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SPEECH BY MR LIM SWEE SAY,
MINISTER OF STATE FOR COMMUNICATIONS & INFORMATION
TECHNOLOGY,
AT THE LAUNCH OF THE
TAMIL INTERNET STEERING COMMITTEE WEBSITE
ON 13 APRIL 2000 AT 7.00 P.M.
AT KENT RIDGE DIGITAL LAB AUDITORIUM, NUS

First of all, I would like to wish all Tamil friends here in Singapore and the Tamil diaspora around the world who may be watching this event through the Internet, a very happy Tamil New Year. Today is indeed a very auspicious day. I can see why you have chosen today to inaugurate the Tamil Internet Steering Committee (TISC).

<u>Civic-Driven Appointment of TISC</u>

We are living in exciting times. The Internet revolution is sweeping the globe at amazing speed. In USA, Internet has reached 50% of the people; in Europe, 12.5%. But in Asia, only 2.5%. Just two weeks ago, the European Community launched the e-Europe initiative to transform Europe into an information society. Asia cannot afford to be left behind. We need to keep up with the Internet revolution too.

Here in Singapore, we are embracing Internet in a pro-active way. 59% of households in Singapore have PC at home. 42% have access to the Internet. Even so, we are taking the threat of digital divide seriously.

We are not taking any chance because digital divide will weaken our social cohesion, which is a core pillar of our nation building, along side with economic competitiveness and national unity. We recognise that the only way we can succeed in becoming an information society without digital divide, is to count on the concerted efforts of the government, business community, and our people.

This is why I wish to repeat what you have just heard from the Chairman of TISC, Mr Ravindran, that this committee is exceptional because it is not a top-down initiative, but the result of active citizenry. A small group of active Singaporeans and Singapore residents got together to form a working group at their own initiative. They identified a set of real and strong needs for the Tamil community, and built up a convincing case for the establishment of an official committee.

On behalf of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, I am very pleased to announce the appointment of TISC as an advisory committee to the MCIT and IDA. TISC will offer advice on the development of local multilingual Internet content, public education and appreciation of the Internet, trends in Asian language development and impact of the Internet in the information society.

TISC will spearhead the efforts in helping the Tamil community to be net savvy, and speeding up the development of local multilingual content. TISC will also help promote the use of e-commerce, and build up a worldwide network to make Singapore a Tamil Internet Hub.

In short, TISC will not only assist the Tamil community to become net savvy, it would also play an active role in helping to position Singapore as a global hub for multilingual and multicultural Internet.

Connecting Tamil Communities Worldwide

I understand that there is a famous Tamil saying that goes back almost two thousand years: "Yaathum oore, yaavarum kelir"; which roughly translates to "All the world our home, all people our kin." Though this saying may have been used in many contexts before, it is all the more fitting for the Internet world. This web of interconnected Tamil networks can bring millions of Tamils from the four corners of the world together in the cyberspace, compressing space and time, transcending political and economic barriers. We can harness the full potential of the Internet for the good and mutual benefit of the peoples around the world.

I am confident that TISC will make valuable contributions to the community and our nation.   Our Indian community here is blessed with thousands of Info-communication knowledge workers, drawn from many parts of the world.

I look forward to working together, and making full use of these highly regarded talent and expertise, fondness and dedication to the community, for the common benefit of all.

Once again, I commend the initiatives of the Indian community in setting up the steering committee. Let us all reaffirm our commitment in marching forward together, towards the information society, "digitally undivided", as one people and one community.

Thank you.