PRESS RELEASE

SPEECH BY GEORGE YEO,
MINISTER FOR INFORMATION AND THE ARTS AND
MINISTER FOR HEALTH, AT THE LAUNCHING OF
SINGAPORE TECHNOLOGIES (ST) TELEPORT
ON THURSDAY, 27 APRIL 1995 AT 10.30 AM

A great transformation is underway in Asia. A whole continent is being re-opened. In many ways, this re-opening of Asia is like the opening of the North American continent in the 19th century - movement of peoples, enormous fortunes made and lost, financial upheavals, rough justice, helter-skelter infrastructural development. China and Vietnam, in particular, exemplify this transformation today.

An important aspect of this transformation, perhaps the most important aspect, is the urbanisation of hundreds of millions of peasant folks. This process will have earth-shaking consequences. Just take China as a magnifier of trends. If all Chinese in China eat meat the way Americans do, the world will be starved of grains. Or if they all eat fish the way the Japanese do, the oceans will be depleted of fish. The urbanisation of large parts of Asia will change the course of world history and create a new pattern of international competition and cooperation.

Information technology will help shape this new pattern which is as yet unclear. More than ever before, cities will become information and information-processing hubs. In the next century, the wealth of cities will be dependent on their ability to acquire, process and make use of knowledge. With high-speed communication and transportation, geographical distance matters much less. What is far can become very near and what was once

thought near can become very far. It is hard to foretell exactly what will be the new configuration of population concentration, social organization and trade in the 21st Century. New technologies will change the pattern of human life in surprising ways. But, eventually, a new pattern will set. This may take 20 to 30 years to happen. When it sets, we will have a different neural network of cities in Asia.

The process of urbanisation in Asia over the next few decades will be considerably more dramatic than the changes which took place in Europe and America in an earlier era of industrialization, because many more people are involved and the changes take place over a much shorter period of time.

In this period of uncertainty, Singapore faces fundamental challenges to its long-term existence. In the past, we benefitted much from our favourable geographical position as the southern-most point of the Eurasian continent which all ships must pass by between east and west, and also our geographical position in between two oceans. Our geographical position as an air hub is less favourable but we have been able to make up for it by running a very efficient airport.

Geography will matter less in the future. We must therefore think of new ways to retain our position as a hub. Over the next 20 to 30 years, we must make sure that we have the new infrastructure to remain a junction for goods, services, people, information and ideas. If we succeed, we will be one of a number of great cities in the Pacific Century. If we fail, other hubs will displace us and we will be relegated to a backwater.

Difficult though it may be, we must try to discern and anticipate what new technologies will bring forth. For example, what will be the impact of larger long-haul jumbo jets or sub-orbital hyper-sonic aircraft on Changi Airport? We know that information technology is developing at great speed. There is

no doubt that we must establish Singapore as an information and information-processing hub. Our interest in the telecommunication and multi-media industry is therefore not merely for the value it adds to our economy. Our interest in telecommunication and multi-media is a strategic one because it is a core aspect of our efforts to keep our position in Asia. This is the philosophy underlying our International Business Hub 2000 programme.

The opening of Singapore Technologies (ST) Teleport reinforces this position. The name 'teleport' is particularly apposite because it conveys graphically the idea of Singapore as a junction node. ST Teleport was offically awarded a cluster licence by Telecommunications Authority of Singapore (TAS) at the end of last year. It is the third operator licensed to offer uplink/downlink services to the broadcast industry after Singapore Telecoms and Singapore International Media. ST Teleport has satellite links to all major regional and international satellites including Apstar-1, PanAmSat-2, Rimsat G1 and Rimsat G2 and, from May 1955, PamAmSat-4 and Palapa B2P as well. It also has terrestial links via fibre-optic cables to different parts of the island.

The Singapore Government is committed to the development of the telecommunication and multi-media industry. I have received positive feedback from senior executives of Reuters, HBO, ABN and Disney TV about their experiences in Singapore. All of them were able to start operations quickly. The Economic Development Board (EDB), TAS and the Singapore Broadcasting Association (SBA) have worked hard to facilitate the development of the industry and made it easy for international broadcasters to base themselves here. But we have to do much more to consolidate and strengthen our position. We need to train many more people to do the engineering, software and other creative work. We need to attract all kinds of talent from all four corners of the world to come and work here.

At the end of the day, having the physical infrastructure is necessary but not sufficient. What we want is to make Singapore a convenient and an attractive city for creative minds, which means not just business efficiency but a total environment which is safe, wholesome, pleasant and interesting.

The opening of ST Teleport marks an important milestone. As with all other hub functions, the key is reliability and flexibility. ST Teleport is designed to have system reliability of not less than 99.99 per cent. It has built-in redundancy and uninterrupted power supply back-up, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. To succeed as a telecommunication and multi-media hub, we must have this reputation for reliability. We cannot know for sure what shocks will hit the system but we must have the redundancy and the quickness to adjust to them. In the end, what we need is a culture of service to others, not just for the industry but for the whole of Singapore. We can only be a hub by serving others, by serving others better than they can serve themselves.

On this note, I congratulate ST Teleport for its quick start-up and wish it great success.

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