

**PROPOSED SPEECH BY DR LEE BOON YANG
MINISTER FOR INFORMATION, COMMUNICATIONS & THE ARTS
SINGAPORE
AT THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY
12 DECEMBER 2003 AT 1000H, GENEVA PALEXPO**

Excellencies

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Global developments

In 1981, IBM introduced the first home computers, the PC and PC/XT models. This signalled the beginning of the Information Age. With home computers, or personal computers, ordinary people had the digital processing power hitherto reserved for research institutions and big companies. The pace of development was accelerated by the advent of the Internet soon after. Today, in the globalised economic environment, the ability to access, digest and deploy the storm of information swirling around us on the Internet and through the multiple media channels has become critical for development, progress and economic success.

2 Rapid advances in information and telecommunications technology have also empowered groups and individuals to transcend boundaries and connect directly with their counterparts across the world. These

developments have created new opportunities and benefits for people around the world. However there are concerns that these positive impacts may not evenly distributed. At the same time the arrival of the Information Age also brought along new problems and challenges which spur the effort to seek appropriate responses. It is clear that the information revolution has a profound impact on tangible and intangible issues such as economic competitiveness, culture, social values and life-styles.

The WSIS Process

3 It is also clear that the trend is irreversible. It is therefore incumbent upon governments to ensure that our people are able to benefit from the ICT revolution. In a globalised information society where existing patterns and boundaries of national and cross-border interactions are constantly being redefined, we have to find new ways to manage these changes. Hence it is timely and particularly relevant for the Summit to consider and adopt the Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action to provide an appropriate framework to guide nations towards better managing the ICT revolution.

4 The process of seeking agreement on the best way to handle such issues is never easy. This is evident from the long and occasionally contentious preparatory discussions over the documents. We may differ in our approaches and our responses, but diversity is not necessarily a bad thing. It is by listening to others that we are able to engage in thorough discussion and formulate consensus on our responses. This Summit has provided us with an opportunity to do just that. We will be meeting again two years from now in Tunis for the second phase of the Summit. That will be another opportunity for us to build on the success of this Summit and expand the common ground and opportunities for collaboration in a global information society.

Asia's progress

5 Asia has made good progress in embracing the Information Society, through the rolling out of ICT infrastructure and promoting ICT adoption. Just last month, the ITU announced the 2002 Digital Access Index. ^{From} In Asia, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore were reported to have made the greatest progress in ICT from 1998 to 2002.

6 Singapore's emphasis on ICT development mirrors that of other countries in the South-East Asia. Together with our ASEAN partners, we

have shared experience and worked on mutually beneficial projects to help ASEAN Members to bridge the digital divide and tap the growth of digital opportunities. Singapore strongly supports ASEAN's Joint Statement to the WSIS outlining the efforts and progress achieved.

Singapore's efforts to develop the Information Society

7 Singapore saw the importance of harnessing the forces released by the Information Revolution in the early 1980s. The government led with its first public sector computerization project. Since then, we have continued to equip our workforce with the latest ICT skills, facilitate ICT collaboration and partnerships with the private sector and encouraged the adoption of ICT at work, in education and at home. We adopted comprehensive ICT policies, pragmatic and transparent regulatory framework, as well as encouraged industry capability development. The on-going Connected Singapore Masterplan leverages on the power of ICT to link up our citizens, entrepreneurs and business sectors to compete in the globalised economy. Today, 7 out of 10 households in Singapore have a computer. 6 out of 10 Singaporeans have access to the Internet and are IT-literate. IT-literacy and usage of online services are continuing to grow, as more and more Singaporeans realised the

power of the Internet for education, information, leisure and communication.

8 The Government is a leader in the use of ICT and many public services are offered through an e-government network. Today, about 1,600 public services can be transacted online. One of the most popular e-services has been the online filing of income tax returns. We have also launched a public consultation portal this year for members of the public to give feedback on government policies. The Government has recently launched another initiative to provide an even more citizen-friendly and comprehensive e-government.

Future challenges

9 While Singapore has made some progress towards an Information Society, there are still challenges and work to be done. These efforts include enhancing access to multi-lingual content, ensuring that the young and old alike have meaningful access to ICT, bringing broadband to more people, sharpening IT skills for our workforce, keeping workers updated with the latest technological advancements and managing competition in a fast converging ICT sector. Whatever the challenges, we believe that remaining focused on developing and using ICT will continue

to yield dividends for our people and empower Singaporeans to become active citizens of an Information Society. Singapore is also ready to work with all to bring about a connected world to realise the full potential and benefit of the Information Society.

Thank you