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

the United States. At the same time, the perceived stability and economic growth of China, without a move towards greater political freedom, poses an ideological challenge to the West, he said.

But he added that he did not see an inherent contradiction between democratic input and out-

put. "I think the broader political and economic participation one has, the more successful a society becomes in the long term," he said.

He believes a country and its citizens benefit more when the arts, sciences and civil society are not closely directed and flourish freely, and when people engage in debates

with political opponents rather than exclude them. "In my experience, you are more likely to find out what's wrong in your society when you allow dissenting voices and the scrutiny of a free press rather than silencing them," he said.

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