Speech by Minister Josephine Teo at MCI Family and SNDGG Joint Scholarship Award Ceremony on 23 August 2022

Permanent Secretaries (MCI and SNDG),

Chief Executives of CSA, GovTech, NLB and IMDA,

Scholars and Award recipients

Good afternoon

2.   I am happy to join you all this afternoon for the Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI) and Smart Nation and Digital Government Group (SNDGG) Joint Scholarship Award Ceremony.

3.   Let me begin by warmly congratulating all our 107 award recipients. I am sure many of you are accompanied by your loved ones today. Let's give them all a well-deserved round of applause for supporting you on your journey.

4.   The Ceremony today is extraordinary in two ways. To begin with, this is the first physical Scholarship Award Ceremony for MCI and SNDGG after two long years. I recall that last year, I presented the awards virtually. Meeting face-to-face makes today's Ceremony extra special. This is also the first time that MCI and SNDGG are holding their Scholarship Award Ceremonies together. A total of 6 agencies from the two families are represented today, giving you a sense of just how wide the digital domain is represented within Government, and the many different aspects that we have to look after. While we have always coordinated across agencies, this joint Ceremony signifies that MCI and SNDGG are now collaborating a lot more closely, given our common digital agenda.

Government plays a big role in harnessing the digital technology

5.   The Government certainly has a role to play in trying to architect a digital future for all of us. Digital acceleration has transformed our lives. Many of us are now used to working from home, home-based learning, or even tele-consulting a doctor. During the pandemic, if you missed going to the library, you would have been able to borrow e-books. The Libby app is a very well-loved, well-used app, so even our physical libraries have a digital dimension to it that is successful.

6.   None of the things that we do to support digital development should be taken for granted. The Government plays a critical role in partnering industries as well as other agencies to lay the infrastructure, and to ensure that the digital space remains safe and secure for all, and we are constantly seeking to do better.

We are united to drive Singapore's digital future, even as we represent different agencies.
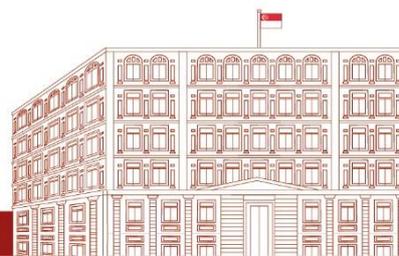
7. A strong collaboration between MCI and SNDGG will put Singapore in a better position to succeed in the digital world.

8. Unlike the physical space, there is no clear roadmap for the digital realm. We need to collaborate for several reasons: to create new opportunities and possibilities for our businesses and people to thrive in this digital age; to look at and deal with emerging issues together, so that we are all better protected when we go online; and to make sure that we have an inclusive agenda. It is also important that we come up with new and better ways to engage the public. This is core to the Government's existence - how to stay in touch with people and make sure that they are well-informed, and at the same time, provide avenues for them to give feedback to the Government so that we can constantly improve. And this part of the landscape is also very fast moving. Media consumption habits are changing all the time, and we have to find ways to adapt.

9. Therefore, collaboration is critical, and it is very much in the same spirit as the Forward Singapore exercise, launched by Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong in June this year. Forward Singapore focuses on six pillars:

   a. Empower
   b. Equip
   c. Care
   d. Build
   e. Steward
   f. Unite

10. These are what we believe is important to take Singapore forward and to renew our social compact. There are areas all Singaporeans care about, and Forward Singapore aims to work with citizens and stakeholders to chart new directions in our collective future.

11. MCI and SNDGG will contribute particularly to building Singapore's future digital domain: One that is fair and inclusive, with opportunities for all to thrive in a vibrant and secure digital society; and where Singaporeans continue to communicate, engage and bond with one another, in what can be a diverse and fragmented media landscape.

Building a diverse talent pipeline where everyone has access to opportunities for a brighter future.

12. To meet these many challenges, we need talent from diverse backgrounds to work together on issues.

13. As Singapore moves forward, we will find ourselves performing wide-ranging tasks:

   a. Engaging the public on national issues, issues that are not always easy to talk about, sometimes with many polarising voices chiming in;

   b. Enhancing understanding through effective translation, because we are a multi-cultural society, and there will always remain segments of our population more comfortable in a different language medium;
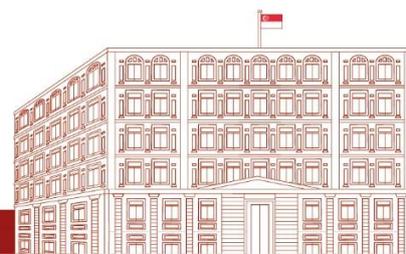
c. Empowering people to use technology safely in their daily lives, because not everyone was born a digital native, and having to adapt to new gadgets and new tools available through mobile means may sometimes feel threatening and very challenging; and

d. Making knowledge come alive for all Singaporeans, helping them to discern what is truth, and what is falsehood.

14.   These are the sorts of meaningful jobs you will be undertaking as scholars in the MCI and SNDGG family.

15.   Let me highlight some examples from our award recipients today and how they contribute to our mission collectively.

16.   **Anjali Elankovan** has been motivated to take up the **MCI Information Service Scholarship**. She knows well that Information Service officers support our efforts to collectively and effectively communicate policies and to build trust in society. This has been a very important feature of our society, but it doesn't happen by chance. We need young talents like Anjali especially in this fragmented and complex media environment.

17.   In building up our Smart Nation, we must ensure that our cyberspace is resilient and secure. **Zara Teo** was inspired by her mother, a financial analyst in an IT security company, who shared with her how her colleagues deterred cyber criminals. **As a Smart Nation Scholar, she will join the Cyber Security Agency of Singapore to defend our cyberspace.**

18.   **We also have Aidan Ong, an NLB scholar.** Aidan has been fascinated by languages since he was young. He looks forward to working in NLB to promote local literature and make knowledge more accessible to the public. In our chat before we started the programme, he shared with me how he was concerned about changes in people's news consumption habits, and how he was concerned with the society's ability to think deeply about issues that mattered.

19.   These days, storytelling is not limited to what we read. We also aim to tell the Singapore story by creating immersive media experiences for Singaporeans. To achieve this, we need to continue nurturing talents in the media industry. Inspired by artists who integrated arts with technology, **Megan Tan took up IMDA's SG Digital Scholarship** to hone her craft in interactive digital media. She hopes to create immersive digital art that touches the hearts of Singaporeans.

20.   Besides our undergraduate scholars, we will also continue to nurture a pool of postgraduates, like **Muhammad Khairul Syahmi** who is pursuing a Masters of Science in Business Analytics at NTU under **IMDA's SG Digital Scholarship.** Currently an engineer in the manufacturing sector, he hopes to use his skills and experience to transform the industry.

21.   I hope this gives you a flavour of the kinds of talents that have come forward to be part of this group. We value the great range of talents that they bring, and we see them as contributing in many different ways after their studies to the agencies, to the respective areas of work, and sometimes, back in industry. And this is all important for our future digital developments.
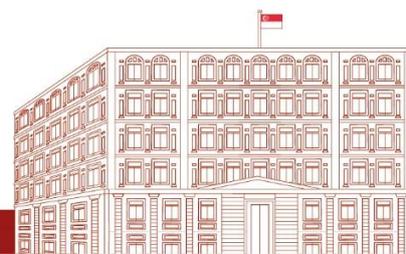
Grooming future leaders for a Digital Nation and build long-term capabilities for the sector

22.   Beyond those who have yet to enter the workforce or just started out in their career, MCI also hopes to harness talent from potential leaders to drive the digital future. I am pleased to announce today a new leadership programme – **IMDA's SG Digital Leadership Accelerator.** This programme aims to bring together Singaporean digital leaders at different stages of their career.

23.   They will have the opportunity to network and support one another on their leadership journeys, while being mentored by established industry leaders. 10 SG Digital Leaders have been selected in the inaugural cohort, from eight companies.

24.   One recipient is **Justin Lee**, Chief Product Officer at ShopBack. Although he did not receive formal tech training as an undergraduate, he took the plunge into the e-commerce industry. In his own words, he described it as being 'in the right place, at the right time'. He has not looked back since then. Beyond developing himself through this programme, Justin is passionate about giving back. He wants to groom the next generation of tech leaders and has been mentoring our young SG Digital Scholars on Product Development, an in-demand skillset.

25.   This year, IMDA has also expanded its scholarship areas to include a new focus on "Future communications". This expanded area of focus supports Masters-level local talent to pursue research and translation projects in future communications technologies such as 5G and beyond.

Conclusion

26.   Before I conclude, I want to bring your attention to the Interactive Holographic Telepresence that you experienced at this Hall today. It is an example of how your seniors who are already in the MCI and SNDGG family are harnessing technologies to better engage Singaporeans. I hope this serves as a small inspiration for you to always innovate and harness the potential of new technology to improve the lives of Singaporeans.

27.   I urge you to "**Be of Service**", "**Be United**", and "**Be Bold**". It is only when we commit to partnering one another to serve Singaporeans, that we can build a better digital future for all. One that is fairer and more equal, more just and inclusive, more united and big-hearted, and stronger, together.

28.   Thank you!

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