

Singapore
18 May 1987

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Communications & Information, City Hall, Singapore 0617 • Tel. 3307269 / 3307270 / 3307271

87-VNH-10

Release No: 13/MAY
03-1/87/05/09

SPEECH BY DR YEO NING HONG, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION AND SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE (POLICY), AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE BUKIT TIMAH SATELLITE EARTH STATION ON 9 MAY 1987 AT 10.30 AM

In 1971, we built our first Satellite Earth Station at Sentosa. We started with 25 satellite circuits linking us to five countries. Today, we have a total of 1,200 circuits linked directly to 50 countries. This is 50 times the number of circuits we had some 16 years ago.

Today, Singapore ranks as the world's 13th largest investor of Intelsat, the 113 member international organisation which owns and operates the global satellite communications system. We are also the sixth largest investor in Inmarsat, the International Maritime Satellite Organisation.

The increase in circuits parallels the growth in international telecommunications traffic. In 1986, despite the slowdown in the economy, there was a 37 per cent increase in the number of international calls over the previous year. This rapid growth in telecommunications helped to counteract the tailspin of a number of sectors in our economy during the recession, making the recession less deep and less painful. We helped in other ways too. For example, in 1985 alone, Telecoms reduced its rates three times, helping business to reduce their costs to the tune of \$120 million per year.

In January this year, rates were reduced yet again and cheaper weekend rates introduced. All these efforts by Telecoms continue to stimulate the economy and assist in our full recovery. For the first quarter of this year, the number of international calls grew by 40 per cent over the same period last year.

As a major telecommunications centre, we have always emphasised the importance of uninterrupted telecommunication services. Our network is designed with alternative back-up routes. If one link is inadvertently severed, service can be restored quickly through another route. This means a more reliable service.

With each additional satellite antennae built and each additional submarine cable link laid, we build greater resiliency and reliability into our telecommunications links to the rest of the world.

With today's commissioning of the Bukit Timah Satellite Earth Station, we have now a total of five satellite antennae. Together with the six submarine cable links out of Singapore, they provide Singapore with a very reliable system on par with other major telecommunication centres.

The past year has seen a growing number of Multinationals establishing or expanding their headquarters and manufacturing facilities in Singapore. They have cited good and reliable telecommunications as a major reason for setting up their businesses here. They use a spectrum of sophisticated services involving what is technically referred to as high speed international leased circuits and packet switched data services.

I am pleased therefore to announce that Telecoms will be offering in August a new range of wide-band digital data leased circuits, via Intelsat.

With these new services, customers can choose from a range of high speed data circuits from 64 Kilo bits per second (Kbps) to eight Mega bits per second (Mbps), at monthly rentals that are among the lowest in this region.

The new services open up a new dimension for sophisticated and innovative customers and businesses to improve their efficiency and productivity. Customers can use the high speed circuits for high quality transmission of motion pictures and circuit design, and high volume information transfers, such as news for printing of newspapers, just to name a few. Already a number of customers have been making enquiries on these services. Companies considering relocation to Singapore will find these new services an additional advantage, which may help tip the balance in favour of Singapore.

The charge for our existing 56 Kbps international leased circuits has also been reduced by 30 per cent from \$22,000 to \$15,200. This also makes our rate the lowest in the region. This reduction will save our customers three quarter million dollars a year.

Those who use the Telepac service to gain access to overseas corporate computers and data bases will be glad also to hear that from 1 June 1987, Telepac rates will be lowered. Telepac customers will save about \$1.5 million annually. This is 36 per cent off their present bill.

Our port and airport are at the very top of their league. Similarly, we aspire to position Telecoms at the very top of the league of international telecommunication centres also. We can do this by providing the best and most comprehensive services at the lowest possible cost. This can be achieved by passing efficiency and productivity savings to our consumers. That is our contribution to helping Singapore businesses maintain the edge so necessary for success in international competition.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is now my pleasure to declare the Bukit Timah Satellite Earth Station open.

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