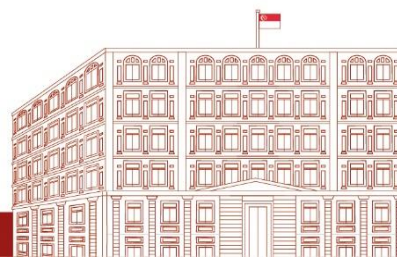


SPEECH BY PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY, MS RAHAYU MAHZAM AT THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY DEBATE, 4 MARCH 2022

“Enriching and empowering our people through Digital”

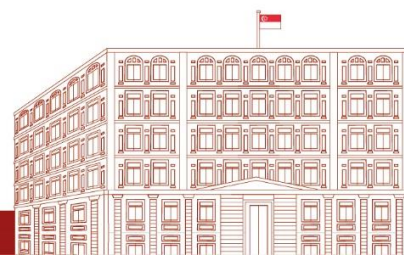
1. Mr. Chairman, let me first start by thanking members for their questions and interest in MCI’s work.
2. I will elaborate on MCI’s plans to build a society which continues to be inclusive, relevant, and prepared for our digital future.
3. As Minister Josephine Teo mentioned, digital technologies are very much a part of our daily lives.
4. Going digital has opened numerous possibilities.
 - a. From facilitating daily interactions with family and friends,
 - b. To engendering new conveniences in many aspects of our lives.
5. This is why **digital access and meaningful engagement with technologies have become key to our quality of lives today.**
6. MCI will continue strengthening digital literacy and wellness, by working closely with community partners and volunteers to achieve three key goals:
 - a. First, **digital access and digital adoption for all,**
 - b. Next, **learning and mastery of digital skills,** for all to seize new opportunities in the digital economy, and
 - c. Equally important, **for our people to be equipped to recognise and respond to dangers online.**



7. To ensure that Singaporeans, regardless of age, background, or skill level are empowered to **take charge of their own digital future.**

Digital access as a basic good

8. Our first goal of digital access and adoption is a basic good that everyone should have, comprising internet connectivity, tech devices, and the ability to make use of them.
 - a. I recognise that this is an issue close to the hearts of many Members, including SPS Baey Yam Keng, Mr Seah Kian Peng, Mr Sharael Taha and Ms Hany Soh.
9. Our broadband connectivity and basic devices are important to our people.
 - a. Singapore is a highly connected society. 98% of households have access to broadband, and 99% of households with children under 15 have access to computers. Still, we recognise that every Singaporean must have this access.
 - b. Today, we have digital access programmes such as **NEU PC Plus** and **Home Access**. Since 2020, these initiatives have assisted more than 34,000 low-income households with their digital access needs. Almost double the number, as compared to those assisted before the pandemic.
 - c. Moving forward, we are looking to enhance our digital access programmes to reach more low-income households and help them more conveniently receive affordable digital access.
 - i. This will include working with MSF and social service organisations to engage and assist low-income households in their applications.



Having ensured that our people have access to the digital realm, **we also look at addressing the needs of particular segments of individuals and businesses so that they can adopt – that is to use and benefit from – digital.**

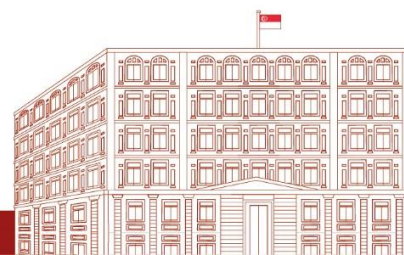
- a. Mr Sharael Taha highlighted that there may be some in the community who are less familiar with the digital space, including seniors and some hawkers.

10. At the height of the pandemic, the SG Digital Office, SDO, was set up to engage precisely these groups that may need additional and tailored support.

- a. Since 2020, SDO's digital ambassadors have
 - i. Trained more than 130,000 seniors to adopt basic digital skills like using smartphones, and
 - ii. Empowered 11,000 hawkers to adopt e-payment solutions.

11. Working together with community partners, **the SDO will continue to keep its curriculum aligned with the digital landscape, and remain a key touchpoint for Singaporeans needing digital assistance.**

- a. One good example is the SDO's collaboration with the **Rahmatan Lil Alamin Foundation, RLAF.**
 - i. Today, RLAF partners 20 mosques to organise training sessions that equip seniors with applicable digital skills such as staying connected through Facebook, WhatsApp, and Zoom.
 - ii. The participants I spoke with at one of the sessions greatly appreciated the hands-on learning environment, in a safe space among friends.
 - iii. The Foundation intends to expand their outreach to more mosques, and deepen learning for seniors who have already picked up basic smartphone skills.



- iv. RLAf also plans to work with other community partners like Roses of Peace to scale their efforts by supplementing volunteers, curating curriculum, and launching a certification system to reward their seniors' learning.
- b. Many other partners have stepped forward to support our seniors.
 - i. The combined efforts of SDO and our partners have resulted in 84%¹ of seniors reporting that they own and use a smartphone in their daily lives.

Digital skills to unlock online learning and discovery

12. Moving on to the second goal. MCI will **continue to bridge digital knowledge and skills gaps, to help citizens keep pace with digitalisation.**

- a. The digital landscape is continually changing, with new technologies and new apps.

13. We aim to imbue in Singaporeans, a sense of confidence to continue to adapt to this changing space, to actively participate in the digital domain and confidently take on new digital opportunities.

- a. We plan to achieve this in two ways.

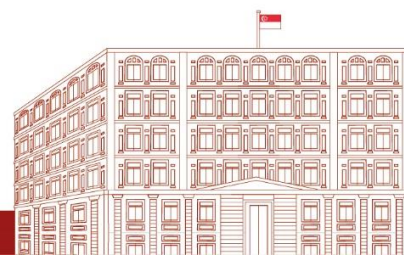
Digital for Life

14. First, by harnessing the community's reach, energy, and resources through the **Digital for Life** movement.

15. Last year, the **Digital for Life Fund** was established to provide funding assistance for ground-up digital inclusion initiatives.

- a. Since then, 22 projects have been supported under the fund, and are expected to benefit over 100,000 individuals across society.

¹ Source: IMDA Annual Survey on Infocomm Usage by Individuals; usage of smartphone for Singapore residents aged 60 and above has increased from 76% to 84% over 2019-2020.



- i. One example is **Byte.SG**, which runs the “Void Deck Technology Labs initiative”.
- ii. Through building skills and familiarity in science and technology topics, Byte.SG aims to bring technology awareness to children living in rental flats.
- iii. At one of Byte.SG’s recent sessions, I saw how the team used augmented reality (AR) and interactive online tools to bring the underwater world to life. Not only were the children excited by this, I was also fascinated by the demonstration!
- iv. Supported by the Digital for Life Fund, Byte.SG will scale their initiative to locations such as Nanyang, Bedok, Tanjong Pagar and Tampines, to help more children build digital confidence in a fun, empowering manner.

16. With our 3P partners, we will build on the Digital for Life movement and continue mobilising efforts on the ground by organising a series of events and activities in the coming months,

- a. This will culminate in a **Digital for Life Festival**, which will take place in the middle of the year.

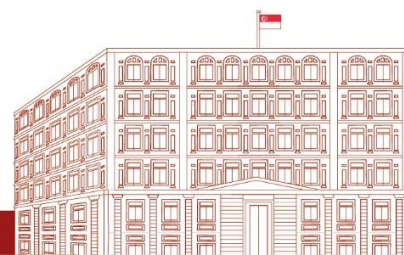
Lifelong learning at our libraries

17. Second, MCI is helping our people **deepen digital skills through our libraries**.

18. Our libraries and archives are important learning marketplaces to pique Singaporeans’ curiosity and inspire discovery, at every stage of our lives.

19. Despite pandemic-related restrictions, NLB’s steady loan numbers and growing digital reach exemplify the key role that they play.

- a. With at least 64% of Singapore’s residents visiting a library or accessing NLB’s online content last year,
- b. And over 98,000 individuals benefitting from NLB’s digital readiness programmes so far.

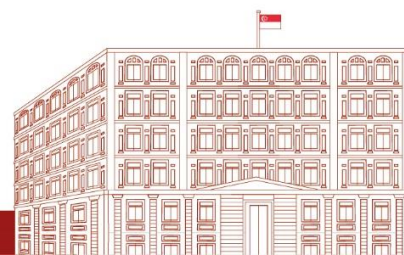


Libraries and Archives Blueprint 2025 (LAB25)

20. In the face of digitalisation, our libraries must keep up with the times, **to continue bringing citizens a wide array of learning opportunities**, as pointed out by Ms Jessica Tan.

21. To this end, our libraries will be refreshed under the Libraries and Archives Blueprint 2025, or **LAB25**.

- a. Many members have visited NLB's LAB25 showcase in the main lobby, and I encourage the rest to drop by if you have not done so.
- b. The showcase brings to life LAB25's four focus areas:
 - i. Building a learning marketplace,
 - ii. Nurturing an informed citizenry,
 - iii. Inspiring Singapore storytellers, and
 - iv. Being an equaliser in society.



22. To realise the LAB25 vision, NLB will:

- a. Launch “**ExperiencelT**”, in collaboration with leaders in innovation and technology such as Amazon Web Services, to drive interest and confidence in more in-depth learning about emerging technology,
- b. And partner the community to bring more Singapore stories to NLB’s network of libraries and make more collections accessible to the public.
 - i. A new Singapore Alcove showcasing Singapore stories and literature will be part of the Central Public Library after its revamp.
 - ii. It will be a “home” for the Singapore collection with regular programming by local authors, featuring immersive and experiential exhibits.

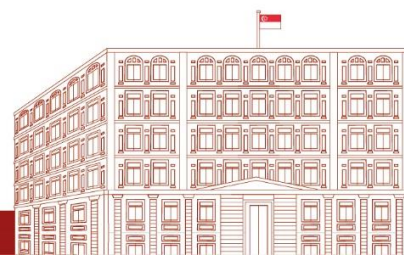
23. The opening of Punggol Regional Library later this year marks another step towards enabling, empowering, and equalising digital access.

24. Building on NLB’s ongoing efforts to ensure accessibility of its physical spaces, NLB will do more through a comprehensive suite of accessibility services for persons with disabilities, starting at Punggol Regional Library. This includes:

- a. **Accessible collections** comprising sensory and braille books, sign language with text, and books that are useful for caregivers on social and life skills,
- b. And **assistive technologies** such as “Immersive Readers” to cater to Singaporeans with different language needs.

25. At the same time, NLB is continually working to improve the physical spaces in our libraries.

- a. The Central Public Library and Marine Parade Public Library will be revamped later this year.



Learning begins with us

26. To encourage Singaporeans to actively take charge of their learning, NLB will make more resources and content available to wider audiences.

a. Ms Jessica Tan will be pleased to note that NLB will roll out Nodes in everyday spaces such as offices, food and beverage outlets, and parks around Singapore to provide new entry points for citizens to access digital resources.

i. As extensions of physical libraries, these Nodes will showcase NLB's digital collections, to interest Singaporeans to read and learn wherever they can.

b. Ms Hany Soh asked about our efforts to encourage young readers to master their mother tongue languages.

i. NLB continues to source for, select, and identify new avenues to grow their mother tongue language content.

ii. Over the past 3 years, NLB's mother tongue language collections for children have increased by 11%.

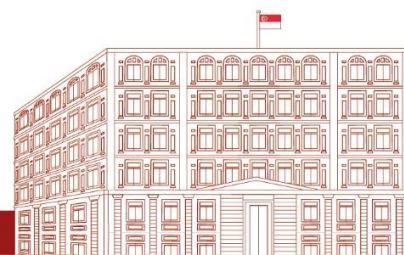
iii. Recently, NLB has begun offering award-winning English children's books translated into the vernacular.

iv. NLB also proactively encourages local publishers to publish their mother tongue language titles in both print and electronic formats to help widen access.

27. Mr Chairman, allow me to deliver the next segment of my speech in Malay, please.

28. Pendigitalan telah mempengaruhi kehidupan kita dalam pelbagai cara, dan ia telah membawa pelbagai peluang dan kemungkinan.

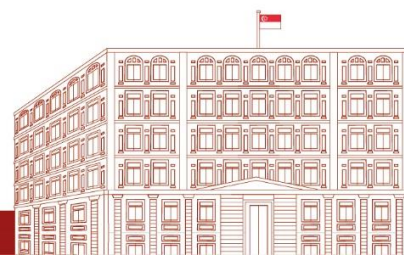
a. Sedang pendigitalan menjadi semakin berleluasa, ia juga amat penting bagi Pemerintah untuk memperkukuh usaha memperkasa masyarakat dari segi keupayaan digital dan kesejahteraan mereka.



- b. Bersama dengan rakan-rakan kongsi 3P, pihak Pemerintah akan:
 - i. Menyediakan akses digital dan mempertingkatkan kesediaan digital,
 - ii. Menggalakkan pembelajaran dan penguasaan kemahiran digital menerusi perpustakaan kita, dan
 - iii. Mempersiapkan rakyat kita, terutama sekali golongan yang mudah terjejas, untuk mengenal pasti dan berdepan dengan risiko dan ancaman dalam talian.

29. Dalam kita mempertingkatkan usaha memperkasa masyarakat, saya berbesar hati melihat ramai rakyat Singapura yang telah mengambil langkah berani untuk mempelajari kemahiran digital baru dan menyumbang kepada perkembangan ini. Satu contoh adalah sebuah rangkaian yang terdiri daripada lebih 300 individu. Mereka saling berkongsi peluang-peluang kerjaya dan bengkel-bengkel yang ada dalam sektor teknologi.

- a. Malah, beberapa individu dalam rangkaian ini asalnya datang daripada sektor-sektor yang tiada kaitan dengan teknologi; contohnya seorang yang datang daripada sektor pentadbiran penjagaan kesihatan dan telah menjadi pembangun teknologi Realiti Tambahan (AR), dan Realiti Maya (VR). Peralihan ini dilakukan setelah mereka menyaksikan bagaimana pandemik ini telah menjejaskan pembelajaran amali secara fizikal dan mereka mula sedar akan nilai penggunaan teknologi digital.
- b. Saya berpeluang berbual dengan salah seorang anggota rangkaian ini, iaitu Encik Mohd Afiq. Beliau merupakan pengasas “PlayTours”, satu alat dalam talian yang membolehkan para pengguna membuat rekaan pengalaman maya yang unik dan bermakna. Antaranya seperti, permainan ‘*escape room*’, dan permainan berbilang pemain pada masa nyata atau ‘*real-time multi-player games*’.
 - i. Sememangnya membangunkan sesuatu produk itu dari mula bukanlah sesuatu yang mudah. Namun, Afiq yakin tentang nilai yang akan dibawa oleh “Playtours” kepada dunia digital hari ini dan ini telah mendorong beliau untuk tetap tabah dan terus berusaha demi memajukan perniagaannya.



30. Apa yang pasti, individu-individu seperti Afiq menjadi inspirasi buat kita semua. Membangkitkan semangat dalam diri kita untuk sama-sama merebut peluang-peluang pendigitalan yang menanti kita.

31. Mr. Chairman, the third key goal that MCI is working towards, is to ensure that our **people are equipped to recognise and respond to dangers online**.

32. The digital way of life often remains challenging, novel, and unfamiliar to many of us.

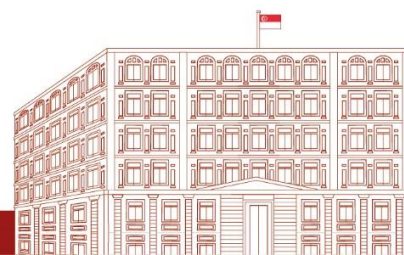
- a. Recent events such as phishing scams may have also caused us to be wary of going digital.
- b. But we cannot let these fears hold us back from unlocking new opportunities.
- c. Rather, **we must actively equip ourselves with the relevant knowledge and skills, to embrace technological advancements, with the ability to recognise and respond to the risks in the digital domain**.

33. I agree with Parliamentary Secretary Eric Chua, Dr Shahira Abdullah, Ms Tin Pei Ling, Dr Wan Rizal, Mr Don Wee that it is ever more important to ensure online safety for our people.

- a. Indeed, as more of our interactions and activities shift online, individuals and businesses will inevitably be exposed to digital risks, online harms, and potentially unhealthy addictions.
- b. Parents today are concerned that easy access to Internet among our youth, has made widespread dissemination of harmful and inappropriate content, such as pornography, quick and effortless.

34. In her speech, Minister Josephine Teo shared that MCI will be introducing new Codes of Practice to enhance online user safety.

- a. Legislation provides a critical safety net.
- b. But we all have a role to play too.
 - i. Beyond being digitally “book smart”, we must also build “street smarts” to identify, and avoid, new risks in the online world.



35. To gain more in-depth understanding of our citizens' digital readiness, MCI is refining metrics and indicators to be tracked in the Digital Readiness Survey.

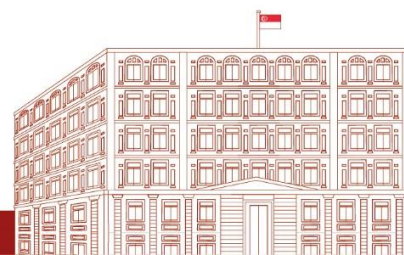
- a. In addition to existing measurements of digital adoption and usage, we intend to better understand the extent to which Singaporeans are able to perform essential digital tasks.
- b. We are also looking to understand citizens' digital habits and gaps between attitudes and behaviours. This will inform the development of more targeted interventions to improve digital adoption and address the needs of vulnerable segments.

36. New online harms are growing increasingly complex.

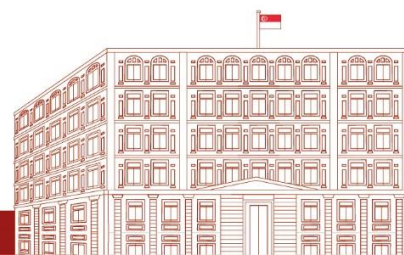
- a. Finding solutions to help users protect themselves from harmful online content requires the expertise of diverse stakeholders, such as legal professionals, tech specialists, regulators, educators, and community partners.

37. MCI is therefore working closely with our community partners to promote safe, responsible, and positive use of technology.

- a. In conjunction with Safer Internet Day on 8 February, the **Media Literacy Council (MLC)** partnered **Apple Singapore** to organise a cyber wellness webinar for primary school teachers and launched a fun and relatable video-making challenge for students to encourage the sharing of cyber wellness messages.
 - i. Beyond this webinar, MLC has also produced resources to help individuals avoid falling victim to technology-facilitated harms such as scams, sexual grooming, pornography, and online harassment.
 - ii. The council also promotes digital literacy resources to educate the public on being more discerning and empathetic online, to create a safer, smarter, and kinder internet for all.



- b. In September last year, TOUCH Cyber Wellness launched a programme titled “e-Conversations for the Family”, with a toolkit to guide parents in having conversations with their children about pornography and its dangers.



Sunlight Alliance for Action

38. MCI also launched Sunlight AfA, which I co-chair with SMS Sim Ann. The AfA aims to raise awareness of online sexual harassment and empower victims to address and deal with such incidents.

39. I thank Mr Fahmi Aliman for recognising the positive impact of Sunlight AfA.

a. Since its launch, the AfA has been studying the incidence of online harms in Singapore and how they impact individuals, especially women and girls.

i. Key insights will be released in due course.

b. The AfA has also partnered other stakeholders for greater outreach.

i. This includes a collaboration with DBS and the Singapore Judiciary on a community hackathon to generate solutions on creating safer and kinder online spaces, and the recently concluded Youth Action Challenge, where the AfA supported the mental well-being track.

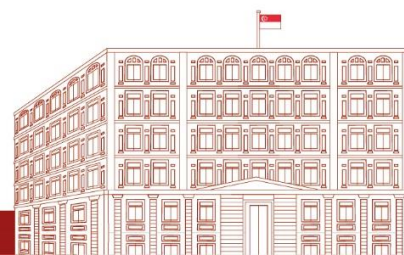
c. We also marked Safer Internet Day with a webinar, where a panel of professionals discussed how parents and families can help our children and young stay safe online.

40. Moving ahead, the AfA will continue engaging and equipping parents and youths to support those who may be experiencing online harms.

a. This includes a second online harms webinar which will take place in the coming months,

b. As well as a website containing updates on AfA's events, and resources to address online dangers and risks.

41. We are especially grateful for the support of our 48 Alliance members, some of whom are keen to run initiatives to tackle online harms in the longer term.



- a. MCI will continue to work with these partners to tackle online harms. We welcome more stakeholders to join us in ensuring that all users are empowered to navigate the digital future with confidence.

42. Just as we have built one of the world's safest, cleanest, and most liveable cities, all of us have a role to play in shaping Singapore's online space.

- a. We must preserve positive and enriching digital experiences for those around us by being respectful users online.

43. In closing, I would like to put these various efforts in context.

- a. According to MCI's 2021 Digital Readiness Survey,
 - i. 76% of Singaporeans feel comfortable using digital technologies; while
 - ii. 80% of Singaporeans acknowledge that digital technologies have made their lives easier.

44. This is encouraging, but we can and will do more.

45. We stand ready to work with individuals, companies and partners in the people sector to realise the vision of a digitally ready and inclusive society. This will allow all Singaporeans to partake in exciting opportunities with a spirit of discovery and growth, in our shared digital future.

46. Thank you.

