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SPEECH TO BE DELIVERED BY SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, DR YEOH GHIM SENG, AT THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY FOR 10,000 LINES OF TELEPHONE SWITCHING EQUIPMENT AT KATONG II TELEPHONE EXCHANGE ON 31 OCTOBER, 1977 AT 10.45 AM.

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Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen.

The telephone has become a basic utility like water, gas and electricity. It is necessary that when it is needed it should be provided at the shortest possible time.

I understand that a long lead time is required for the planning of telephone service - from 2 years to as long as 6 years where a new telephone exchange has to be constructed.

Unlike other services, like gas, water and electricity which could be tapped off from existing service mains, a telephone requires a physical cable pair from the telephone exchange for the exclusive use of the telephone subscriber. This explains why sometimes whilst your neighbour has telephone service, you may have to wait for service.

Telecoms tells me that in the present service conditions where it is responsible for the wiring within the subscribers' premises, it has encountered difficulties which cause delays giving rise to complaints of inefficiency in the provision of telephone service.

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Telecoms observes that owners and developers who are often not the eventual tenants of their new premises are usually oblivious of the telephone needs of their tenants. This is particularly in respect of multi-storeyed office buildings, shopping complexes, industrial buildings and luxurious apartments.

In a number of overseas countries (e.g. Malaysia and South Korea) this problem is solved by making it mandatory through legislation that owners and developers provide all the telephone cable wirings within their premises.

However, Telecoms intends to persuade rather than legislate owners and developers to provide the necessary telephone wirings for their new buildings.

The incremental costs to owners and developers to provide such facilities are negligible compared to the total construction costs of their premises. But at the same time the increased costs give added value to their properties by enabling not only timely telephone services to be provided to their tenants, but also providing aesthetically concealed wirings and flexible sites for locations of the telephones.

Telecoms hopes and trusts that it need not have to make these requirements mandatory later. Professional architects and engineers could assist Telecoms by giving their clients proper advice on this matter.

The provision of the national telephone service is highly capital-intensive. In the fiscal year of 1976/1977, a total of \$185 million were spent of which \$153 million or 83% were used for the development of national telephone service.

In the Katong Telephone Exchange area for instance, which serves the constituencies of Joo Chiat, Marine Parade, Mountbatten, Chai Chee, Geylang East and Geylang West, Geylang Serai and Kampong Kembangan, the demand for telephone service has been especially high due to public housing developments in these constituencies e.g. the HDB and Government housing estates in the reclaimed land. Last year, the demand for telephones in the area averaged 1,150 a month. Consequently, the old Katong Telephone Exchange has been facing an exchange equipment shortage ever since November 1976: the number of telephone deferred subscribers was fast rising from 1,100 in October 1976 to about 2,600 in April 1977.

Recognising the urgent need to meet the surging demand for telephone service, Telecoms has taken immediate steps in May 1977 to commission two mobile telephone exchanges of 1,000 lines each at the construction site to clear some 1,800 deferred subscribers. Contingency plans were also worked out to serve 1,100 subscribers from the neighbouring East and Bedok Telephone Exchanges via junction cables. I am pleased to note that with all these additional efforts put in by Telecoms, the number of deferred subscribers had been kept under control to only 677 as at end September 1977, mainly residential, of which 590 are equipment deferred subscribers. All of them would be offered service after commissioning of this 10,000 lines of switching equipment this

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morning; the remaining 87 deferred subscribers have to wait slightly longer due to the shortage of telephone lines. Cable schemes are in progress to clear 63 of them before end March 1978 and the remaining 24 by second quarter 1978.

The building we are now in, is an extension of the Katong Telephone Exchange. This new 5-storey building costs \$3.7 million. Another \$3.8 million were spent in the installation of the first lot of 10,000 lines of telephone switching equipment. This new telephone exchange is designed to accommodate a total of 85,000 lines of telephone switching equipment ultimately.

The present telephone application rate in the Katong Telephone Exchange Area is about 450 per month. With this first 10,000 lines of telephone switching equipment and the planned completion of another 5,000 lines of telephone switching equipment in March 1979, Telecoms can ensure the continued availability of telephone service to new subscribers in the Katong Telephone Exchange area.

It is my great pleasure now to commission into service the first 10,000 lines of telephone switching equipment in the new Katong II Telephone Exchange.

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