

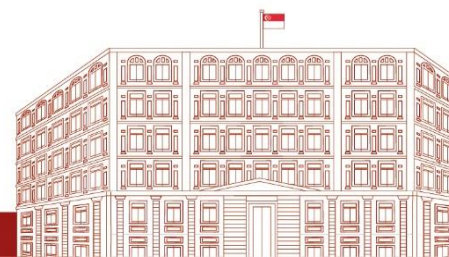
**Keynote Address by Senior Minister of State Janil Puthucheary
Asia Tech x Singapore Industry Headliners Stage
14 July 2021 (Wednesday)**

Ladies and gentlemen,
Colleagues and friends.

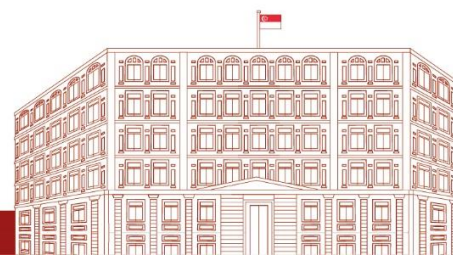
1. Good morning. Thank you for the invitation to join you on the Industry Headliners stage at Asia Tech x Singapore (ATxSG).
2. Let me begin by thanking our partner, Informa Tech, for gathering such an eminent array of speakers for today's event. Singapore has always endeavoured to convene thinkers and doers, and forge connections even in, or maybe, especially in difficult times. This week, we welcome some of the best minds in tech to address some of our most fascinating – and challenging – questions today.
3. Digital technology has become an indispensable part of life. The internet connects almost 60%¹ of the world's population. Our own neighbourhood is more connected than ever, with 7 in 10² Southeast Asians using the internet. Social media networks like TikTok and Twitter have catalysed new forms of participation. Others, like Google and Grab, have reinvented the delivery of information and services. Each shift has reshaped whole sectors of the economy and our lives.
4. The life-changing event in recent times has been COVID-19. In my concurrent role as Senior Minister of State for Health, my colleagues and I constantly grapple with how to keep our people safe, while allowing some aspects of life to return to normal. Amid the crisis, we have seen the resilience and innovative capacity of our people, to move forward and find new possibilities.
5. Indeed, disruption can be a powerful force for change. With meetings and transactions shifting online, businesses have adapted to meet customers' needs within the safety of home. A study by McKinsey found that COVID-19 has accelerated the digitisation of products and services worldwide by 7 years; and in the Asia-Pacific, by more than 10 years.

¹ Source: *Digital 2021: Global Overview Report* (We Are Social, Hootsuite); verified with Statista.

² Source: *e-Economy SEA 2020* (Google, Temasek, Bain & Co.).

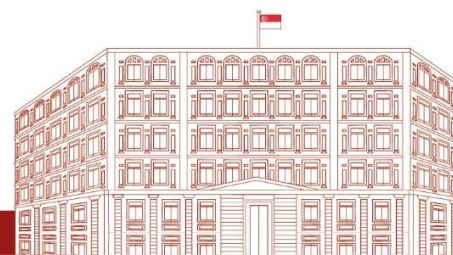


6. Transformation on this scale would not be possible without the tech industry playing several important roles. First, as builders of digital infrastructure: from the telcos delivering connectivity at scale, to platforms facilitating trusted transactions, these are the rails on which our digital economy operates. Second, as providers of digital solutions: from teleconferencing to cybersecurity, these help us navigate the digital economy with confidence and ease. Third, as innovators of products that reach new markets, grow new demand, and bring value to people's lives. Finally, as generators of content that circulates online: industry players have reinvented broadcast and media, bringing information and entertainment to new audiences in new ways.
7. We are privileged today to hear directly from the women and men who have led many of these transformations. I won't steal their thunder, but as we reflect on the theme of 'Redefining Tech for a Better Future', let me offer some observations.
8. First, I'd like to emphasise the importance of partnerships in safeguarding our digital domain. A key aspect of this is cybersecurity, which is woven into many of our policies. Our Cyber Security Agency (CSA) supports organisations and individuals in strengthening their cybersecurity posture, works on upstream measures to secure Singapore's core digital infrastructure, and has introduced initiatives like the Cybersecurity Labelling Scheme to increase market demand for secure user devices.
9. But government is only half of the equation. Last year, we welcomed the launch of Cisco's Innovation Centre and Cybersecurity Centre of Excellence, which has strengthened our capabilities and the cybersecurity ecosystem here.
10. Such partnerships across the ecosystem are critical, because the work of building a safe and resilient digital domain spans many areas. It requires us to protect our community, including those who are more vulnerable, against those who misuse digital tools to exploit personal information, or commit crimes and abuse online. It also requires us to be alert and responsive to how misinformation and manipulation can be used to sow discord.
11. What lies at the nexus of all these concerns is Trust, which is a core pillar of the ATxSG programme. In the days ahead, our partnerships must focus on shoring up Trust at the following interfaces: Between people and the tech they use, by developing fit-for-purpose legal and technical frameworks to facilitate the governance of emerging technologies like AI; and between people, as they interact on and across tech platforms, by pre-empting and preventing the harms that I have mentioned, through public education efforts, and collaborations with industry.
12. We have made important progress in some of these areas. In 2019, for instance, we launched our Model AI Governance Framework after extensive consultations with



industry, and have since developed it further with a second edition released last year. With the onset of COVID-19, we have also worked with companies like Facebook to increase the prominence of authoritative information sources, for reassurance and public safety. But there is increasing urgency to our efforts as the risks are expected to grow; both in complexity, and their power to erode our social compact.

13. A safe and resilient digital domain is not only one where citizens can interact confidently, but also one where businesses can transact seamlessly, and enterprise can flourish. That is why it is so important for the industry to work hand-in-hand with governments to address the risks ahead. The private sector's dynamism, capabilities and foresight will be crucial as we strive to make digital spaces more trusted, secure, and resilient.
14. The risks I have outlined should not be taken lightly, but they should also not prevent us from seeing, and seizing, the opportunities ahead. Government and industry stand to gain from joining forces to make the most of these possibilities.
15. Cities like Singapore have been connecting points for networks of enterprise and exploration. Instead of the trade winds of the past, we rely today on the possibilities of the digital domain, to drive new convergences in a networked world.
16. Industry is a key part of this story. Businesses, and especially SMEs, can ride the momentum of COVID-19 to build new capabilities and grasp the opportunities ahead. In 2020 alone, we supported 40,000 businesses in adopting new digital solutions through our SMEs Go Digital programme. More than 75,000 have benefited since 2017. Beyond tools like collaboration software which are particularly useful in the pandemic, many have also taken up advanced digital solutions tailored to specific sectors like healthcare or construction, which build longer-term resilience.
17. We also invite firms to partner with us in deepening our shared talent pool. Our ongoing collaborations with industry leaders like Google, Facebook, and Microsoft help develop important digital skillsets, and build a future-ready workforce.
18. Finally, we want to work together to create a conducive environment for growth and innovation. We recently unveiled plans to sustain investment in research, innovation and enterprise at 1% of GDP, or \$25 billion, over the next five years. Part of this will be allocated to investments in digital technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, communications and connectivity, trust technologies like blockchain, and quantum computing. At the end of last year, we launched the Singapore Blockchain Innovation Programme, involving partnerships with more than 70 firms to create 17 blockchain related projects over three years, starting with trade and logistics, and supply chain.



Through such initiatives, we hope to support you in bringing fresh ideas to market here in Singapore, and then to the world.

19. The more technology transforms our world, the more essential it is for us to act together to contain the risks – and capture the opportunities – that emerge. As we look forward to many meaningful conversations today on ‘Redefining Tech for a Better Future’, I am convinced that the ‘Better Future’ we seek is not just at our fingertips. It is in our hands.

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