

**Speech by Minister Josephine Teo at the 4th ASEAN Digital Ministers' Meeting
on 1 Feb 2024**

“Building an Inclusive and Trusted Digital Ecosystem”

Fellow Digital Ministers

Excellencies

Distinguished guests

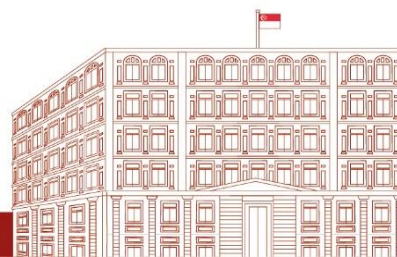
Ladies and gentlemen

Introduction

1. Thank you all for making time to be in Singapore for the 4th ASEAN Digital Ministers' Meeting. We are honoured to be your host.
2. My longer-serving colleagues will know that when Singapore last hosted this meeting 11 years ago, it was called the “Telecommunications and Information Technology Ministers Meeting”, or “TELMIN” for short. The name change to ADGMIN took place just four years ago. It reflected how much our landscape was changing and the unmistakable march of digital technologies. As a bloc, we decided to be responsive and we have made commendable progress.
3. This year, we are pleased to welcome Timor-Leste as an observer for the first time at the ADGSOM, ADGMIN, and other Related Meetings. Let me also extend a warm welcome to all our Dialogue and Development Partners.

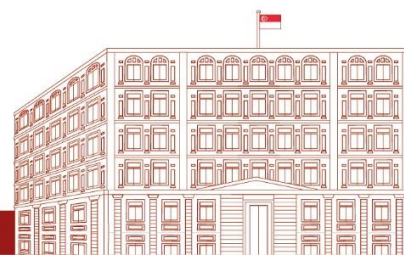
Although diverse, ADGMIN has found ways to support member states' digital developments in practical and meaningful ways.

4. There is no doubt that ADGMIN's relevance has grown over the years. Digital products and services are now all-pervasive, we encounter them at every turn. More recently, generative AI has captured widespread interest. As much as we



welcome the opportunities of each technological advancement, we also recognise the risks they bring.

5. The current wave of digital technologies sweeping across the world has the potential to sow distrust and deepen fault lines in society. Misinformation and disinformation can be supercharged with deepfakes generated by AI. All governments will be challenged to ensure that digital developments are built upon a strong foundation of trust.
6. With around 650 million people, ASEAN is one of the most diverse regions in the world. But that has not stopped us from finding ways to better support each other in our digital journeys.
7. For example, ASEAN is the first and remains the only regional group that has fully adopted the “Norms of Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace” put forward by the United Nations. Although the 11 rules are non-binding, the fact that we have worked out implementation guidelines shows our seriousness and commitment.
8. We also introduced practical ways to support cross-border data flows. Building on the ASEAN Data Management Framework, a set of Model Contractual Clauses can be used by our businesses to meet the legal requirements for data protection in all Member States, however different our regimes may be.
9. These efforts recognise that the digital domain is borderless. Many products and services our businesses and citizens access are created and managed elsewhere. Whether it is to enable them to gain more from the opportunities, or to better protect them from the harms they encounter online, our governments and officials must work together, with each other as well as with our partners.



10. This is why ASEAN is discussing a Digital Economy Framework Agreement and the theme for this year's ADGMIN is "Building an Inclusive and Trusted Digital Ecosystem".

11. I would like to thank all the previous chairs of ADGMIN and TELMIN for contributing to the forward momentum that has been steadily built up. Let me now offer some suggestions on how our foundations of progress can help us break new ground.

Forging a more integrated and connected digital ASEAN

12. First, Singapore believes a more integrated and connected digital ASEAN will benefit all of us. This is especially so if we can identify areas of potential to unlock.

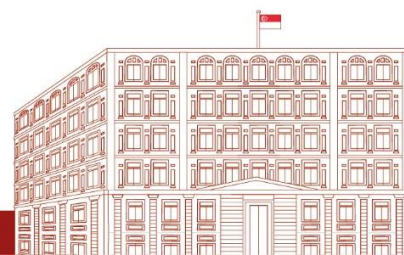
13. Our cooperation on data is a good example.

14. It is significant that at ADGMIN 2024, we are launching the EU-ASEAN Joint Guide on Model Contractual Clauses for International Data Transfers. ASEAN is the EU's third largest trading partner, while the EU is the second largest investor in ASEAN, having invested US\$26.5 billion in our economy in 2021¹. I am sure that figure has grown since. Singapore alone has more than 14,000 European businesses that use us as their regional headquarters, logistics and distribution centres for the region.

15. This joint Guide will therefore be useful for businesses that operate in both EU and ASEAN, to manage their cross-border data flows. SMEs and Micro-SMEs in particular, will be far less hampered by the lack of resources to engage in lengthy contractual negotiations on cross-border data flows.

16. Second, we believe ASEAN can also contribute to advancing AI Governance. All of us have an interest to support AI adoption to help grow our industries and

¹ Source: ASEAN Key Figures 2022



enterprises. Equally, we want to protect our societies from the harms of irresponsible or unethical uses of AI.

17. For the first time, Singapore has collaborated with fellow Member States on an ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics. This is an important signal to the global community of AI developers, creators and policy-makers to keep our needs and expectations in mind, as you design products and services or develop rules that our people are bound to be impacted by. At the same time, by putting forward a common set of guidelines, we help you meet our needs in a more inter-operable and unified manner.

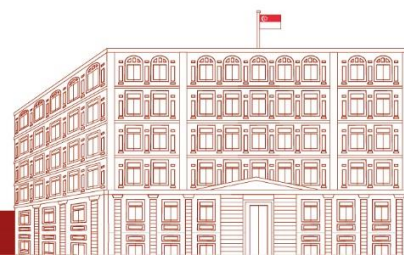
18. We thank each Member State for your strong support and contributions to this Guide, and to our other projects under the 4th ADGMIN.

Architecting a trusted and inclusive digital ecosystem, together

19. In architecting a digital ASEAN, we must ensure that the voices of small states, small companies and individuals continue to be heard. As governments, we have the responsibility to ensure that digital does not divide – instead, all members of society can reap the benefits of digitalisation, without fear or barriers to access.

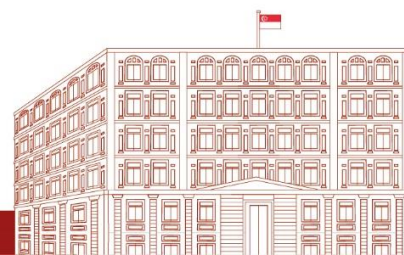
20. Just last month, the Singapore Parliament moved a Motion on building a safe and inclusive online space for Singaporeans. Among our elderly population which many consider to be less tech-savvy, 82% are already comfortable using the Internet to search for information. But we believe we can do much more to help them, as well as anyone who wishes to acquire the skills needed to benefit from technology. This is why, during the debate, my Ministry announced the introduction of a framework², which identifies baseline digital skills for Singaporeans to carry out daily tasks online.

² Digital Skills for Life Framework



21. In this regard, I am also glad to learn about the project by Laos on Assessing the Relationship between ICT Infrastructure and Digital Skills and the Inflow of Foreign Investment to the ASEAN ICT Sector, as well as Indonesia's project on improving logistics for the Digital Economy Supply Chain in rural areas.
22. Let us all continue to look at digital inclusion from multiple angles. The diverse perspectives in this room are assets that will expand our horizon and broaden our understanding of what it requires.
23. Last but certainly not least, we must seriously address challenges that undermine the people's trust in our digital systems. Specifically, we have to do much more to combat scams carried out with the help of digital technologies.
24. According to the Global Anti-Scam Alliance, US\$1.4 trillion was lost to scams worldwide between August 2022 to August 2023. In Asia alone, more than 60% of people encounter at least one scam each week.³ Scams are now a transnational problem, with criminals and cybercrime syndicates using digital tools to operate at scale and at speed, across borders.
25. In this regard, we welcome Thailand's timely proposal on the Operational Framework to establish the ASEAN Working Group on Anti-Online Scams. It will help us share policies, best practices, and strategic intelligence to prevent scams at source.
26. Singapore is already in close discussions with our Thai colleagues on how the ASEAN Regional Computer Emergency Response Teams, or CERT for short, can support the work of the proposed Working Group on Anti-Online Scams. We hope

³ Source: 2023 Asia Scam Report published by the Global Anti-Scam Alliance (GASA) and Gogolook, Nov 2023.



that this and other mechanisms for cooperation will collectively raise our ability to protect our citizens from scams and strengthen their trust in digital systems.

Conclusion

27. Let me conclude by reaffirming the growing relevance of ASEAN and ADGM. Our digital economies are growing and our digital societies will continue to expand. Our agencies are using more digital tools to deliver services to the public, and increasingly need to uphold public trust in the safety and resilience of digital systems.

28. We can build on our foundations and progress to forge a trusted and more inclusive digital future. I look forward to an enriching day of discussions, where we can deliver concrete outcomes for the benefit of the 650 million people in this region.

29. Thank you very much for being here. I look forward to our exchanges later.

