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Keynote Address

By

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computer
information



Keynote Address by Mr Tan Chin Nam, Chairman of Singapore National Computer Board to the Expert Group Meeting on Integrating Information Systems / Technology In Local / Regional Development Planning on 31 October 1988 held at Royal Hotel

Mr Sazanami, Director of UNCRD,
Mr Vijay Menon, Secretary General AMIC,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It's a great pleasure for me to address such a distinguished international gathering.

We in Singapore are indeed fortunate and honoured to be chosen to host this Expert Group Meeting on integrating information systems and technology in local and regional development planning. My congratulations go to AMIC and UNCRD for organising this important event, and for attracting participants from so many countries.

Here in Singapore, the strategic importance of information technology or IT was formally recognised by the government in 1981, when the National Computer Board (the NCB) was established. This commitment to IT as an agent of economic development was reemphasized in 1986 when the government launched the National IT Plan, as an important component of its new economic strategy.

In the context of Singapore, because of the small size of our country, the word *regional* has an obvious international connotation. I have therefore adopted the theme **IT and Global Economic Linkages** for this address.

The operations of today's multinational corporations span the globe. An MNC may source for raw materials in South America, perform research and development in North America, manufacture components in Asia, assemble the end product in

Europe, and export it to the whole world. In this way an MNC could fully capitalise on the different comparative advantages existing in each country. Each of the countries in this value adding chain would also be able to maximise its economic development potential in the process. This trend of globalisation of business was reaffirmed by three panels of international participants, representing the US, Europe and Japan, in the Global Strategies Conference held in Singapore last week.

IT plays an important role in supporting this business globalisation aspect of regional development. IT is in fact a critical element of the infrastructure supporting the coordination of business operations on a global scale. The kind of global business scenario which I have described would be impossible without a corresponding IT infrastructure.

Government has a meaningful role to play in developing the information infrastructure to support the globalisation of business. A competitively priced telecommunication service with good international connectivity is an important prerequisite. Beyond that, value added networks need to be developed to facilitate the exploitation of the telecommunication infrastructure.

For example, here in Singapore, the National Computer Board has been developing an extensive computing and database infrastructure serving practically every aspects of government. Recently we are beginning to apply the concept of electronic data interchange (or EDI) to facilitate the interchange of information between government and the private sector. The first of such systems to be operational will be TradeNet, an EDI system serving traders, air and sea port operators, freight forwarders, trans-

port companies, and the government custom and regulatory agencies. The data standards adopted by TradeNet conforms to the internationally endorsed EDIFACT standards. This will simplify the linking of TradeNet to similar systems in other countries.

Seen from this perspective of global business, the design of government information systems need not be limited to just the operational requirements of government. Such systems could have much wider potential economic impact.

Information technology and information systems are making the world even smaller than air transport could. Just as we invest in building international airports, so must we also invest in information infrastructure. International economic cooperation and business linkages could reach new heights with the development of global information networks. I believe this is the ultimate contribution of IT to local and regional development.

You have a very interesting conference programme ahead of you for the rest of the week. We at the NCB are looking forward very much to your visit on Wednesday. Let me conclude by wishing you a successful meeting, and an enjoyable stay in Singapore.