Opening Remarks by Minister of State for Communications and Information Mr Tan Kiat How at the DBS-Judiciary-MCI Hackathon 2021 Awards Day on 28 Oct 2021

Collaborating with the Community to tackle Online Harms

Justice Aedit Abdullah from the Supreme Court

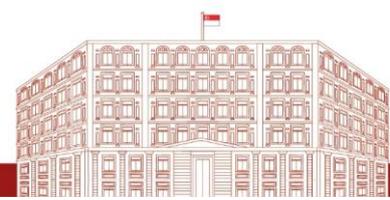Ladies and gentlemen

Introduction

1.   I am pleased to be here today at the DBS-Judiciary-MCI Hackathon 2021 Awards Day. Thank you for inviting MCI to co-organise this year's event.

2.   I would like to begin by congratulating DBS and the Judiciary for a successful second run of the hackathon.

3.   I would also like to commend the 28 teams that had submitted your proposals after two intense months of research, as well as the six teams who presented your pitches at the final judging earlier this month. I asked my team to share the write-ups and details of all 28 proposals, and I was impressed by the thoughtful ideas – a big congratulations to all 28 teams.

Online harms is a critical and urgent issue

4.   This community hackathon marks the first partnership under MCI's Singapore Together Alliance for Action, which aims to address the critical and urgent issue of online harms, especially those targeted at women and girls ("Sunlight AfA"). The AfA was launched in July to encourage collaboration and ground-up initiatives, so that we can co-create a safer, more responsible, and more respectful internet for all. This is something that I am passionate about, and I spoke about it in my maiden speech in Parliament.

5.   The risk of exposure to online harms and threats have increased significantly over the years, especially amid COVID-19 in the new normal of learning, working and socialising from home.

Collaboration to Identify New Solutions

6.   The Government cannot tackle this issue alone. Events such as this hackathon, are important avenues to bring together like-minded individuals from all walks of life, be it schools, law firms, private sectors, and the Government, all for a common cause - to tackle online harms.

7.   Through leveraging the different expertise, perspectives and experiences, all the teams, and in particular the six finalists, have shown us a wide spectrum of innovative and creative solutions. Some teams proposed one-stop resource hubs to provide legal support and help for victims of online abuse. While others proposed partnerships with social media companies to identify bad behaviour online, or even leverage artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to block the dissemination of explicit photos in group chats.

8.	Different perspectives also allow us to identify blind spots or segments of society that need help. One of the finalist teams brought attention to a category of victims of technology-facilitated sexual violence – the spouses of perpetrators. Another team brought attention to cyberbullying victims, and noted that a small percentage of them do not see a need to report cyberbullying incidents.

Amplifying Ground-up Efforts in the Community

9.	Whether you are an enterprise or individual, you can play a part in partnering the Government to make the online space better. Throughout the past year, we have even seen some going a step further to organise their own community ground-up efforts.

10.	One of the many ground-up efforts is project CyberFence by a student from the Singapore University of Technology and Design, which uses an AI-based detection software to fight against cyberbullying. Another is Defence Guild SG, an initiative launched in June 2021 by a group of lawyers, which provides free legal advice and aid to women who have faced sexual harassment online.

11.	We want to encourage more of such ground-up efforts. Together, we can tap into our collective wisdom to identify new solutions, and encourage safe and responsible online habits. This is so that all of us, especially the more vulnerable among us, can navigate the digital space with confidence.

12.	This is also why we launched the Digital for Life movement – to bring together the people, public and private sectors to help Singaporeans lead digitally-enriched lives. I encourage the participants to join us in this movement and hopefully, we can inspire more people to embrace digital technologies in a safe manner.

Conclusion

13.	In conclusion, I am heartened that this year's hackathon has generated many inventive solutions to tackle online harms, and I look forward to seeing some of them adapted in the real-world.

14.	Once again, I would like to thank DBS and the Judiciary for organising a successful second run of the hackathon, and congratulate all the teams, including today's winners.

15.	Thank you.