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Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

Media Division, Ministry of Information and the Arts, #36-00 PSA Building, 460
Alexandra Road, Singapore 119963. Tel: 3757794/5

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SPEECH BY GEORGE YEO, MINISTER FOR INFORMATION
& THE ARTS AND 2ND MINISTER FOR TRADE & INDUSTRY,
AT THE LAUNCH OF CHANNEL NEWSASIA ON 1 MAR 99
AT 9.00 AM

The launch of Channel NewsAsia is a major milestone in the development of local broadcasting. Launched at a time of economic crisis when many others would hold back their expansion plans, it is a bold move by the Television Corporation of Singapore, a move which would hopefully help it become a significant player in the regional broadcasting industry.

Information Technology has changed the media environment dramatically. Bandwidth as a constraint on broadcasting is becoming much less of a problem. The result is a proliferation of channels, market segmentation and product differentiation. The Internet and Web TV will further multiply the number of news sources available to the individual. In this cacophony, it is crucial that the Asian viewpoint, which occasionally will include the Singapore viewpoint, is also put across.

Western media companies play a major role in providing news to Asians. This is important but there is also a tendency for many of these companies to present Asia from a Western viewpoint. In order for Asians to have a wider range of choices, news presented from an Asian viewpoint should also be available. The

availability of bandwidth is therefore an opportunity for Asian media companies like TCS to create their own niches.

Willy-nilly, the international media has become an inseparable part of the domestic political process. Recent events in Indonesia and Malaysia demonstrate how the international media not only report on political developments, they also influence the course of these political developments. Censorship is becoming more and more difficult to impose. Official broadcasts which lack credibility are quickly discounted and alternative sources turned to. Governments know that they have to work under the glare of the international media. Some have learnt to use the international media to reach their own domestic audiences. For example, all contending groups in Indonesia now exploit the international media for their own purposes. Last year, CNBC played the video tape of former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's message to Malaysians after he was detained. Reporting by the international media has forced the Malaysian government to manage the domestic political process in a different way. Information technology has changed the playing field to the advantage of some players and to the disadvantage of others.

With the world becoming more complex and knowledge-intensive, the demand for timely and accurate news has grown exponentially. CNN's live coverage of the Gulf War marked a turning point in the development of the international media. Indeed, CNN's real-time coverage became a part of the war itself. Listeners and viewers want to know about events and developments as they unfold. No one is prepared to wait until 10.30 in the evening to catch up on what has happened in the day.

It is therefore timely that TCS has set up this new channel. It will help to meet a growing demand for news in real-time presented from an Asian viewpoint, especially among professionals, managers, executives and businessmen. With the region in the middle of a crisis, they want to be kept informed at all hours. Channel NewsAsia will supplement the other international news channels and help to make Singapore a business centre and a media hub.

To be sure, Channel NewsAsia is launched at a time when newscasting has never been more competitive. CNBC Asia, BBC World and CNN are all established names. It is therefore crucial for Channel NewsAsia to differentiate itself from the competition and find its own niche.

Channel NewsAsia's declared strategy is to present news from an Asian perspective. Because of TCS' history and its roots in Asia, Channel NewsAsia's brand of journalism will reflect a different set of nuances and subtleties. Channel NewsAsia cannot displace the big boys but it can supplement what the big boys offer. Thoughtful Asian viewers would appreciate the different perspective that Channel NewsAsia brings.

Increasingly, we must expect Singaporeans to turn to a variety of sources for news about the world, including news about Singapore. If we are to succeed as a knowledge-based economy, Singaporeans must have the fullest access to the widest sources of news. Singapore already has one of the greatest concentrations of international media in the region today. Singaporeans are also educated in English and access the Anglo-Saxon media directly. Channel NewsAsia will help Singaporeans find a good balance between international and local sources of news, and keep us all

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better informed.

My congratulations and best wishes to Channel NewsAsia on this exciting new enterprise.

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