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Subject: (EMBARGOED) Speech by Mr Yeo Cheow Tong, 8 March 2000, 4.00 p.m.

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

Media Division, Ministry of Information and the Arts, #36-00 PSA Building, 460 Alexandra Road,
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**Speech by Mr Yeo Cheow Tong,
Minister for Communications and Information Technology,
at the Opening of the Singapore Post Centre,
8 March 2000, 4 pm**

Over the last three decades, the advent of technology has drastically changed the way humans communicate. The appearance of the fax machine in the mid 70's dealt a death blow to the telex machine, and the development of the Internet and e-mail in the 90's means everyone and every organisation can be easily connected today. Technological advances have indeed shrunk our world, and enabled social and business communications to become almost effortless. As a result of all these developments, many people expected the traditional postal services to become a twilight business, without any chance of survival in this electronic age.

2. However, this has not been borne out by reality. World mail volume continues to grow at about 3% each year. The growth rate is also projected to remain at this level for the next ten years. In Singapore, mail volume has increased by about 30 million items per year over the last five years, with business mail forming about 80% of the volume. It shows that traditional postal

communication is still important, despite the speed which the telephone, fax or email has to offer.

3. But as we move towards our goal of becoming a totally networked society, the inevitable trend is that traditional letters between individuals, between businesses and between businesses and individuals will decline. This will come about as more people and businesses discover the convenience and efficacy of electronic communication and commerce, and as transactions over the Internet become more secure.

4. To be effective in this new century, the postal services sector must learn to adapt and move with the times. The new-generation consumers will demand faster services from the comfort of their home. To meet the needs of this new breed of cyber-consumers, the postal service must harness new technology to improve its workflow, efficiency and customer service.

5. Over the past three decades, Singapore has been incorporating technological changes to the postal services sector. We started to mechanize mail-sorting processes in the early 70s. In the post offices, service quality and staff productivity has improved with the installation of computerised systems. Self-service Automated Machines were introduced in 1997, providing the public with 24-hour basic postal and bill payment services. Consumers can now pay their mobile phone or utility bills at the post offices.

6. Singapore Post has done well in catering to both individual and business consumers, and will continue to play a key role in the postal services sector. The introduction of Virtual Post and electronic postage services will provide opportunities for individuals to transit from the physical hard-copy world to the all-new electronic world of cyberspace. Nevertheless, the physical network of post offices, which remains the central meeting-place for a variety of consumer services, will still be around for those in our society who need them.

7. The variety of new services offered to business organisations, such as hybrid mail and certification authority services, has also benefited them tremendously. Hybrid mail, which essentially is a combination of electronic and physical mail, allows organisations to focus on their core business, and to outsource their printing and posting to DataPost, a SingPost subsidiary. The cost reductions has enabled organisations to perform their day-to-day business functions more easily and efficiently. In recognition of more businesses going online, SingPost, together with CISCO, has also set up a joint venture, ID.Safe

to issue digital certificates. This will help ensure secure transactions over the Internet.

8. I am indeed glad to see SingPost continuing to develop innovative services to cater to the differing needs of the consumer. One example is MyStamp. Launched on 8 Mar 2000, MyStamp will allow consumers to have their photographs printed on a tab attached to an actual stamp. We will be the third country in the world, after Australia and Switzerland, to offer this. SingPost will conduct a 6 months trial run of MyStamp, to determine consumer and business viability. With increasing competition from electronic forms of communications, personalised stamps could well go a long way in ensuring that postage stamps remain relevant in today's world and help make social mail an enjoyable form of communication.

9. I am also happy to announce that, with effect from 1 Apr 2000, the management of the Singapore Philatelic Museum will be transferred from the Infocomm Development Authority to the National Heritage Board. Under this transfer, SingPost has agreed to co-fund 50% of the museum's operational costs, with the National Heritage Board funding the rest from the Philatelic Fund. The Singapore Philatelic Museum, or SPM, was set up in April 1995, as a wholly owned subsidiary of the ex-Telecom Authority of Singapore. SPM will continue to cultivate interest in philately, and promote the use and study of Singapore's philatelic materials as an educational tool on our postal history.

10. The National Heritage Board, with its expertise on heritage matters, would be in a better position to manage the SPM and make it more attractive to visitors. At the same time, SPM personnel would have more scope for professional development as they can tap on the larger NHB network.

11. The global trend has been towards automated mail processing over the past decade. SingPost, in recognition of this trend, has invested \$380 million on the construction of a custom-built sorting complex that would automate mail sorting and processing. The Singapore Post Centre came into operation in Sep 1998, housing a state-of-the-art mail processing system. The system sorts mail mechanically, down to the postman's delivery route. This new facility will greatly strengthen Singapore's position as a 24-hour postal and mail processing hub.

12. I look forward to greater innovations from SingPost, aimed at further improving efficiency, enhancing customer service and meeting the info-

communications challenges of the new century. With that, it is now my great pleasure to declare the new Singapore Post Centre officially open.

National Archives of Singapore