SPEECH BY MR A RAHIM ISHAK, SENIOR MINISTER OF
STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AT THE OPENING OF
SOUTHEAST ASIA COMPUTER CONFEDERATION (SEARCC)
SUMMIT ON 3 FEBRUARY 1978 AT 9 A.M. AT THE
REGIONAL LANGUAGE CENTRE AUDITORIUM, ORANGE
GROVE ROAD, SINGAPORE 10

I am happy that you are able to come together in
Singapore to put into motion a set of events which is unprecedented
forthis part of the world.

The use of computer is relatively new to South East Asia
and the problems to which the computer professionals in South East
Asia address themselves are also unique and characteristic of the
region. Advances in computer technology has long been the exclusive
domain of the more developed countries and in this regard, they
have set the tempo and direction of development which must have
inevitable impacton South East Asia.

We in South East Asia can and must continue to take
advantage of the developments in the more advanced countries in
order to telescope the process of acquiring this technology. In
many respects this is a simpler and more effective way to enable
South East Asia to keep pace with the rest of the world.

However, I venture to suggest that the time has come for
peoples in South East Asia to develop a computer philosophy of their
own. Particularly in computer applications, the systems developed
and used in the more advanced countries do not always lend themselves
to direct translation into the South East Asia environment. There
is a discernable need that the solution to South East Asia problems
must be in consonance with the distinctive life styles of each
country. It must take into consideration and diverse cultures,
education and economic background which exist and for which no
model solution exists in the West.

Your appreciation of this need and the positive steps you have taken to bring about the formation of a regional grouping for the purpose of advancing computer technology in the region is indeed commendable. It is my belief that the South East Asian region possesses sufficient experience and potential to offer computer expertise most suited for developing countries. The formation of the South East Asia Regional Computer Confederation for the expressed purpose of cooperation and exchange in computer technology is a major step of which you can be proud.

While Singapore may not be as advanced as the developed countries in computer usage, it has nevertheless accumulated sufficient experience from its 15 years history of computer usage to contribute effectively to the region. Ever since the first computer was introduced in Singapore in 1963, computers have steadily become a dominant life style in the larger commercial and public institutions in Singapore. There are, to date, no less than 120 computer installations in Singapore serving a multitude of functions ranging from accounting, administration and inventory control to the highly sophisticated real-time and on-line applications. For example, Singapore Airlines is serviced by a worldwide on-line passenger reservation system. Our containerised port is served by a comprehensive system of network terminals. Similarly, our Post Office Savings Bank has introduced a comprehensive range of on-line terminal system to serve the needs of depositors. There is an increasing awareness in Singapore in regard to the need for the use of the most advanced technology in computers in order to keep pace with the heavy demands of rapid economic and industrial growth.

The development of Computer technology and the direction of its development has so far been the exclusive domain of the more advanced countries of the West, in particular the United States of America. This has resulted in the use of English language as the dominant language in the transfer of computer technology. I understand that on a global basis, the use of English is universal among the computer professionals. I have been advised that this can be seen in the development of a new and expanding vocabulary based on English in the information processing field, which has gained international acceptance. Examples of this vocabulary

I have been informed are words such as "real-time", "Database" and "structural programing" which can be understood by computer professionals all over the world.

In Singapore, English is, among others, the language of commerce, industry and technology. This is due to the realisation that the use of English will considerably improve the position of Singapore as a global city in these undertakings. The advantage of this approach in Singapore is already demonstrated by the ease with which Singaporeans have taken to new fields of technology with a rapidity which would not otherwise be possible but for the universal acceptance of the English language in Singapore. This being the case, Singapore appears to be in an eminently suitable position to contribute substantially to the advancement of computer knowledge and practice based on regional concepts for the mutual benefit of all countries in the region.

In view of its strategic geographical position in the region, the development of Singapore into the servicing centre of the region could not have been achieved had it not been for the dynamic and forward looking planners who have introduced computers into the banking, financial and other similar service organisations. I can forsee the impact which computers would have on the Singapore economy as more and more entrepreneurs come to realise the indispensability of computers as a tool for management and corporate planning. In this regard the choice of Singapore as the birth place of the South East Asia Regional Computer Confederation is in my view most appropriate. Singapore hopes to play its role through the regional organisation and contribute its expertise in full support of computer professionals of countries in the region.

Being computer professionals you have a decided advantage over many other gatherings of this kind. You speak the same language and have an easy grasp of the many new concepts and ideas which may be put forward. For you a meeting of the minds poses no difficulties quite unlike other less exacting professions.

With economic development foremost in the minds of the countries in the South East Asia region, it is inevitable that computers would be expected to play an indispensable role. These countries need the means to plan and monitor their development programmes. In forming this Confederation, you have clearly recognised the essential nature of your profession to your countries and this augurs well for the future development of the region.

I welcome this opportunity to address you on this significant occasion and I look forward with great interest on your efforts to play your part in the development of computer expertise in South East Asia.

I wish to thank you for inviting me to speak at your opening session this morning.