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SPEECH BY MR ONG TENG CHEONG, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS,  
AT THE INAUGURATION CEREMONY OF THE ASEAN PHILIPPINES-  
SINGAPORE SUBMARINE CABLE ON TUESDAY, 3 OCTOBER 1978  
AT 10.15 A.M. AT CRYSTAL BALLROOM, HYATT HOTEL

The ASEAN Philippines-Singapore Submarine Cable, which we are inaugurating this morning, is one of the segments of the proposed ASEAN Submarine Cable Network designed to link all the five ASEAN countries eventually. Built and now completed at a cost of \$116 million, it will lead to more and better communications within the ASEAN region and from the region to the rest of the world.

The history of submarine cables only goes back to about a hundred and twenty years ago. The first cable, across the English Channel was unsuccessful. But progress was made by 1858, a century ago, when the first transatlantic cable was laid. This cable had a spectacular but short life. It was however not until 1956 that the first voice cable was laid under the Atlantic. The submarine cable's first appearance in South-East Asia was in 1967 in the form of SEACOM, the South-East Asia Commonwealth Submarine Cable. With a capacity of 80 high-quality voice channels, it linked Singapore to Kota Kinabalu, Hongkong, Guam and Australia and then on to Canada and United Kingdom.

Although the modern satellite communication system, with its multi-access nature permitting operations to many countries via an orbiting satellite, has revolutionised the field of international telecommunications, the submarine cable continues to play an important part. Developments in submarine cable technology like the multi-channel capacity cables have made them competitive with satellite communications. Telecommunication experts have also realised the need for what is known as systems diversity, that is, having fallback systems such as microwaves and submarine cables to supplement the satellite system.

When ASEAN was founded in 1967, the five member countries recognised the importance of telecommunications in promoting regional cooperation in the region. They realised that an essential ingredient of economic growth and cooperation will always be telecommunications. They therefore decided to implement an ASEAN cable network linking ASEAN capitals to each other.

Today, we see the beginning of the culmination of all these efforts. The Philippines-Singapore cable spans approximately 1500 nautical miles across the South China Sea between the Currimao Cable Station in North Luzon and the Katong Cable Station in Singapore. With a capacity of 1380 voice channels it can be used to carry all types of telecommunications traffic including telephone, telex, telegraph and data.

The inauguration of the Philippines-Singapore cable today is a physical and tangible manifestation of what ASEAN cooperation can accomplish. It reflects the successful efforts of ASEAN states to carry out joint endeavours mutually beneficial to all. All the five ASEAN nations have substantial investment in the cable. The remaining investors are international telecommunication organizations from Australia, Japan and the United Kingdom.

It is gratifying to observe that while we are assembled here today to officiate at the inauguration of the Philippines-Singapore cable, construction of another segment of the ASEAN cable network, the Indonesia-Singapore cable, is already under way. This is expected to be completed in 1980 at a cost of \$74 million. Discussions on the Singapore-Malaysia and Malaysia-Thailand cables are currently in progress and this segment of the ASEAN cable network is expected to be ready for operation in 1981. With the completion of the Thailand-Philippines cable by 1982/83, the entire ASEAN cable network will be implemented. This would prepare us well for the greater level of communications likely to be generated between our increasingly important region and the rest of the world. Telephone subscribers in the region would be able to dial directly and speak to each other at the cheapest possible rate.

It now gives me great pleasure to commission the operation of the ASEAN Philippines-Singapore Submarine Cable.