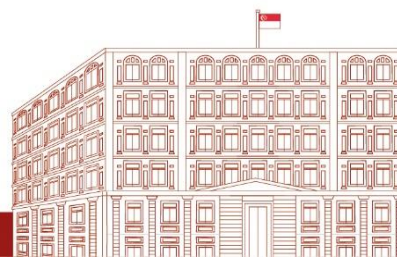


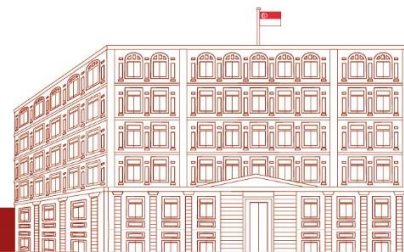
Transcript of Speech by Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information Janil Puthuchery, at the Committee of Supply Debate on 1 March 2024

1. Thank you, Mr Chairman. I thank Members for their cuts and their questions.
2. And today, I would like to take the opportunity to explain MCI's approach towards Digital Government: how we need to create and we are creating effective digital products, being citizen-centric by looking at Singaporeans' needs, by experimenting and embracing experimentation, how we are investing in digital infrastructure, and research and development. All this so that Singapore is well-equipped to realise our Smart Nation ambitions.
3. Sir, good Digital Government begins with understanding what citizens need and solving the problems that matter to them.
4. Our most successful products are the result of asking the same question: what challenges do Singaporeans face?
5. One example is RedeemSG. This lets residents claim and spend Government-issued digital vouchers, including the CDC vouchers. It has been a key enabler in our shift away from paper vouchers. The drawbacks of paper vouchers for the consumer are obvious. Merchants have faced challenges too. The paper vouchers received had to be bundled together daily, then collected, and manually processed. Reimbursement took days or weeks. RedeemSG provided a better way. Households have claimed over \$1 billion in digital vouchers since 2020. Simple, effective digital products can have a tangible impact on people's lives.
6. Ms Tin Pei Ling asked how the Government can facilitate greater citizen participation in identifying problems and co-creating successful digital solutions. And Mr Sharael Taha also asked how the Government can continue to better Singaporeans' lives through new digital products. Build For Good is a good example of how we do both. This brings together volunteers to build digital solutions for fellow citizens. We adopt a problem-first approach. Ahead of Build For Good 2023, the organisers collected over 700 problem statements from the public. One of the teams tackled the problem of student counsellors having to spend time writing case notes. Their solution is a product called NoteFlow, and it is a tool for transcribing and summarising case interviews. And counsellors can then focus on caring for their students. NoteFlow and other promising ideas coming out of Build For Good are prototypes, and we are hopeful that some of them will mature in time and make their own contribution to the public good.
7. Having identified the problem, we explore different solutions to tackle it: build prototypes quickly; test them out with real users; and scale the ideas which show promise. The problems Government has to tackle are challenging, and



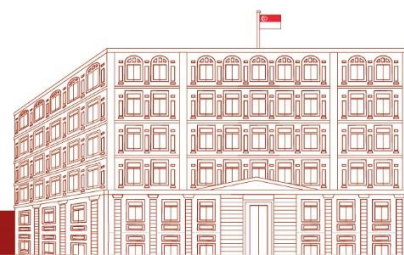
trying different things to figure out what works best is our best bet to solve these problems for Singapore.

8. Some of the ideas we experiment with will not work out. Let me provide one example; this was a product called MoneySound.
9. The team had observed that it is sometimes difficult for hawkers, especially elderly hawkers, to visually check for proof of an e-payment on a customer's devices.
10. And so, having identified this problem, within a couple of months, a small team from GovTech had built a 'proof-of-concept' prototype for MoneySound. It's a device which reads out incoming digital payments so that the hawker's hands are not occupied, and they don't have to look to then check this digital payment. We tested it with the hawkers, but we found out they were not keen. Their feedback was negative. They had some concerns about the installation, the maintenance of the device. And also, about how it worked. So, after considering these insights, the team has paused the development on MoneySound, three months after it began. Come up with an idea, move quickly, establish through a 'proof-of-concept' whether it's likely to be well-received. And if it doesn't, you have to press pause.
11. It is disappointing when ideas do not work out as expected. But this is the process of experimentation that our Digital Government engineers are working through. But the insights from such an approach are useful, and they will help us to tackle the next problem, or the next iteration of the product.
12. This experimentation approach also allows us to try multiple strategies at the same time, to tackle big problems. For instance, GovTech teams have been exploring how to help citizens access relevant information from Government websites. Providing the right information for citizens in the right way is a big problem. Instead of searching for a single silver bullet, we have launched several products. And each targets a different segment of users to address different needs.
13. Singaporeans in need of assistance can use SupportGoWhere, it's a one-stop portal to find Government schemes or funded services. And one of its key features is the Care Services Recommender for caregivers to find care services, financial support schemes and future planning tools suited to their circumstances. This enables them to find support conveniently, instead of having to navigate various government websites in search of relevant information. They don't need to know where to go to find the relevant information. They just have one portal.
14. And sometimes there's a need for more general information, so we've produced another product, SearchSG – which is a search engine that uses artificial intelligence to provide citizens with relevant and up-to-date search

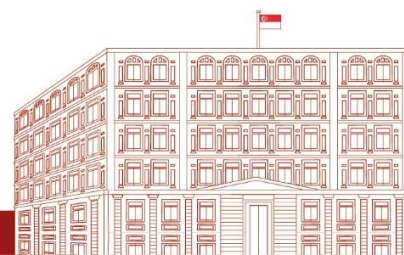


results scraped from a variety of Government sources. So multiple strategies to try to solve the same problem.

15. And in doing so we are able to learn more about the needs and experiences of our users as they engage with our digital products. And the faster we learn, the faster we improve.
16. Ms Jessica Tan asked how the push for digitalisation has improved Singaporeans' lives, as the Smart Nation initiative enters its tenth year. Between 2014 and 2023, citizen satisfaction with Government services has improved from 73 percent to 83 percent. Over the same period, business satisfaction with Government services has also risen from 69 percent to 83 percent. So, allow me to share some of the key strategies that we are applying that we think has resulted in this improvement. One is that we have to work to improve the day-to-day lives of Singaporeans. Secondly, we have to offer better and more integrated Government services. And third, in doing so, we have to be more inclusive. And if I could perhaps share some examples in each of those categories.
17. There are many digital services available through websites, app stores and other channels. There are also needs that the market does not address or finds it difficult to address.
18. One example of this, that keeps Singaporeans safe from scams, is ScamShield. It is difficult for there to be a market solution that can adequately protect Singaporeans in quite the same way. It's a difficult problem that affects us on a day-to-day basis. And now we have a product – ScamShield – and it appears to be well-received. 850,000 downloads; it is one of our most wide-reaching tools in the fight against scams. And I would encourage Singaporeans to use it.
19. And second is offering better and more integrated Government services. And a couple of examples here.
20. One is the Health Appointment System Users can easily make appointments for vaccinations, for screenings, such as mammograms. This product is available in English, Mandarin, Malay, Tamil. So again, that's an aspect of the service that is difficult for the market to solve in a way that we need it to – multiple languages. This product also allows users to see what subsidies are applied to their health appointments from schemes such as CHAS and Medisave.
21. So, we are bringing together two or three different aspects of the service that the market is unlikely to do. An appointment scheme, provided in multiple languages, and so that you can see the subsidies you would get for these appointments at the time to help you make your decision.

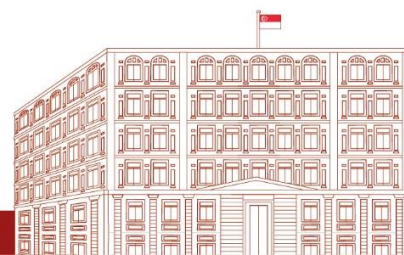


22. Another example is MyLegacy@LifeSG. This goes a step further. It brings together reliable information and digital services related to end-of-life planning as well as post-death matters in a convenient portal. Because navigating such matters can be difficult. These times of our lives don't happen very often – a lot of stress, a lot of uncertainty and a lot of services and transactions to get done. So, every bit of support helps at a time like this.
23. One example of this sort of experience is Mr Christopher Hamzah. He's married, he's got a 4-month-old daughter. And back in 2021, Mr Hamzah saw firsthand the challenges his close friend faced in settling his late father's affairs in the midst of grieving. And learning from this experience, Mr Hamzah and his wife decided to start planning early and turned to MyLegacy for help. With the MyLegacy product, Mr Hamzah could easily record important details, his various accounts, his insurance policies, and share that information with trusted persons. He describes the portal's dashboard as 'intuitive', 'very easy to use and navigate'. And he takes heart in the assurance that his information would not be used for third party marketing and he has become an enthusiastic advocate for MyLegacy among his friends and family. And again, I would encourage Members to look at the MyLegacy product and encourage their residents and constituents to consider signing up for it.
24. The third part of our strategy is to be more inclusive.
25. Mr Eric Chua had some questions about this and brought up some points. He asked about the mobile phone access of our seniors. 89% of seniors, aged 60 years and above, owned a smartphone in 2022. And this has increased from 74% in 2017. And our Mobile Access for Seniors scheme, has approved more than 16,000 assistance packages for low-income seniors since the launch of the scheme in 2020. Mr Chua also spoke about the need for better support seniors in general to navigate the digital space. And to do this, we launched the Seniors Go Digital Programme and over 280,000 seniors have been trained so far. At the same time, we also have to take efforts to be inclusive in our design and development; take the process to our seniors. We test our digital services with a wide range of users, including seniors, to ensure that their needs are met. We have also built tools specifically to support those with differing needs.
26. One example, and Members can try this out for themselves at Level 1, is a product called ReadLiao. This is one of the prototypes that emerged from our recent Hack For Public Good hackathon. Today, seniors sometimes struggle with long and complicated letters and often have to rely on caregivers, including children, to summarise the information for them. Those with older relatives might be familiar with the experience of looking at these letters and explaining such letters to them. It is often not just the language, but also how the material is presented. So ReadLiao uses Optical Character Recognition, together with an AI platform, repackages and displays documents in a clear and comprehensible format, to better communicate the content to seniors. We intend to pilot ReadLiao within the community in the coming months and

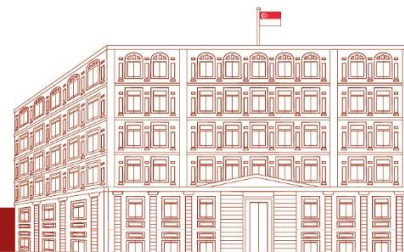


hopefully build it into a full-fledged product. It's literally only a few weeks old, at the prototyping stage.

27. We have another tool which is more mature, this is called Purple A11y - GovTech's open-source, automated testing tool. It scans webpages and it identifies potential accessibility issues. Developers can use it to identify improperly labelled buttons or images. For most of us, these are things we don't notice. These are not necessarily errors that we pick up and we don't see the difficulty that such a design might create. But if you are visually impaired, if you use a screen reader to navigate digital services, getting this type of design correct makes a huge difference. Since 2023, we have used Purple A11y to make Government digital services more accessible. And it has also been directly integrated into the development for websites like MyCareersFuture, to ensure they are accessible.
28. Sir, I have so far focused on digital products. But there is another aspect to the work that we have to pay some attention to. The infrastructure; the interconnected systems that must work together to make such products even possible. And I'd like to now explain how we are strengthening Singapore's digital infrastructure and investing in research and development, so we can continue to have a conducive environment for digital innovation.
29. Mr Sharael Taha asked how MCI is equipping Singapore to make the most of latest technological developments, especially in AI.
30. Ensuring Singapore has the foundational infrastructure to power AI activities is vital. To that end, we will be investing up to \$500 million to ensure that Singapore can have sufficient high-performance compute to support our ambitions in AI innovation and capacity building.
31. We envisage that these resources will support use cases across sectors such as financial services, healthcare, transport and logistics.
32. And over time, we hope for this seed funding to catalyse greater development and use of AI in Singapore, and spur additional industry investment in compute infrastructure.
33. Ms Tin Pei Ling asked about plans to implement the Digital Connectivity Blueprint. Launched last June by MCI and IMDA, the Digital Connectivity Blueprint outlines Singapore's strategy for building the next generation of our digital infrastructure. It covers various infrastructure components: the hard infrastructure like submarine cables, which connect us to the world; the middleware that links diverse systems, applications, and devices together for them to work together; and many other factors. The DCB is about integrated masterplanning to ensure we have what we need, when we need it.
34. Over the next few years, we can look forward to seeing the DCB's bold ideas come to life. This has already begun.



35. For example, one of the DCB's strategic priorities is to enable seamless 10 gigabits per second (or 10G) domestic connectivity within the next five years. We are setting aside funds to enhance the capacity of our Nationwide Broadband Network (NBN) to make such 10G broadband a reality. IMDA will be investing up to \$100 million to support operators in upgrading their infrastructure and offering innovative services at competitive prices. Like with the NBN back in the 2000s, we are investing ahead of demand. This is to cater for upcoming opportunities in areas such as AI, immersive digital experiences and autonomous solutions, which will require higher-bandwidth connectivity. We target to complete the upgrade to the 10G NBN by 2026 and expect more than half a million households to sign up for and benefit from higher-speed broadband in the next five years.
36. Mr Xie Yao Quan asked how we can power our digital future more sustainably. As mentioned in the Budget Speech, the Energy Efficiency Grant (EEG) will be extended to the Data Centre industry. With the rollout of the EEG to the DC industry by end of 2024, we hope more Data Centre operators and end-users will adopt energy-efficient equipment. The EEG is just one of several efforts to grow our DCs sustainably under the Green DC Roadmap, which IMDA will be launching later this year.
37. Beyond the products, beyond the infrastructure, we also need to make sure we have access to the right technology. This is vital. Singapore needs strong Research & Development capabilities to develop and tailor technologies for our local context.
38. For cybersecurity, we have established a CyberSG R&D Programme Office at Nanyang Technological University, with allocated funding of \$62 million to support cybersecurity research. Launched last September, the Programme Office serves as a coordinating body to spearhead Singapore's efforts in translating research into commercial solutions for government agencies and the industry. It is a key enabler to both strengthen our digital security and grow our digital economy.
39. Mr Taha asked how MCI is building Singapore's research capabilities in AI. Over the last 5 years, we have invested more than \$500M on AI research and our investments have borne fruit. We rank among the top 10 countries based on publications at top AI conferences. Our researchers have also won international accolades such as the Google AI PhD Fellowship, which recognises about 50 graduate students worldwide each year for their exceptional and innovative research work. In addition, we have supported close to 150 research collaborations with government and industry partners. Some big projects, some small, some in areas that you don't expect. Such as, AI Singapore working with a dental chain Q&M to help dentists detect diseases from X-rays, perform automated dental charting and recommend dental treatment plans. I recommend all Members have their teeth regularly checked, with AI if necessary.



40. With access to the newest technology becoming increasingly necessary to attract investments, we must continue to invest in R&D to maintain our competitive edge in the global market.
41. Sir, allow me to conclude. Digital technology is one of our most powerful tools to meet the needs of citizens and businesses. We embrace bold developments and agile experimentation so we can wield this digital technology to create the greatest possible impact for Singaporeans and for Singapore. At the same time, we have to look ahead to the horizon and invest in digital infrastructure and research & development so that we can facilitate ahead of time our goals for digitalisation. So far, this approach has been successful, and there is much more that this approach can deliver for Singapore as we enter the second decade of our Smart Nation journey.
42. Thank you Sir.

