

Singapore Government

Press Release

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**SPEECH BY MR GOH CHEE WEE, MINISTER OF STATE FOR
TRADE & INDUSTRY AND COMMUNICATIONS,
AT THE INAUGURATION CEREMONY OF THE
TELECOMMUNICATIONS USERS COMMITTEE
ON 24 JUNE 1996, 12 NOON, AT THE REGENT HOTEL**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here this afternoon to officially launch the Telecommunications Users Committee (TUC).

2 We are now in the midst of very exciting changes in the telecommunications industry. Indeed, the pace and scale of change in the telecommunications industry has been exhilarating, characterised by rapid advancements in technology, service innovations and changing industry structure.

3 Day by day we see the previously monopolistic telecommunications industry transforming into a highly competitive sector. The spread of this phenomenon is inevitable as governments all over the world are coming to realise that a vibrant

telecommunications industry is an important pre-requisite for a healthy economic growth in this day and age of advanced info-communications.

4 As such, more and more traditionally state-owned telecommunications enterprises are being privatised. Companies have to sharpen their competitive edge in order to survive in an increasingly competitive and open market.

5 In Singapore, the situation is no different. Since the privatisation of Singapore Telecom in 1993, the telecommunications industry here has undergone tremendous changes with the introduction of competition in more and more areas by TAS.

6 In liberalising the industry, TAS' objective is to ensure that our economy will enjoy a greater variety of products and services of world-class standards and provided at more competitive prices.

7 To achieve this, we have adopted a phased approach to liberalisation. This is so because the long term benefits to Singapore might not materialise if competition was introduced too rapidly and without regard to the sustainability and viability of new operators.

8 One other important factor which TAS emphasizes on in liberalising the industry is consumers' welfare. It is crucial that in the heat of competition among the operators

and service providers, the interests of consumers will not be compromised. TAS certainly encourages cheaper alternatives and services to benefit end-users but they must not be at the expense of usability and quality of services.

9 In the light of these factors, TAS recognises that in regulating the industry, consumers' feedback is important. We need to constantly review and if necessary, revise the policies that we have formulated, to ensure that these policies work well for all of us - the country, the business users and the man-in-the-street.

10 To do so, TAS has initiated the formation of the Telecommunications Users Committee. The TUC aims to establish a two-way channel through which TAS and the users of telecommunication services could exchange ideas and information on how the local telecommunication industry can best serve the needs of industry and residential end-users.

11 The TUC is represented by various trade and business associations which in turn, represent the major users of telecommunications services. The member organisations of the TUC include CASE, the various chambers of commerce, and associations representing banks, retailers, manufacturers and other industry sectors.

12 The composition of the TUC is such that major users of telecommunication services in all sectors of the economy, including the individual users, are amply represented.

13 An example of how users' feedback have helped in TAS' policy formulation is the 1-900 audiotex service.

14 Two years ago, TAS opened up the 1-900 audiotex service market to allow operators in Singapore to provide audiotex service through the access telephone code 1-900. This was meant to be an information service which provides quick and timely audio information such as entertainment, news, sports updates and financial reports for a fee.

15 However, TAS received feedback from a number of end-users that the service has resulted in instances of unauthorised usage by children without the consent of parents. Some suggested that there should be a way for parents to bar access to 1-900 services.

16 On receiving these feedback, TAS sets out to work out a solution with Singapore Telecom that will resolve parents' concerns and yet provides flexibility to the end-users.

It was felt that there should be a choice of either to bar all 1-900 outgoing calls totally, or to have 1-900 calls barred as and when they wished.

17 I am pleased to say that SingTel is now ready to implement the solution. End-users will be offered two schemes - fixed and flexible barring options. For the fixed barring services, SingTel would modify an existing software in the switching system to ensure that all 1-900 numbers would not be put through. End-users will be able to opt for the fixed barring service which shall be provided free of charge by SingTel. As for the flexible barring option, SingTel would make use of the current Phone Plus software to activate or deactivate the barring using a 5-digit password. A small fee will be levied for the flexible barring option.

18 Besides the TUC, TAS also welcomes feedback from individuals through the TAS Web Site, known as TAS Info-Hub. The TAS Info-Hub provides net users with information about TAS and the telecommunications and postal industries.

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19 Under the section "TAS and Consumers", net users will find some of the service standards which TAS has set for service providers to comply with. There will also be results of performance surveys on services, such as public internet access services, leased circuits and value-added services which TAS conducts from time to time. There

is also a "Consumer Feedback Form", for the public to forward his or her comments, suggestions or feedback on services.

20 The formation of the TUC represents yet another milestone in the development of our telecommunication industry.

21 I look forward to the active contributions and participation from members of the TUC. With your help, TAS will be better placed to ensure that our telecommunication industry will continue to maintain its key cornerstone position in making Singapore a better and more competitive place to do business.

22 In closing, I would like to thank the various trade, business and consumer associations for their support to the TUC. It leaves me to wish the TUC every success in its efforts to pursue the interests and welfare of the users of the telecommunication service.

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23 With that, it is my pleasure to declare the Telecommunications Users Committee officially launched.

Thank you.