Singapore Government
MEDIA RELEASE

SPEECH BY DR TONY TAN KENG YAM, ACTING PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE AT THE eGOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN OPENING CEREMONY OF COMMUNICASIA 2000 HELD ON TUESDAY, 6 JUNE 2000 AT 10.00AM AT SINGAPORE EXPO, HALL 1

I am delighted to be here this morning to officiate the opening of CommunicAsia – the leading Infocomm Technology exhibition in the region. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the many important Government officials from the region, CEOs and executives of major telecoms and IT corporations to Singapore.

We are living through exciting times. Over the last two years, we have witnessed the dot.com gold rush, the roller coaster ride of technology stocks, the creation within months of multi-millionaires in unprecedented numbers, and the convergence of the communication, computing, and content technologies and industries. With the arrival of the digital economy, Singapore is actively working out plans to ensure that our nation remains relevant and competitive in this new era.

Infocomm 21 lays out the blueprint for developing Singapore into a dynamic and vibrant infocomm capital with a thriving and prosperous Internet economy by 2010. Since January this year, various components of Infocomm 21 have been

announced. These include the liberalization of Singapore's telecommunications market from 1st April this year, the expanded development and attraction of infocomm manpower, helping Singaporeans go online, and the development of Singapore as an infocomm hub. The telecommunications "Big Bang" on 1 April has been highly successful. To-date, we have issued a total of 106 licences to facilities- and services-based providers, of which 98 are new entrants. Interest from global telecommunications players continues to be strong, and IDA is currently in discussion with many other potential licensees.

Governments the world over have a major role to play in realizing the socio-economic potential and benefits of the Internet economy for their industries and citizenry. The Singapore Government embarked on a massive computerization programme as early as the 1980s. By the 1990s, we had gone online. We are now going one step further. We have begun the process of transforming ourselves into an eGovernment, one which members of the public and businesses can reach, communicate and interact with virtually. The power of 3G will enable individuals and businesses to obtain government information and utilize government services on the move. This scenario gives rise to many promising new business opportunities for telecommunications and info-communications players as well as more convenient, innovative and cost-effective services for the public. Today, at CommunicAsia 2000, I would like to focus on this theme of eGovernment.

Creating an eGovernment

The vision of the Singapore Government is to be a leading eGovernment to better serve the nation in the digital economy. There are five strategic thrusts to our vision.

Pushing the envelope of electronic service delivery

The first strategic thrust is to push the envelope of electronic service delivery. Increasingly, members of the public will want Government services to be delivered online, anytime, anywhere. We believe that the public sector can provide the catalyst to create an e-based society in the digital economy. Two years ago, we set ourselves an ambitious target – to make key public services that can be delivered electronically, to be electronically available by the end of year 2001.

This target has not changed. Today, about 130 public services are delivered electronically. For example, the eFiling service provided by the Inland Revenue Authority received about half a million electronic returns filed through the Internet and telephone this year. This represents about 40 per cent of the total user base.

Another example is the Integrated Land Information Service, or INLIS. This is an Internet-based system which allows the public to get land ownership, land tenure, last transacted price and map-based information from various government agencies, in an integrated manner.

We believe that greater value will be created if electronic services are integrated and customer-centric. We will offer service packages organized around the customer's needs. The objective is to provide a convenient one-stop, non-stop service for the public. The government's eCitizen Centre initiative demonstrates what I am talking about.

e-CITIZEN Centre

The eCitizen Centre website is designed to be a single window to public services. Here, services are organized according to life events rather than by departments and agencies. As citizens travel down the road of life, they can stop at buildings that line the road which are graphically depicted on the website. The buildings, called "Towns", represent business, defence, education, employment, family, health, housing, law & order, sports and transportation.

For example, the "Look for a Job" service package in the Employment Town serves new and potential entrants to the workforce. It integrates information from the CPF Board, Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore, Ministry of Manpower, National Trades Union Congress, Productivity and Standards Board, and the Public Service Division. It also offers an on-line job bank that provides information on positions available in the market.

This integrated approach requires government agencies to adopt a strong customer orientation. Government agencies will need to work across boundaries to integrate information, processes and systems to provide a seamless online experience. We believe that this approach will create tremendous value for the customer and result in savings in both time and effort for the public.

When the concept for eCitizen Centre was launched in April 1999, the site offered 16 service packages and 108 electronic services. By this time next year, eCitizen Centre aims to offer more than 60 service packages and more than 200 electronic services.

Building new capability and new capacity

Our second strategic thrust is to build new capability and new capacity. Over the past twenty years, the Singapore Government has invested heavily in hardware, software and networks to automate manual processes, and improve productivity and efficiency. Today, the Singapore Government is one of the most computerized governments in the world.

However, the name of the game is no longer just about productivity gains. The Masterplan for IT in Education is a good example of an initiative that goes far beyond productivity gains. It is an ambitious and forward-looking initiative to equip our teachers and students with the necessary skills and infrastructure to integrate information technology into the school curriculum and the learning environment. It is about equipping our children with the necessary skills for the digital economy.

Government agencies must continue to radically re-engineer and transform the way we do things. We must harness infocomm technologies to create new capability and capacity – to allow us to do things we have not been able to do before, and to create new value for our customers. We will equip public servants with the necessary skills, tools, systems and infrastructure to make them effective workers in the digital economy. When the world is marching to Internet speed, public servants must be able to work at a similar speed.

The Singapore Government network will be broadband-enabled over the next nine months. A new network architecture and security framework will be implemented to enable the 30,000 public servants to access systems and information anytime, anywhere. Tele-commuting will become a reality for some public servants.

Innovating with infocomm technologies

The third strategic thrust is to innovate with infocomm technologies. The new economy demands that we adopt a "creative destruction" approach in our policies, regulation and work processes to keep up with the rapid developments in the global economy. We must be prepared to experiment with new technologies, and be in a situation where there is nobody else to learn or copy from, simply because we are the first ones there.

As our customers become more sophisticated online users, they will begin to benchmark the quality of the public service online experience with those provided by the private sector, both locally and internationally. Government agencies will

need to experiment with interactive broadband multimedia to provide a superior online experience.   They will also need to experiment with wireless technologies to provide the convenience of access from "anywhere" to "everywhere". The Land Transport Authority, Meteorological Services and the Ministry of Defence already provide some services that are accessible by WAP devices.

Anticipating to be proactive, sensing to be responsive

The fourth strategic thrust is to be proactive and responsive.
Public servants must be savvy technology users to keep up-to-date with national and international trends. Government agencies must collect data and intelligence and be proactive in developing relevant public policy responses.

Gone is the era in which government agencies have the luxury of time to develop new policies, systems and services. Increasingly, government agencies will have to adopt the "sense and respond" approach. Systems and services must be delivered at Internet speed and continuously fine-tuned to respond to customer needs and feedback. "Time to market" for new systems and services is as important as systems and services that are perfect when launched.

Developing thought leadership on eGovernment

The fifth and final strategic thrust is to develop thought leadership on eGovernment. Adequate resources will be set aside to equip public servants with the necessary knowledge and skills to use infocomm tools and systems effectively, and to harness infocomm technologies for organization excellence and public service delivery. More important, there is a need to sensitize public servants to the impact of infocomm technologies on the economic and social landscape so that they can continue to make meaningful policy decisions.

Conclusion

The Government will spend approximately $1.5 billion on the programmes in the e-Government Action Plan over the next three years.

More important than the funding for the Action Plan is the mindset change that is needed to propel Singapore forward in the new economy. To be a leading eGovernment serving the nation in the digital economy, the Singapore Government is prepared to do things differently.

We are prepared to challenge our usual evaluation criteria for funds approval of infocomm projects, our traditional methods of system procurement and implementation, and our assumptions about delivering public services on private sector infrastructure and public-private sector collaboration.

On this note, let me end by wishing all our overseas visitors and participants an interesting and enjoyable stay in Singapore. It is now my pleasure to declare CommunicAsia 2000 open. I wish all of you a highly successful exhibition.

Thank you.