**SPEECH BY MS SIM ANN, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION (MCI) AT THE MCI COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY DEBATE, 2 MARCH 2021**

Introduction

1. The past year has been challenging, to say the least, and we have all come to value the importance of staying connected. Digitalisation has been critical in enabling us to do so, even as we adopt safe distancing measures. We are transforming digitally as a society, but we need to ensure that the transformation is inclusive.

2. I will elaborate on four key strategies to achieve this:
    (a) First, we know not all Singaporeans are progressing at the same pace in the digital journey. Regardless of your starting point, the Government and key stakeholders will support you with the necessary resources.
    (b) Second, we will forge strong partnerships with stakeholders.
    (c) Third, we will continue to improve our last-mile delivery infrastructure.
    (d) Fourth, we will strengthen our communication efforts, making trusted information accessible to all.

Supporting fellow Singaporeans to go digital

3. Let me address how we will approach inclusive digitalisation, starting with small businesses, as asked by Ms Tin Pei Ling, Mr Sharael Taha and Mr Cheng Hsing Yao.

4. We stepped up efforts to help small companies, including mom-and-pop HDB shops, to adopt simple digital solutions through the Heartlands Go Digital initiative. MOS Low Yen Ling and I co-chair the Heartland Digitalisation and Revitalisation Committee, and she had earlier spoken on how the Committee is helping heartland enterprises keep pace with digitalisation, taking into account their unique context.

5. Under the Hawkers Go Digital initiative, we have been acting on stallholders' feedback to make improvements. For example, IMDA and the SG Digital Office are working with NETS to enhance the NETSBiz mobile app, with features such as bigger font size, the use of colour and a distinct audio alert, to make it easier for busy stallholders to track their payment transactions.

6. Mr Eric Chua, Mr Saktiandi Supaat, Mr Seah Kian Peng and Dr Shahira Abdullah asked about the efforts made to ensure that low-income families do not lag behind in the digital future.
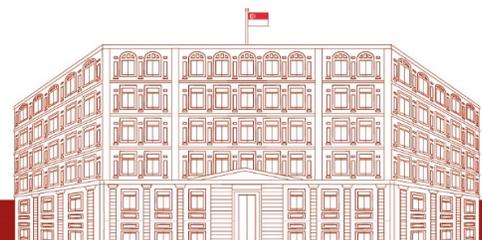
7.   Singapore is a highly connected society, where 98% of all households have access to broadband and own Internet-enabled devices such as computers or smartphones. We recognise low-income households and vulnerable groups may require more help. A central thrust of MCI's work is helping them access digital tools and remain connected with the larger society.

8.   Last year, IMDA's Home Access and NEU PC Plus programmes, which subsidise digital connectivity for low-income households, benefited 20,000 families. The two programmes were enhanced in 2020, providing faster broadband speeds and more bundled device options. This includes a second subsidised laptop for larger families with school-going children during COVID-19. We have streamlined the application process for households supported by Comcare, to make it easier for them to get onto the programmes. IMDA is working to automatically include recipients of HDB's Public Rental Scheme for the Home Access programme in the coming months.

9.   MCI also works closely with MOE to address digital access and literacy needs of students. I am glad to update Ms Sylvia Lim, that since the Mobile Access for low-income seniors scheme was launched last year, more than 6,400 seniors have benefited from the subsidised smartphones and mobile data plans.

Working with the community: Digital for Life Movement

10.   Our second strategy is building strong partnerships. There is a growing sense that many in the community would like to contribute and support fellow Singaporeans. I chaired an Emerging Stronger Conversation on Digital Readiness in November last year. The 60 participants had a robust discussion on digital adoption challenges faced by vulnerable groups. Many asked what we, as a society, can do to help bridge the digital gap.

11.   It was this and other similar calls for collective action that led us to launch the Digital for Life Movement last month, which Minister Iswaran mentioned. The Movement will support community activities that promote digital technology and inclusion, as well as digital literacy and wellness. It will be a platform where like-minded individuals from corporates, community and government agencies, can utilise their skills, experience and know-how in helping those who need a little extra assistance, and in building inclusive, safe and secure digital spaces. The Government will empower and support them to catalyse meaningful changes.

12.   One project I feel strongly about is protecting women and youths from online harms. As a Member of Parliament, I have encountered calls for help from distressed women and their loved ones, because their intimate pictures have found their way online without their consent. I have also heard disturbing stories about how our youths are being harassed and receiving unsolicited lewd pictures, with some coming to view this as "normal".
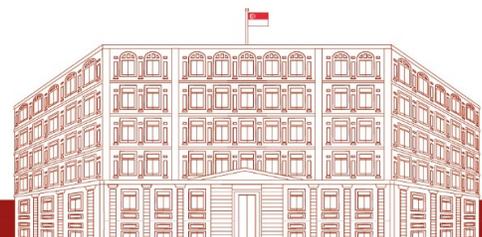
13. Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin had raised the same concern about protecting our youth, especially young girls. I met some community partners last week to discuss how we can tackle such online harms and mitigate the real-world damage they cause. These partners have shown strong interest to create more impactful public education and resource support for potential victims, and in offering policy ideas to shape a safer cyberspace for women and girls, and indeed for men and boys too. These can complement other measures such as the Better Internet Campaign by the Media Literacy Council, MCCY's work on promoting youth cyberwellness, and MOE's work in the schools.

14. With the Digital for Life Movement, I hope that the community can be empowered to hold conversations and collaborate even on thorny and complex social issues.

**Libraries as an inclusive learning space for all**

15. To help Singaporeans pick up digital skills, our much-loved libraries have been transforming themselves into digital learning hubs. As mentioned by Minister, NLB will be embarking on the Libraries and Archives Blueprint 2025.

16. Going forward, our libraries will feature digital services that enhance experiential learning. I thank Ms Cheng Li Hui for her interest and encouragement in the initiatives of our libraries. The pilot at the Geylang East Public Library to help seniors navigate online public services will be evaluated and further roll out will be decided upon once we see the results. The revamped Choa Chu Kang Public Library, set to reopen later this year, will feature digital services which encourage appreciation of natural landscapes and biodiversity.

17. Augmented Reality elements will allow library users to interact with selected books through their mobile devices, making content come alive, almost literally.

18. Last week, I visited the Tampines Regional Library and chatted with seniors who learnt how to use the libraries' services such as e-newspapers and the NLB mobile app. They appreciated the human touch of having our Digital Ambassadors walk them through the steps, and having someone to turn to whenever they need a refresher. In the library's makerspace, library users of various age groups were enjoying the use of technology, such as robotics and 3D printing.

19. There is truly something for everyone in NLB's growing suite of digital offerings. The role of librarians, as alluded to by Mr Eric Chua, will evolve in the digital future. Librarians will need to put together inter-disciplinary knowledge, taking into account societal trends, and how people learn and acquire information. NLB cannot do this alone and will collaborate with volunteers and partners with diverse interests.
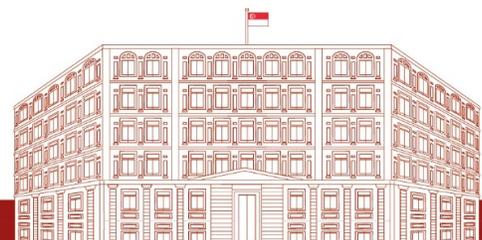
20. We agree with Mr Don Wee and Ms Hany Soh that every Singaporean should have access to NLB resources. This is why NLB brings library books to reading corners at partner spaces such as community centres and Family Service Centres.

21. For many years, NLB has been supporting the Singapore Prison Service. Last year, NLB donated more than 7,000 books to cater to inmates' varying reading needs. Inmates also have access to 400 e-books.

22. NLB will continue to develop ways to support under-reached communities.

Continual improvements to last-mile delivery infrastructure

23. Mr Liang Eng Hwa, Mr Sitoh Yih Pin and Mr Cheng Hsing Yao asked about MCI's plans to transform the postal sector. This is addressed by our third strategy – which is to continue investing in digital infrastructure, so as to make the benefits of the digital economy more accessible to Singaporeans.

24. E-commerce has become an important part of our lives. Last year, I shared that we would be rolling out a nationwide parcel locker network, to give convenience to Singaporeans, and enhance productivity for merchants and logistics service providers. IMDA and its subsidiary Pick have been trialling these parcel lockers. The feedback received from close to 10,000 residents has been overwhelmingly positive. 96% agreed that the lockers will bring them convenience and they will use the locker stations in their neighbourhoods.

25. Mr Ng Kum Yin, a 71-year-old retiree, looks forward to the locker stations. Mr Ng and his wife shop online for consumer electronics and health supplements. He is concerned by news of missing parcels left outside homes, so he is keen to try out the parcel lockers whenever they are ready.

26. Mr Edward Chia would be pleased to know that the parcel locker network is expected to reduce distance travelled for delivery by 44% daily, and this will go a long way towards reducing carbon emissions. Pick is on track to launch the first batch of up to 200 locker stations by April. We are targeting nationwide deployment by the end of 2021.

27. To address the growth in e-commerce and benefit both consumers and industry, we are reviewing the Postal Services Act this year. More details will be shared at a later date.

28. On postal delivery, since December last year, SingPost has been trialling PostPal, a smart letterbox system, at Clementi, serving about 200 households in total. Residents like the convenience of using the app to find out if there is any mail for them to retrieve. SingPost has seen an increase in productivity of 75% for
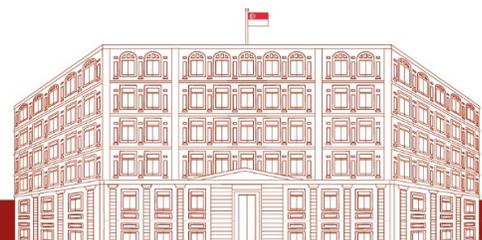
postmen. 94% of the mail can go through the auto-sorting feature in the smart letterbox, which means greater accuracy in mail delivery.

29. These innovations are part and parcel of our collective effort to seek efficiency improvements and better value for consumers and residents, while making good use of technology and digitalisation.

Inclusive communications to ensure access to trusted information for all

30. The fourth strategy is to strengthen our government communication efforts, making information accessible to all citizens with diverse backgrounds and language needs.

31. Despite COVID-19, REACH connected with more than 59,000 Singaporeans last year. To engage safely, REACH opened up new channels. These include online Listening Points and online dialogues such as the Emerging Stronger Conversations. During the Circuit Breaker, the REACH WhatsApp chat group discussions were maintained 24/7.

32. We have established diverse platforms to reach out to our audiences. For example, gov.sg has now gone into the heartlands. Some 14,000 Digital Display Panels are found within HDB lifts and at lift landings, making important Government information accessible to Singaporeans at their doorstep. We are pushing out content in the four official languages wherever possible, across platforms like free-to-air television, radio, newspapers and WhatsApp messages.

33. On Ms Tin Pei Ling's question, to reach out to members of the Chinese community who are seniors, and who communicate primarily in dialects, key government messages are weaved into programmes that run on Mediacorp's dialect belt.

34. We also worked with Mediacorp to introduce sign language interpretation for key national events such as PM's COVID-19 addresses. This is on top of the longstanding practice of subtitling or closed captioning, wherever possible, for Government communications on free-to-air television and Government's social media channels.

35. Accurate and contextualised translation is important for effective Government communications. Last year, MCI rolled out two new translation initiatives. The first initiative is Citizen Translators, where we reach out to volunteers to co-create solutions for the most suitable renderings. Malay and Tamil-speaking volunteers have told us that they are keen to help with the standardisation of translated terms. Chinese-speaking volunteers are interested in post-editing and vetting machine-generated translations. We look forward to working with our Citizen Translators to improve government translation.
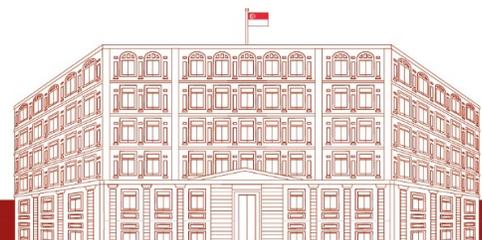
36. The second initiative is the Tamil Engine for SG Translate, which was launched last October. Public officers can now generate machine translations in all four official languages. The SG Translate web portal - called SG Translate Together - will be progressively opened to members of the public this year.

37. The Seniors Go Digital website and the TraceTogether mobile app are already available in our four official languages. The Government also has plans to translate the SingPass mobile app by June 2021.

38. The Government is committed to translating more government digital services, where necessary, so that those who more comfortable with their mother tongues can access government digital services with greater ease.

39. Chairman, in Mandarin please.

40. 数码化是大势所趋，但一些国人在使用数码科技时，还是感到一些犹豫与不安。政府充分了解这些顾虑。

41. 为了让所有国人以从容和自信的步伐迈向数码化，我们将持续推行并扩展各类计划，让国人掌握数码化的工具与技能。

42. 在企业方面，易华仁部长已经宣布推出首席科技官数码咨询服务以及数码领袖培育计划，计划的宗旨是帮助企业将数码科技融入运作，以把握新的增长机会。这同时也能加强本地企业在国际舞台上的竞争优势。

43. 在个人方面，政府也在公共图书馆，民众联络所或民众俱乐部设立援助站，由新加坡数码转型办事处的数码大使指导较不熟悉数码科技的国人，帮助他们掌握这方面的技能。在这个过程中，我们尝试以更亲切和生动的方式向公众传授数码知识。

44. 数码大使与年长者接触，教导他们如何在网上交易中保护好自己，避免上当受骗。比如，提醒他们为网络账号设置不容易被人破解的密码，以及在使用银行的电子服务时，不要将一次性密码告诉他人。

45. 新加坡要在数码化方面取得成功，就需要和国人、社区和企业并肩合作。我们将通过"数码益终身"全国运动，与来自私人领域和社区的伙伴合作，借助他们的专长，针对他们所关心的课题采取行动，推广良好的上网习惯，帮助弱势群体享有数码化社会的好处。此外，政府也持续重视翻译质量。

46. 我们招募了一批公民译者，希望和他们一同探讨什么才是好的翻译，以及如何改进政府翻译。公众对公民译者计划的反应积极，令我们感到鼓舞。通讯及新闻部
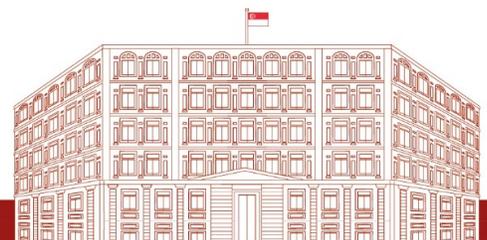
与全国翻译委员会期待和大家在这方面进一步合作，共同提升政府公文的翻译水平。

Conclusion

47.   The digital future presents many opportunities for different segments of our citizens. The Government will continue to work with partners from the people and private sectors to strengthen the digital ecosystem. This way, government-led programmes and community initiatives can complement each other and create greater value for Singaporeans.

48.   We look forward to forging an inclusive and digital Singapore together.