

**Opening Keynote Address by Minister Josephine Teo at
Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA)
Mobile 360 Asia Pacific Conference
19 October 2021**

Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

1. Good morning.
2. I am pleased to join you in this year's GSMA's Mobile 360 Asia Pacific conference.
3. The digital transformation started well before the pandemic but COVID-19 has accelerated it. As we reposition ourselves for the future, technology adoption will continue to grow. But digitalisation is a double-edged sword. It brings tremendous benefits. It can also lead to immense harms.
4. To truly uplift our lives and unlock the value of digitalisation, it is critical that we take part with a peace of mind, in a safe and trusted environment.
5. Governments and industry members alike have an important role in this – by investing in connectivity infrastructure, driving innovation, and most importantly, building a safe and trusted foundation for our digital future.

Investing in Digital Connectivity

6. Let me start with digital connectivity. We must continually invest in it as a backbone to drive digital innovation today, and to prepare ourselves for the next generation of technologies.
7. The pandemic was a sobering reminder of the importance of a robust connectivity infrastructure.
 - a. When circuit-breaker measures were imposed in Singapore last April, we were thankful for the earlier investments we made more than 10 years ago to build a nationwide fibre network.
 - b. Today, 98% of our homes have fibre connectivity. This was critical in allowing families and businesses to quickly pivot to working, learning and living online.
 - c. Our pervasive mobile connectivity has also allowed us to provide essential public services and public health information with timeliness and reliability.
8. To maximise our ability to harness technology for innovation and societal good, Singapore will continue to invest in our digital connectivity infrastructure. Our Infocomm Media Development Authority has worked very closely with telcos to deploy 5G standalone networks.

9. Why did Singapore decide to push ahead with 5G standalone networks? We could have built 5G non-standalone networks on top of existing 4G infrastructure. It would have been cheaper and faster to build.
 - a. Instead, we have taken the path to invest in 5G standalone networks because we believe that it will empower our people and businesses with vastly more capabilities to innovate and digitally transform.
 - b. It will lay a stronger foundation to build a future with augmented reality, virtual reality, autonomous vehicles, drones, and other innovations that can only be made possible with an extensive 5G standalone network.

10. Singapore is on track to achieve 5G standalone coverage across half the nation by 2022, and nationwide by 2025.
 - a. Even as we do so, we are looking further ahead into the next bound.
 - b. Earlier this year, we announced a US\$50 million fund for Singapore's first Future Communications Research and Development Programme.
 - c. This programme will spur research in cutting-edge future communications and connectivity technologies that will become 6G.
 - d. Just as importantly, we aim to translate such research into innovative products and services for our industry, as well as our small and medium enterprises.

Driving Digital Innovation

11. Let me now turn to digital innovation. Singapore's close partnership with GSMA and the global telecom industry will be a critical key to unlock the potential of new communications technologies. To deepen our innovation and collaboration with the industry, Singapore has also transformed ourselves into a living lab for 5G innovation.

12. Our approach aims to be inclusive towards all businesses.
 - a. We have set up open testbeds offering 5G commercial services, such as a 5G Living Lab for AR and VR use cases and a Maritime Drone Estate to test ship-to-shore urban air mobility vehicles.
 - b. Our Smart Urban Co-Innovation Lab promotes the development of smart cities solutions such as unmanned robots for security, cleaning, and facilities management.
 - c. IMDA has also set up a US\$22 million fund for companies to innovate and develop 5G commercial use cases at these testbeds.
 - d. We welcome more companies from Singapore and across the region to join us in this innovation journey.

13. As part of our continuing efforts to pioneer bold ideas, we have also transformed Sentosa, itself an innovative resort island into a 5G testbed for the public sector.
 - a. Today, I am pleased to announce that our Government Technology Agency has launched the first set of 5G trials at Sentosa.

14. Let me share a few interesting use cases.
 - a. Our Building and Construction Authority is collaborating with construction company Gammon to deploy autonomous robots to conduct real-time construction quality control checks.

- b. Such checks were previously done manually by inspectors on-site.
 - c. With 5G, we can now make use of these robots, which have 3D laser scanners and live streaming capabilities, to conduct inspections remotely and reliably.
 - d. If we can scale this up, it will significantly raise productivity and enhance staff safety in the wider construction sector.
15. We are also deploying a 5G-Enabled Digital Twin for manufacturing shopfloors; and we are conducting trials for the remote operation of autonomous road-sweeping trucks.
- a. These trials integrate 5G connectivity with Internet of Things devices and various sensors, including those on our Smart Nation Sensor Platform.
 - b. They will allow our agencies to gather and process large amounts of data in real-time, and enhance our situational awareness.
 - c. What we learn here could potentially be applied to use cases in other public service domains to benefit people and businesses, and realise Singapore's vision to be a Smart Nation.

Building Digital Trust

16. With new digital business models, products, and services, there are also new challenges, including cyber threats and online harms.
- a. In July this year, GSMA published a very informative report detailing how the dissemination of online misinformation has impacted societies in our region, sometimes leading to violence against vulnerable individuals and communities.
 - b. The failure to build and sustain trust in the digital domain can hurt all of us. We must also move from awareness to action.
 - c. As articulated by GSMA, this has to be a multi-stakeholder effort, involving Government, industry, and citizens.
17. The telecom industry, as custodian of our digital backbone, is particularly well-positioned to contribute positively to these efforts.
- a. Various telcos across the region have put in place programmes to empower youths, parents, and educators with resources on cyber wellness and safe online behaviour.
18. In Singapore, we also work closely with our telcos on a range of measures to combat the proliferation of scams and cybercrimes.
- a. For instance, our telcos recently implemented the “+” prefix for all incoming overseas calls.
 - b. This may sound like a small move, but it has been effective in alerting the public of suspicious and spoofed calls from overseas.
19. To achieve bigger impact, these trust-building efforts must go beyond our national borders. Countries must work together to develop new governance principles, frameworks, and standards, to preserve trust and confidence in the digital space.
20. At the United Nations, Singapore has been actively engaged in the Open-Ended Working Group and Group of Governmental Experts. Both delivered their consensus reports earlier this year.

- a. These are significant milestones towards developing the “rules of the road” for cyberspace, and a safer digital environment globally.
21. Singapore is also working with like-minded countries to foster common standards for trusted digital transactions.
- a. For example, we signed two Digital Economy Agreements last year, one with Australia, and another with Chile and New Zealand.
 - b. These Agreements outline a clear and harmonised set of international rules that promote greater interoperability between digital frameworks, thereby enabling trust in transactions among all parties.
22. In addition, Singapore is proactively facilitating the provision of digital utilities, to enable seamless, secure, and trusted cross-border digital transactions.
- a. One such example is IMDA’s TradeTrust. This is a digital utility that connects governments and businesses to a neutral and public blockchain to facilitate the trusted exchange of electronic trade documents.

Conclusion

23. In closing, Singapore welcomes the industry and regional partners to work with us to fully unleash the value of digital in our region. As we reposition and reinvent ourselves to emerge stronger from the pandemic, we have an opportunity now, at this pivotal moment, to create a strong and trusted foundation for our collective digital future.
24. I wish you a fulfilling and meaningful conference ahead.