

FIRST SOUTH-EAST ASIA REGIONAL COMPUTER CONFERENCE
SPEECH BY DR LEE CHIAW MENG,
MINISTER FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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1 I am glad to note that this Conference has brought together such a large gathering of distinguished experts in the field of computer science as well as practising computer professionals not only from countries in South-East Asia but other parts of the world. This certainly reflects the extent to which we have come to rely on the use of the computer in our daily business. It was less than two decades ago when computers made their first appearance in this region. The first computer was installed in Singapore only thirteen years ago. Today there are about 150 computer installations in Singapore engaged in all areas of business and government activities. A similar pattern of growth is also apparent in the other countries in this region.

2 The multiplicity of computer applications has extended even to the organisation for this Conference. All of you present here this morning have been checked, verified and accepted through an on-line computer system with terminals in this hotel and remotely linked to the mainframe computer of the Telecommunication Authority located some kilometres away.

3 The computer industry ranks among the major growing industries in the world today with a potential which is yet to be fully realised. There is, however, a growing awareness of the important role that computers can play in management and planning and it is expected that computers will continue to exert an ever increasing influence in the development process.

4 Countries in South-East Asia are undergoing a pattern of computer evolution similar to that experienced earlier by the more advanced countries. There has been an increasing diversification of computer usage and the introduction of sophisticated computer systems in South-East Asia. There is no doubt that this gathering momentum will ultimately result in countries of this region attaining a status comparable to that of the advanced countries.

5 The impressive growth in computer usage raises a number of issues that need to be given careful consideration. These relate essentially to the efficient utilisation of computer capacity and manpower as well as to the need to achieve a fuller integration of the computer systems with the decision and policy making machinery so as to bring about a more balanced social and economic growth in the countries of this region.

6 The growth of the computer industry requires, among other things, a considerable injection of specialised and highly trained manpower. Studies in the United States have shown that the capital costs of computer hardware comprises about one-third of the total costs of a computer system over its life span with the balance almost entirely attributable to manpower costs. This trend is also discernible in the developing countries where the increasing demand for manpower and its rising costs is likely to impede the growth of computer usage and indirectly the tempo of development.

7 A major factor which contributes to the effective utilisation of computer capacity is the quality and competence of the staff manning the system. Whether it be the Manager, Systems Analyst or the Programmer, their respective capabilities and deficiencies will spell the difference between an effective installation and one which is wasteful and expensive.

8 The mere fact that the computer system is functioning is no indication of the efficiency of its utilisation. Despite significant sophistication in computer hardware technology, many computer systems still adhere to low efficiency methods, though time tested, of data processing. Sufficient attention has not been paid to fully exploit the capabilities of the new generation computers. Similarly, there is still a noticeable tendency to confine to the traditional areas of application such as statistical processing and accounting.

9 Not only is there a need to expand and diversify the use of computers to cover other fields but it is also necessary to keep under constant review the type of information processed, its availability and timeliness and its usefulness for purposes of decision making. The optimum utilisation of a computer system is dependant on this and other factors and it is essential to review the computer systems and to ascertain their efficiency in these terms.

10 The rapid advances made in communication technology in South-East Asia coupled with the increasing sophistication in computer systems does offer further opportunities for expansion and cooperation in the field of communications. The feasibility of establishing a greater number of computer networks through a link-up with the latest communication facilities available should be seriously studied so as to exploit both technologies in the rapid transfer of information between countries.

11 The organisers of the Conference should be congratulated for having included such a distinguished array of leading authorities in the computer field as guest speakers in this Conference. I am happy to note, too, that the main topic of discussion cover practical and pragmatic aspects of computer applications and utilisation rather than the purely academic.

12 I now take great pleasure in declaring open the first South-East Asia Regional Computer Conference and to wish all an interesting and fruitful conference.