

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR LIM SWEE SAY,
MINISTER OF STATE (TRADE & INDUSTRY,
AND COMMUNICATIONS & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY)
AT THE LAUNCH OF SINGAPORE POWER'S NEW WEBSITE
AT SICEC, SUNTEC CITY, TUES, 30 NOV 99, 11am

Mr Ho Kwon Ping, Chairman Singapore Power
BG Boey Tak Hap, President & CEO Singapore Power
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and gentlemen

1. Good morning. It is my great pleasure to join you at the launch of Singapore Power's new web site, CAN.COM.SG.

National Archives of Singapore

The INTERNET Revolution

2. We are living in a fast changing world. I am told that it took electricity 50 years to reach the first 50 million users. Radio took 38 years, then came TV, 16 years, followed by PC, 13 years, and now Internet, only four years! Even before the world could settle down with Internet, it has begun to change again. From the narrow-band Internet we know today, to the broadband Internet, wireless Internet, and Internet Appliances of tomorrow. Soon, multimedia Internet will be accessible at anytime, from anywhere, using almost anything such as cellular phone, watches, pocket notebook and so on. Indeed, the Internet revolution is changing every aspect of our daily lives, be it at work, in school, in business or even at leisure, at a pace much faster than many of us realise.

The Digital Divide

3. Question is, will all Singaporeans use Internet in time to come and advance into the information society together as one people in the 21st century? Or will we end up having a digital divide in our society and community in the information age?

4. Today, one in every two households owns personal computers, and one in every four Singaporeans is connected to the Internet. Singapore is now rated the fourth most information driven economy and society in the world, after USA, Sweden and Finland. It is projected by International Data Corporation to move up to number two position by Year 2002. On the whole, we have indeed come a long way after twenty years of active IT promotion and development.

5. Even so, the threat of a digital divide in our community and society is still very real. Notwithstanding having one of the highest Internet penetration rates in the world today, we are concerned that there are more Singaporeans who are not connected to the Internet than those who are connected. Of course, over time, we can expect to see almost every young Singaporean to be on the Net because every student today is being exposed to the use of the Internet in school. However, we do face the challenge of encouraging and helping many of the older Singaporeans, as well as those with lower education to embrace the Internet. This will not be easy, but we must do our best in order to reduce the severity of a digital divide.

6. The best way of encouraging more Singaporeans to join the Internet revolution is to help them benefit from the use of Internet. After all, technology is neutral. We must recognise that people will take on to Internet only if they find it useful to do so. To increase the penetration rate of Internet among the older and less IT literate Singaporeans, we will have to depend on the collective efforts of the 3 "P" sectors – the Private sector, Public sector and People sector.

7. The Public sector can help enhance the usefulness of Internet to the members of the public by bringing as many public services as possible on to the Internet. Under the Public Service 21 movement, all Ministries and Departments are working together to realise the vision of "Public Services Online". Our target is to offer a comprehensive range of e-Government services by the Year 2002 so that the members of the public will have easy access to all major public services from the comfort and convenience of their home and workplace, in a one-stop and non-stop manner.

8. Likewise, the private sector can help enhance the attractiveness of Internet to the members of the public too. We have put in place one of the best National Information Infrastructures in the world today in Singapore. The Government has also put in place many incentives programmes to encourage innovation in the industry, using Singapore ONE as the platform to introduce creative and user friendly Internet and e-Commerce services on the Net. The emerging trends towards broadband, wireless and Internet appliances will open up many more opportunities for the business community to try out new ideas and grow new markets, thereby create more benefits for the consumers to go on the Net. We hope the private sector will take on this innovation challenge and introduce more creative and useful Business-to-Consumer (B2C) services on the Internet.

9. The People sector also has a major role to play. The Government and the business community can only do their parts in increasing and improving the "supply" of Internet based services. The People sector will have to do its part in helping to

enhance the "demand" for such services. In this regard, community based organisations can educate the public and help them realise the potential benefits of going on the Net. Only through matching increased supply with increased demand, can we hope to prevent the widening of the digital divide in the information society of the future.

CAN.COM.SG

10. I am happy to see the launch of CAN.COM.SG by Singapore Power. CAN.COM.SG is promising and innovative. By putting customer service on-line, it allows the members of the public to open new utility accounts, to view and to pay their utility bills, and even to submit their meter readings via the Internet. CAN.COM.SG even allows any member of the public to analyse his consumption over a period of time, compare it with the national average, and find out which of his appliances is consuming the most electricity. By enabling the public to make interactive use of the customised information, it will enable all of us to plan and adjust our power consumption intelligently.

11. Singapore Power has also worked with other industry players to offer several interesting services on CAN.COM.SG. With its map based search engine and interface with various databases, Singapore Power aims to go beyond its 1 million utility customers and position CAN.COM.SG as a key portal site for Singaporeans. I hope Singapore Power will succeed in bringing these exciting and useful applications to the mass public. This will help bring those among us who are still adverse to Internet to get on the Net, hopefully soon.

12. I congratulate Singapore Power on this exciting Internet initiative. I hope CAN.COM.SG will grow in popularity and appeal to a cross section of the Singapore population. This will encourage the less IT-savvy individuals to try the Internet and help bring many more Singaporeans to join the Internet Community. I commend Singapore Power for innovating with the Internet to benefit our community.

13. In conclusion, Internet is bringing the world closer, while at the same time threatening to divide the global community between the connected and un-connected. There is nothing we can do and want to do to slow down the pace of Internet revolution. The task at hand is to make sure that all Singaporeans stay on the right side of the digital divide. I hope the three "P" sectors of Private sector, Public sector and People sector will join hands in the true spirit of Singapore 21 to help all Singaporeans, young and old, to discover the benefits of Internet. By working together, we can make Singapore the leading information society in the digital future. Thank you.
