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**SPEECH BY BG (NS) GEORGE YEO,
MINISTER FOR INFORMATION AND THE ARTS AND
MINISTER FOR HEALTH, AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF
SINGAPORE CABLEVISION AT TAMPINES CENTRAL
ON FRIDAY, 23 JUNE 1995 AT 12.30 PM**

The launch of cable television (TV) by Singapore Cablevision (SCV) today opens a new chapter in the history of broadcasting in Singapore. The development of cable TV will change the nature of our society in ways expected and unexpected. It is a new challenge which we must respond to in a deliberate and creative way.

Cable TV will strengthen Singapore's position as an international hub city. By wiring up every home, cable TV will help us achieve our national objective of making Singapore an 'intelligent island'. Through cable TV, Singaporeans and foreigners visiting or living in Singapore will have windows to different parts of the world. Having American, German, French, British, Australian, Japanese, Chinese and Indian channels available in Singapore will greatly reduce the sense of distance and encourage even more multi-nationals to set up their regional headquarters here. Families of foreign executives will then be able to keep in close touch with their home countries. We want Singapore to be, for them, a home away from home. Thus, cable TV will help the globalisation of Singapore's economy.

But in globalising our economy, we should not lose our own sense of living in Singapore and of being Singaporean. Singapore should remain Singapore and should not be no different from Hongkong, Bombay, London or Los Angeles. That will not be good for Singapore. Although many channels may be similar, cable

TV in Singapore must have a different character from cable TV elsewhere. We must preserve our own sense of place, self and community.

Happily, the technology which makes globalisation possible will also be a force for localisation. While multi-media technology enables us to network with the rest of the world in real time, it also enables us to network within Singapore much more intensively. We must therefore exploit the potential at both ends. Put in another way, we have to globalise and localise simultaneously.

In this respect, cable TV is not too different from free-to-air TV and newspapers. All over the world, the experience has been that newspaper and TV markets have strong local characteristics. Truly global media like the International Herald Tribune and CNN enjoy small audiences. Invariably, global media companies have to customise their media products for local markets and adapt to regional variations in language, culture, law and taste. Put in another way, while the wholesale market for media products may be global, the retail market is always local. Thus, Dow Jones packages different products for different parts of the world. Even CNN separates its American channel from its international channel. Magazines like Time and Newsweek produce regional editions.

For cable TV in Singapore to succeed, not only as a business, but also as a communal facility for social development, it must be localised. We should think of localisation at different levels. First, there must be a sense of the region we are in, namely, Singapore in Asia and Singapore in Southeast Asia. Then there must be a strong sense of our being in Singapore. Even within Singapore, we need to have a sense of the neighbourhood we live in, like Tampines Town. And finally, there must be a sense of the home as every Singaporean's own castle.

Our sense of the region on cable TV will be partly

achieved by the availability of channels from different parts of Asia like China, Japan and India. We must, however, strengthen ASEAN programming. We already have good links with Malaysia and Indonesia. Malaysian channels are received in Singapore. But, we must do more to strengthen our broadcasting links with other ASEAN countries like, for example, making it easier for our channels to be carried in each other's cable TV systems. I will discuss this with my ASEAN counterparts at this year's ASEAN Information Ministers' Meeting which will be held in Singapore in November.

To strengthen our sense of being in Singapore on cable TV, SCV is working on a few channels for education, sports, health, museums, libraries, art performances and other social services. With many channels available, the actual limitations are availability of good material and the marketing imagination to package useful products. Channels 5, 8 and 12 will of course be carried on SCV. SCV will also be working on a slew of interactive services including electronic home shopping and electronic home banking.

In addition, SCV will be exploring the development of community channels for different parts of Singapore. They will be like the Straits Times' regional weekly supplements. Such community channels will draw in town councils, Citizens' Consultative Committees (CCCs), Residents' Committees (RCs), community centres, schools, libraries and neighbourhood businesses. We should make use of cable TV to strengthen civic and grassroots organisations in Singapore so that there is a strong sense of Singaporeans belonging to local communities.

With cable TV, it is possible to take this a step further and provide channels which monitor goings-on in the immediate neighbourhood. Residents can keep an eye on activities at public parks, neighbourhood centres, car parks, open areas, corridors and even lifts. This can be done on rotation on one or more channels to give those who are home a sense of what is going on around

them. This facility will also increase neighbourhood security. SCV will discuss with town councils and management committees on the practical possibilities.

The multi-media revolution holds up great possibilities for mankind. But, it also poses new dangers. Urban terrorism, for example, may become much more of a problem worldwide because of quick and easy access to information and the ease of travel. One big problem of Internet is anonymity which tempts individuals to become irresponsible. What we should try to do is to create within our city, smaller communities in which people know each other and care for each other, each with a kampong spirit. Of course, we should not become busybodies and invade each other's privacy. But we should also not move to the other extreme and mind only our own business. If we mind only our own business, the city can become an ugly and a dangerous urban jungle.

We must therefore think of ways and means to re-localise our neighbourhoods using the new technologies available. We have to continue insisting on high standards of broadcasting. All channels of SCV will have to be individually approved by the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA) and all programmes and advertisements must conform to SBA's codes.

But SBA can only do so much to maintain standards. SBA's standards represent overall community standards. They cannot cater to all the specific needs of individual families. As a community, everyone must feel responsible and do his part. As with so many other things, the key is the family. Parental supervision remains the most important. SCV's set-top will allow parents to block off channels they do not like by the use of PIN numbers. In addition, SCV will also provide optional timer controls, like Robomum or TV Guard, which allow parents to set particular viewing slots for their children to watch TV and even set weekly time quotas for them.

Cable TV is an exciting new phase in Singapore's

development. The new multi-media technologies will help to make Singapore an international city. We cannot anticipate all the possible side effects but, if we put our minds to it, we should be able to come up with all kinds of interesting solutions which will make us a stronger Singapore in the next century. Cable TV should not only provide us new hotel facilities; it should make us a better home.

On this note, I congratulate SCV on its quick start-up and wish it great success in Singapore and elsewhere.

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