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SPEECH BY MR YEO CHEOW TONG, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ON THE LAUNCH OF THE VIETNAM-SINGAPORE SEA-ME-WE3 DIRECT CABLE LINK, 3 MARCH, 3.30 PM

INTRODUCTION

H.E. Dr.Mai Liem Truc, Secretary General, Department General of Post and Telecommunications, Vietnam, Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1 The 20th century has witnessed unprecedented growth in science and technology having a profound impact on almost all walks of human life. Advances in telecommunication and information technologies have revolutionized the way in which people live, work, do business, and even perceive each other.

2 Technological breakthroughs in the past three decades, followed by intense commercialization in the 90's has led to an increased blurring of the fine lines dividing telecommunications, broadcasting and IT. It is envisaged that this trend towards *convergence* will continue well into the next century.

3 The global info-communications revolution has all but destroyed the traditional barrier to human interaction - distance. Historically, physical distance was the most significant factor that underlined the cost of communications. The cost of a phone call was usually roughly proportional to the distance between the calling and the called parties. That is no longer so.

4 In recent years, advances in Fibre Optics & Satellite technologies have steadily eroded the distance premium. Furthermore, the info-communications revolution has not only had the effect on driving communication costs down, but also has increased the range of options available for communications. Depending on the user's needs there is a info-communication service for every pocket.

5 As nations and people come increasingly to depend on the information, making it an inalienable part of our lives, it becomes imperative to focus on a ubiquitous, seamless, integrated services information infrastructure. The ability to deliver a whole gamut of multimedia information services to users, regardless of their physical location or terminals used for access is a promise which seeks fulfillment in the era of convergence.

ENHANCING REGIONAL INFORMATION INFRASTRUCTURE

6 We have strongly supported the development of info-communication infrastructure in the Asia Pacific region. Working through APEC, we have been part of the effort in building an extensive regional infrastructure - through initiatives like the Asia Pacific Information Infrastructure (APII). More recently, we have Singapore and Vietnam have been working together under the ASEAN umbrella to usher in e-Asean; bringing ASEAN into the Internet age. E-Asean visualises closer cooperation in the areas of trade, tourism and education among the ASEAN countries - and to do achieve this it is necessary to further develop the telecommunication infrastructure within the region. The commissioning of the SEA-ME-WE3 link between Singapore and Vietnam is a welcome step in this direction.

7 SEA-ME-WE3 is probably the longest submarine cable in the world and connects more than 92 countries, linking the Pacific Rim, through South East Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East to Europe. Prior to the commissioning of

this link, Singapore has about 10 Gbps total submarine cable capacity going to the region. SEA-ME-WE3 will enable us to link up these countries with 20 Gbps capacity, which would eventually be scaled up to over 40 Gbps by the end of the year. In total, this would mean a 5-fold increase in Singapore's submarine cable capacity.

8 Being able to carry millions of telephone calls and Internet traffic in the order of gigabits per second, this cable will bring people and businesses ever closer together. It has been observed that increase in telephone density is very often linked to a manifold increase in economic growth. Poised as we are at an interesting point in history, when the baton of growth is being passed from the traditional industries to the new knowledge-based industries, I am sure that SEA-ME-WE3 will be a harbinger of economic prosperity and friendship amongst our peoples.

CONCLUSION

9 I understand that this is the first time that there is a direct telecommunications link connecting our two countries. This link will enable consumers and businesses in both countries to enjoy high-quality and reliable telecommunications services, and make such services more affordable to all. The direct link will also serve as an ideal backbone for the growing Internet traffic as well as interactive broadband multimedia services. I am sure that there is tremendous excitement on both sides to unleash the potential that this link has created.

10 In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the teams from Singapore and Vietnam who with their tireless efforts have made this possible. I commend the close cooperation and teamwork between the engineers, technicians and managers of VNPT and Singapore Telecom and wish them every success.

11 Thank you.
