

## **Speech by Minister Josephine Teo at the Launch of Grab's Tech for Good Institute on 4 October 2021**

Ms Tan Hooi Ling, Chief Operating Officer of Grab,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

### **Introduction**

1. Good morning.
2. Thank you for inviting me to join you at the launch of Grab's Tech for Good Institute (TFGI).

### **Tech unicorns in Singapore have contributed in many ways**

3. In the last few years, several tech unicorns based in Singapore have emerged. They include:
  - a. Consumer internet company Sea,
  - b. Financial services platform NIUM,
  - c. And most recently, online classifieds marketplace Carousell.
4. Apart from their astonishing commercial success, we, the Government, are very happy that they are contributing in other ways:
  - a. Sea is working with IMDA to hire and train 500 Singaporeans under the TechSkills Accelerator programme,
  - b. NIUM has situated BOLT in Singapore. BOLT is its global R&D hub to boost innovation in FinTech.
  - c. And to encourage sustainable living, Carousell is supporting the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment's Climate Action Week through its #TrashtoTreasure initiative.
5. It is significant that successful homegrown enterprises see your impact in more than economic terms.
  - a. Particularly in the digital domain, Singapore-based businesses have the opportunity to punch above their weight, as companies like Grab have shown.
  - b. Along with your growing economic influence internationally, it is right and good that you consider your social impact.



- c. Such a motivation for the TFGI is commendable and to be further encouraged.
6. As a global company, Grab's footprint extends well beyond Singapore.
    - a. Even then, our experiences here with digital developments can be instructive.
    - b. Hopefully, they can also serve as pathfinders for the Institute's research initiatives,
    - c. and help you make a bigger impact worldwide.
  7. In the spirit of learning and sharing, let me outline just two areas.

### **Digital Inclusion**

8. Arthur C Clarke, the author of "2001: A Space Odyssey" had said,  
*"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."*
9. Just yesterday, I experienced magic when my son's good friend, recently relocated to London, ordered a treat of Korean fried chicken to thank our family for our friendship and support. Incidentally, it was delivered by GrabFood.
10. Such magic is commonplace.
  - a. But life is not similarly magical for the 3.8 billion people around the world who do not yet, have even an internet connection.
  - b. **Digital inclusion** is not yet a reality for everyone.
11. In Singapore, we have made serious efforts to bridge the digital divide.
  - a. For example, subsidised broadband through our **Home Access** programme, has helped to raise broadband penetration up from 90% in 2017 to 98% currently.
  - b. Last year, we set up the SG Digital Office. Since then, its **Digital Ambassadors** have trained more than 100,000 seniors and familiarise them with what we call "digital acts of daily living". For example:
    - i. cashless payments,
    - ii. accessing e-Newspapers from our public libraries, and
    - iii. interacting with our families online.
  - c. Our well-loved hawkers are not forgotten either.



- i. **We started an Alliance for Action on Online Ordering for Hawkers**, of which Grab is a very active member.
  - ii. In a few short months, the Alliance has engaged more than 5,500 stallholders in this very difficult time. The number of hawkers participating in online ordering has since been raised from one-third to half. And clearly, there is room for us to grow further.
12. Not so long ago, our Prime Minister spoke of our concerns about the platform workers - delivery workers, in particular, who get most of their work through online platforms.
  - a. They are, for all intents and purposes, just like employees.
  - b. But they lack the basic protections like workplace injury compensation, union representation and employer CPF.
  - c. In time to come, we worry that they will find it harder to afford housing, healthcare and eventually retirement.
  - d. To be truly inclusive, we must address these issues to give these workers more secure futures.
  - e. Therefore, the MOM is studying the matter and will take a similarly consultative approach in arriving at solutions.

### **Digital Security**

13. As more people become digitally connected, we must acknowledge the **risks**.
14. Just like the rest of the world, the number of online scams and ransomware incidents in Singapore have risen.
  - a. These have **real-world impact**.
  - b. Online scams can cause serious financial harm.
  - c. Ransomware attacks, such as those on Ireland, New Zealand and Germany impact even healthcare services, and they can cause serious physical harm. For example:
    - i. Affected IT systems meant surgeries had to be postponed or certain services being undelivered.
  - d. Weaknesses in data protection, if not overcome, will eventually impede legitimate uses, such as for research and business improvement.
15. Here again, we have introduced new measures to counter the risks.

16. We launched the **Safer Cyberspace Masterplan** last October.
  - a. It is a blueprint for the creation of safer and more secure cyberspace in Singapore,
  - b. Aimed at raising the general level of cyber hygiene for individual users, communities, enterprises, and organisations.
17. We are also increasing cybercrime awareness in the private sector.
  - a. The Singapore Police Force has set up the **Alliance of Public-Private Cybercrime Stakeholders**,
  - b. To engage tech companies like yourselves, platforms, and banks,
  - c. to combat cybercrime.
18. We have also taken proactive steps to safeguard our **Critical Information Infrastructure**,
  - a. By raising their cybersecurity posture in view of the growing threats
  - b. building on the provisions in the **Cybersecurity Act of 2018**.
19. Last year, we also amended our **Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA)**
  - a. to strengthen safeguards
  - b. while making legitimate uses clearer and easier for businesses.
  - c. We are also supporting SMEs with a free business intelligence tool so they can use data safely and securely without worrying about whether they have flouted the PDPA rules.
20. But it is a long road ahead to full digital inclusion and assured digital security.
  - a. We are determined to keep up these efforts in Singapore,
  - b. And support your efforts elsewhere in the world.

### **Singapore's efforts in the international space**

21. In this context, what does Grab's setting up of the TFGI mean?
22. I see it as potentially significant in two ways:
  - a. As a public commitment for the company to do good, as much as to do well,

- b. And as an inspiration to other Singapore-based businesses to achieve greater global impact.
23. In the same way, as a nation, Singapore is keen to play our part to shape the **global digital commons and secure sustainable digital development**.
24. For example, Singapore champions practical mechanisms for data sharing,
  - a. Such as the **ASEAN Data Management Framework** and the
  - b. **ASEAN Model Contractual Clauses for Cross-Border Data Flows**.
  - c. Singapore also participates in the **APEC Cross Border Privacy Rules System**, which allows certified organisations to seamlessly exchange personal data.
  - d. These initiatives help regional businesses reach wider audiences, and gain real benefits from digital trade.
25. We welcome the UN Secretary-General's proposal for a **Global Digital Compact**, and to identify a common set of "digital development goals" that will guide humanity on a common path forward.
  - a. Singapore also now chairs the **UN Open-Ended Working Group** on cybersecurity.
  - b. This week, we are holding the sixth **Singapore International Cyber Week**, which has grown to be a key forum attracting policymakers, leading industry players, and thought leaders.
26. Singapore is also a founding member of the multi-stakeholder **Global Partnership for Artificial Intelligence**, where our experts actively contribute.
  - a. We were the first in Asia to develop a **Model AI Governance Framework**. This is to provide practical guidelines to companies on how to deploy AI responsibly.
  - b. There are ongoing sectoral adaptations of this framework.
27. At the World Economic Forum, both my Ministry and Grab contribute to the multi-stakeholder **EDISON Alliance**, which aims to ensure that every person can affordably participate in the Digital Economy.
28. These examples I have cited reflect the urgent need for efforts from multiple stakeholders.
  - a. This is because the challenges in the digital domain are inherently complex,
  - b. and need close partnerships

- c. between governments, enterprises, consumers, and citizens
- d. across national boundaries.

29. They also demonstrate how Singapore can contribute to building the wider digital ecosystem,

- a. in the same way Grab seeks to,
- b. through your setting up of the Institute.

### **Conclusion**

30. Since I talked about magic earlier, let me end with another view about it. It comes from Roald Dahl, the much-loved author of children's books. He said that

*“Those who don't believe in magic will never find it.”*

31. Whatever challenges technology brings, it can also be a force for good.

- a. Not only can we share this belief, we must find every opportunity to make it a reality.
- b. The Institute represents your efforts to do so.
- c. I look forward to you working with government, enterprise, and community partners to make tech for good real for everyone.

32. Thank you again for inviting me.