

**Opening Speech by Mr S Iswaran, Minister for Communications and
Information, at the Singapore Computer Society Tech³ Forum
on 16 Oct 2020, IMDA PIXEL**

Dr Yaacob Ibrahim

Dr Chong Yoke Sin, President of the Singapore Computer Society

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Good morning everyone. First, I am happy to join you all again at the Tech³ Forum. This Forum organised annually by SCS brings companies and professionals together to discuss ideas and strategies to enhance the vibrancy of our ICT sector. Given the pervasive impact of digitalisation on the economy, SCS has broadened the participation in recent years to include professionals from other sectors. Overall, the Forum remains an important platform to discuss the technology, talent and trends that underpin digital transformation.

2. This year's theme, Black Swans and Blue Oceans: A New Digital Paradigm, is apt for our times. Our gathering today which is mostly virtual; not the usual physical in the dimensional sense, is an apt reflection of the situation and the challenges posed by the pandemic. It also encapsulates how leveraging technology is key to overcoming the challenges posed by COVID-19 and staying relevant. Some would argue that it is appropriate that the SCS is doing a virtual event like this – who better to show the way on some of these new ways of doing things.

Supporting businesses in deploying Artificial Intelligence (AI) responsibly

3. But the fact is, a new paradigm is indeed emerging, with COVID-19 accelerating digitalisation within our communities and within the business landscape. Businesses are compelled to adopt digital solutions that enable telecommuting and e-commerce, for business continuity. As Singapore and other countries gradually reopen our economies and borders, there will also be more demand for solutions to support safe distancing management.

4. Novel technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) are critical to support businesses in adapting to this new normal. In recent years, AI has risen as a frontier

technology that holds much potential to improve lives, enhance productivity, and open up entirely new fields and growth opportunities.

5. To drive adoption and maximise the benefits of AI, it is absolutely critical that we build trust through responsible use. This cannot be overemphasised. Responsible adoption of AI can boost companies' efficiencies, facilitate decision-making and help employees, in turn, upskill into more enriching and meaningful jobs. Above all, we want to build a progressive, safe and trusted AI environment that benefits businesses and workers, and drives economic transformation.

6. To this end, at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in January this year, I launched a suite of AI governance initiatives. This is something that IMDA has been working on with many partners. The aim is to guide organisations to deploy AI responsibly, and to build the critical success factor of trust. These initiatives included the second edition of the Model AI Governance Framework or what is referred to as the Model Framework, which translates ethical principles into practical measures for organisations to adopt, and that is key to translate what is at the conceptual level to operational reality. The Implementation and Self-Assessment Guide for Organisations and Compendium of Use Cases is also another initiative to help organisations align their governance practices with the Model Framework.

7. I am very glad these initiatives have gained traction internationally. Several organisations have come forward to share how they have adopted practices in the Model Framework, and these include AI Singapore, Google, Microsoft, and Taiger. The City of Darwin in Australia has also implemented the Model Framework for its CCTV Data Analytics project. You can learn about their experiences in Volume Two of the Compendium of Use Cases, which will be published by IMDA and PDPC today. We are heartened that both companies and governments have found the Model Framework relevant and applicable.

8. To deploy AI responsibly, businesses also need access to the counsel of experts who are proficient in AI ethics and governance. In this regard, I am pleased to announce that we and the SCS is launching the AI Ethics and Governance Body of Knowledge (BoK).

9. The BoK is a reference document that will guide the development of curricula on AI ethics and governance. It will also form the basis of future training and

certification for professionals – both in the ICT and non-ICT domains. These professionals will serve as advisors for businesses on the responsible implementation of AI solutions. The BoK is a document that constantly has to be updated based on the Model Framework and will have to respond to the changes in the environment because this is a fast moving technology and the relevance is only sustained when it adapts to the evolution of technology.

10. The BoK is first and foremost an industry-driven initiative, and I want to thank the many collaborators who contributed to creating the robust curricula. These include Dr Yaacob Ibrahim and Dr Chong Yoke Sin, who are the honorary patron and chairperson, respectively, of the AI Ethics and Governance Steering Committee.

11. I am also delighted to announce the collaboration between Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and SCS to create the first certification course based on the BoK – the Certificate in AI Ethics and Governance with NTU. This certification course will equip professionals with skills and knowledge on AI ethics, so they can deploy AI in a responsible and human-centric manner in their work. This collaboration is yet another step that we are taking to position Singapore as a global leader in AI ethics and governance.

Government will work with industry partners to create jobs

12. Beyond the work on AI, the Government will continue to work with industry partners like SCS to address evolving workforce needs. Despite the current economic downturn, the ICT sector remains a bright spot with many career opportunities for Singaporeans, ranging from tech-lite to deep tech jobs.

13. IMDA has been working with companies and industry partners to reskill and train Singaporeans for such tech jobs in the ICT sector and also across the economy. SCS is a key industry association with whom IMDA works closely, to enhance employment opportunities under the TechSkills Accelerator (TeSA) initiative.

14. One of the key thrusts of our partnership is the SCS Career Compass, a coordinated career support ecosystem for job matching, group mentoring, and leadership programmes by tripartite partners such as NTUC, e2i, IMDA and WSG. Under the initiative, SCS brings together a pool of experienced ICT professionals as mentors to provide jobseekers with career development advice, as well as first-hand insights into the latest trends and demands of the rapidly changing ICT landscape.

15. Since its inception in 2016, more than 700 participants have also benefitted from SCS' Career Advisory services. These include career mentoring, career preparatory workshops and meet-the-employer sessions. One such beneficiary, Mr Tan Keng Hee, joined a career mentoring session last year where he learnt from the rich industry experiences of SCS' ICT mentors. Motivated by their encouragement, Keng Hee was able to take up a new role as Project Director at ST Engineering Electronics late last year. Keng Hee continues to acquire knowledge to upskill himself, demonstrating a willingness to learn and adapt that should inspire all of us.

16. We want to help more Singaporeans follow in the footsteps of Keng Hee and seize the opportunities across the digital economy. Hence, the Government is partnering industry to create another 6,800 jobs, traineeships and skills opportunities over the course of the year through IMDA's TeSA and WSG's SGUnited Jobs & Skills initiatives. These efforts will grant Singaporeans access to ICT jobs and training opportunities, regardless of their starting points and academic or professional backgrounds.

Conclusion

17. So if I may conclude, we may be living in uncertain times, but investing in building the digital infrastructure, governance frameworks and capabilities of our enterprises and people will certainly stand us in good stead not just to navigate the current challenges, but to emerge from it more competitive and with the ability to take on opportunities. The themes I have addressed today show that we are making headway both in addressing our immediate economic and manpower needs, as well as laying the foundations for the next bound of growth of our digital economy. These important threads of work have been enriched by our partnership with the SCS, with our partners in universities, labour movement partners and industry partners. I want to thank all of you for your steadfast support, which is key to the success of our efforts to bring about a vibrant digital transformation in Singapore.

18. I wish all of you a very a fruitful session today. Thank you very much.