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SPEECH BY DR YAACOB IBRAHIM, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AT THE 7TH ASIAN MULTIMEDIA FORUM PLENERY MEETING (17 – 18 JUNE 99),

SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, ON 17 JUNE, 1900 HRS

DEVELOPMENTS IN TELECOMMUNICATIONS & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN SINGAPORE

1.   I am very pleased to address you this evening at this Asia Multimedia Forum or AMF. The AMF is an excellent initiative by the private sector to boost the development of multimedia services and technologies in the region. I understand that previous plenary sessions organised by the AMF were very successful. Many large-scale multimedia projects like Voice-Over-ATM and Vocal Link Internet Telephony had their beginnings at such sessions.

2.   We are in a Multimedia age of rapidly converging telecommunications, broadcasting and IT industries, a landscape of innovative products, services applications exploding onto the scene, fuelled by technological advances and shifting market conditions. The result will be an increased demand for speed and bandwidth. We must seek new technologies to meet these demands; Singapore is no different.

3.	We have embarked on building a national high-capacity network initiative called Singapore ONE - or One Network for Everyone. This network will be capable of handling a huge amount of multimedia traffic to the workplace, home, schools and other public places. Launched in June 1998, direct access to Singapore ONE for end consumers is provided via ADSL and cable modem services. Access coverage is currently over 98%, with over 60,000 users. Singapore ONE access can be found in all local schools, more than half of all public libraries as well as many other community locations throughout Singapore. A local company, i-One Net International Pte Ltd, has also set up some 202 kiosks in various strategic locations, with plans to eventually install 20,000 such kiosks island-wide. There are also plans for wireless access to Singapore ONE. The international standards for such third generation mobile systems are currently being studied by the International Telecommunications Union. It will be ready by the end of this year,

4.	As a high-bandwidth communication network, we believe Singapore ONE is also an ideal test-bed for multimedia applications development. You may wish to consider making use of Singapore ONE in your broadband initiatives. We already have more than 200 MNCs and local companies actively utilising Singapore ONE to create new business opportunities. With more than 170 interactive multimedia applications and services, we want Singapore ONE to also provide Singaporeans with many new ways to work, live and learn.

5.	We also want to extend Singapore ONE beyond our shores. For a start, the National Computer Board (NCB) has just launched FastAsia, a new site hosted on a US cable Internet service provider offering selected Singapore ONE multimedia applications to North American users. With 490,000 subscribers already on board, we will continue to aggressively promote FastAsia to North American users, and pursue dialogue with more broadband networks.

6.	Closer to home, our Internet Access Service Provider market, liberalised in October 1998, is expected to see increased competition boosting Internet access quality & connectivity, and fuel the growth of innovative value-added Internet services and applications. We hope this will in turn result in an increased number of dial-up Internet subscribers and uptake of Singapore ONE services. Currently, with three Internet access services providers in Singapore and direct connections to more than 30 Internet service providers in 20 countries in the Asia-Pacific Region, the total number of Internet dial-up subscribers in Singapore is 426,800 as at March 1999, a penetration rate of 13.5%. We plan to improve on this.

7.	The decision to adopt a particular standard for Digital Television (or DTV) also represented a multimedia development milestone. With the adoption of the DTV European standard, the first digital television broadcast may be available in Singapore as early as next year. It will also aid in the creation of innovative interactive broadcasting and multimedia services through the backbone of the Singapore ONE network. The DTV standard and eventual wireless access to Singapore ONE will eventually enable people to communicate and access services or applications anytime and anywhere.

8.	The developments I have listed so far, however, constitute only progress in infrastructure development. We have built most of the house; now we must make the house a home. I see the challenge to Singapore here as being one of developing more local multimedia content, applications and services. The industry has to provide the push here, and I am pleased to note that the AMF has already taken the lead here. On

a related note, I would like to highlight the potential for e-commerce in Asia: it is staggering. According to a 1997 International Data Corporation report, e-commerce revenue in Asia (excluding Japan) is expected to grow from US$130 million in 1997 to US$16 billion by 2001. These opportunities are there for us to seize them.

9.   Singapore wants to ride the wave and become the e-commerce hub for the Asia-Pacific region. We want to make Singapore an attractive base for companies to carry out an entire range of e-commerce activities. Our traditional strengths as a financial and transportation hub provide a strong foundation for this effort. Already we are seeing S$400 million of transactions per month, through both EDI and the Internet. This figure is set to grow as more and more businesses and consumers in Singapore become IT savvy.

10.   The Government of Singapore is committed to work with the private sector to develop the best infrastructure for e-commerce in Asia. We have achieved some significant milestones on this journey:

·   For example, in 1997, we deployed a secure infrastructure to support electronic identification and authentication of transacting parties on the Internet. We successfully tested the world's first government to government cross certification between Singapore and Canada, which would enable Singaporean and Canadian merchants and consumers to identify each other on-line.

·   In 1998, a new Electronic Transactions Act came into force, providing a crucial legal framework for e-transactions and offering the required transparency and predictability for e-contracts and digital signatures. About 200 on-line stores are already utilising these important features, and services such as Internet banking and electronic stock trading are also available. We also announced the E-Commerce Masterplan, aiming to achieve S$4 billion worth of products and services electronically transacted through Singapore, and to have 20% of Singapore companies adopt e-commerce in the next two years, with an eventual goal of 50% by 2003.

·   In February this year, we released the Electronic Transactions (Certification Authority) Regulations for the licensing of third-party certification authorities, or "CAs", in Singapore. These will issue digital certificates, and vouch for the identity of their holders. These Regulations set a new benchmark for CA service integrity and security, giving e-commerce security a boost.

·   A number of e-commerce service companies have also set up businesses, offering bureau, leasing and hosting services to companies wishing to get their e-commerce business up and running quickly and efficiently.

11.   With these developments, companies looking to capitalise on the growth of e-commerce will benefit from setting up a base in the Asia-Pacific, especially Singapore. We have the infrastructure, an IT-savvy workforce, and proactive e-commerce regulations and initiatives necessary to help turn companies' e-commerce plans into reality.

12.   I hope what I have just shared with you will be of help to you as you seek to identify key projects and areas for future mutual collaboration. The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology is pleased to support the AMF and its activities, and I look forward to seeing the fruits of the various initiatives that will be borne out of sessions at the 7th plenary.

Thank you.