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SPEECH BY MR ONG TENG CHEONG, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS,
ON THE OPENING OF COMMUNIC ASIA 79 EXHIBITION AND CONFERENCE
AT HYATT HOTEL ON WEDNESDAY, 5 DECEMBER '79 AT 9.00 AM

I am happy to be here to open Communic Asia 79 which is being held for the first time in Singapore. I am told that about 250 manufacturers of communication equipment from 17 countries are taking part in this exhibition. Guests from various countries in the region have been invited to view the exhibition and to attend the conference being held simultaneously. To all the participants and visitors, I wish to extend a warm welcome.

The timing of this exhibition could not have been better chosen. It coincides with the one hundred years of service commemorated by Telecoms this year. Centenaries are traditionally used to take stock of achievements, to set new goals and to map out the strategies for the future. The Centenary of telephone service in Singapore is no exception. Wisely, Telecoms used the occasion to reaffirm its commitment to modernise and to maintain Singapore in the forefront of telecommunications. Consequently, this exhibition is an excellent opportunity for Telecoms and other users of telecommunications equipment to keep up-to-date with the latest development in the industry. The display of equipment will also enable potential users to know what is available in the market today.

Telecommunications technology have made tremendous progress over the last thirty years. The turning point was made with the invention of the transistor in 1947. This marvellous invention paved the way for modern telecommunications which couple computers with telecommunication equipment to exploit the infinite capacity of computers to maximum advantage. With the latest invention of micro-processors and the use of optic fibres in place of copper

cables, /2.

cables, the stage is now set for the development of sophisticated telecommunications equipment. It will revolutionise the whole concept of telecommunications. As a result some of the services which we can hope to enjoy both at home and in the office are cable television, telemetering, televue and teleconferencing services.

The introduction of these new services and facilities is significant. In this age when the spectre of oil shortage looms large, the concept of electronics technology which aims to integrate voice, video and data service is an attractive one. It becomes a necessity if we are to cut down on journeys in order to economise on the use of precious oil reserves. This is the concept of total telecommunications which is the long term plan of Telecoms.

Such sophisticated facilities are expensive because of the high capital cost of the equipment used. Initially it can be made available to a limited number of users only. However, with advancement in technology there is no doubt that more of us will be able to benefit from them in the near future. Already, with the cost of electronic components decreasing over the years, Telecoms have been able to improve its existing facilities and add new ones at no extra charge at all to users.

As costs decrease with the use of more advanced technology, a stage must come when certain existing services become no longer competitive. An example is the dispatch of mail by post. This may soon be superseded by electronic mail. Electronic mail is a relatively new concept and has the advantages of speed and reliability. When the service becomes less expensive to provide, the Postal department and Telecoms could find themselves in a situation where they have to compete for the same market. Because of this, my Ministry will have to consider whether it would be in national interest to pool the resources of these two organisations through a merger. Such a possibility has already presented itself and is now being studied by the managements concerned. If it is feasible, it would make available a cheap, speedy and reliable service to a large sector of our public.

I have now great pleasure in declaring Communic Asia 79 open.