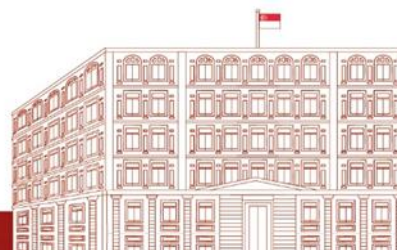


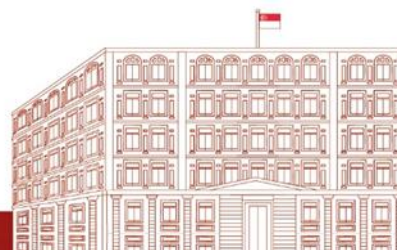
**Transcript of speech by
Parliamentary Secretary for Communications and Information Ms Rahayu Mahzam
at InnovFest x Elevating Founders (ATxImpact) (1 Jun)**

1. It is such a wonderful experience to be back in-person and see everyone coming back together for such a meaningful cause. Let me thank the National University of Singapore for the opportunity to address this audience today at InnovFest. This year's theme on "redefining tech for a better future" resonates deeply with me as I know this will have significant impact on all Singaporeans.
2. Many of the innovations developed by the entrepreneurs here indeed have the potential to redefine tech for a better future. We are part of a tech sea change that is on the horizon, and I'm sure that all of us would agree that in order to reap its benefits, we must relentlessly pursue innovation. The rise of Web 3.0, the Metaverse, and other developments offer new opportunities for solutions that improve efficiency, reimagine possibilities for services and reshape the digital world as we know it – and start-ups will lead the way in this future.
3. In Singapore, our start-up ecosystem is modest but has been doing well:
 - In 2021, of the 19 "unicorns" in South East Asia – companies valued at 1 billion US dollars or more – 9 or almost half were from Singapore.
 - Locally, start-ups raised 11.2 billion Singapore dollars in the first 9 months of 2021, more than double the 5.5 billion raised in the whole of 2020.
4. We can be proud of the vibrant start-up ecosystem we have built together through a multi-stakeholder partnership of Government agencies, start-ups, investors and the research community. MCI will continue to support digital innovation and position us for opportunities in a digital and post-Covid economy by investing in transformative technologies that grow the sector.
5. But as we forge ahead into this new digital future of tomorrow, how do we ensure that we do not leave the rest of society behind? How do we come together, as a community with collective ownership, and drive programmes and projects that meet the digital needs and challenges of all segments of the community, especially the vulnerable?
6. President Halimah Yacob launched the Digital for Life movement in February 2021 and our hopes were that Singapore's digital future would be inclusive for all. We want all Singaporeans to feel excited, empowered and enriched by the potential and opportunities of digital technologies for all of life. Digital for Life is a Whole-of-Nation movement to bring together the 3P sectors – people, private and public – to improve digital access and raise digital literacy through ground-up projects. It will take all of us in concert to help Singaporeans keep pace with digitalization.
7. More than a hundred partners have since come onboard in the DfL movement in areas like supporting vulnerable groups with digital tools and skills and promoting digital wellness in the wider community. Our digital ambassadors have laid impressive groundwork as a foundation – 11,000 hawkers have adopted e-payment solutions and 150,000 seniors have acquired



basic digital skills over the last two years. And this is just the beginning. We recently held the inaugural Digital for Life Festival over a 9-day period, which was graced again by President Halimah. Close to 30,000 visitors participated in the activities and more than 80,000 Singaporeans pledged their support to help the digitally vulnerable with digital access and connectivity through the Data for All initiative. This groundswell of community interest was made possible only because of the strong support from the more than 100 DfL partners at the festival. We hope that the movement will gain greater momentum as more partners join our cause in providing more offerings to the community.

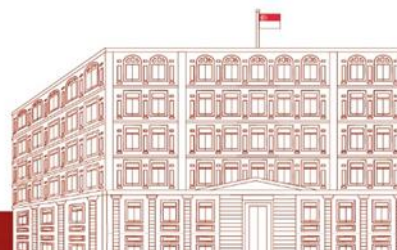
- One such partner organisation is Cognizant, which together with Daughters of Tomorrow, partnered on a virtual mentoring programme to help women from low-income backgrounds acquire the necessary digital skills required for jobs, like using Microsoft Office applications, Google tools and email etiquette. To date, they have mentored over 50 women.
8. This is just one of the many efforts under this growing movement.
 9. We invite like-minded organisations and individuals to come onboard and add your creativity and passion to our efforts in building a digitally inclusive society.
 10. We can harness the power of technology by designing and deploying meaningful solutions that can be scaled for the good of the community. Let me highlight two “tech for good” initiatives by Digital for Life partners that stand out:
 - Mercurics is an Artificial Intelligence company that uses data and technology to assess complex patterns of personality data. They first developed selfi.ai, a free tool for corporations to assess their employees’ mental well-being and take helpful interventions. At the end of this year, they will roll out SmartBFA, partially funded by Tote Board’s Enabling Lives Initiative Grant and supported by SG Enable. SmartBFA is a navigation app which identifies barrier-free accessible paths in Singapore for wheelchair users’ accessibility.
 - Another homegrown R&D start-up is Wraek, which has developed the world’s first force-pad controller. Their solution gives persons with physical and intellectual disabilities better control of computer functionalities that require fine motor actions like keyboard emulation, scrolling and cursor movements, and is a major help for their daily accessibility and recreational needs.
 11. These are undeniable benefits that come about because innovators, like the ones you are going to talk to today, applied their skills and expertise to the needs and solutions of real-life people with real-life difficulties and developed people-centered solutions.
 12. As we put people at the heart of all that we do in innovation, what new initiatives can we develop together to enrich and improve the lives of people around us? How can we generate new creative interventions for good? To paraphrase Einstein, our technology must not exceed our humanity.
 13. Yet too often, we witness how technology does bring out the darker side of people. Because online interactions are often anonymous, identities can be masked for nefarious reasons or to



do online harm to others, especially women and girls. Such actions often go uncaught and unpunished, leaving victims with painful memories and some may choose to avoid the digital realm altogether.

14. The reality is that while going digital opens up new hopes and dreams for some, it can open up new nightmares for others. An online poll¹ conducted in January this year showed that one in three respondents (31%) had either personally experienced and/or witnessed gender-based online harms. Many women face these realities – unwanted sexual exposure or Zoom-bombing, doxxing and sharing of personal images and details. This explains why the same poll showed that only 60% of women felt safe from online harms – much less than their male counterparts (72%).
15. In July last year, the Government set up an Alliance for Action to tackle online harms targeting women and girls, which I co-chair with SMS Sim Ann. Since its inception, the AfA's work has grown steadily, along with the agreement that more needs to be done to make online spaces safer and more secure. As part of the Digital for Life movement, we took an inclusive approach and brought diverse stakeholders together to co-create solutions.
16. Today, the AfA's work spans public education, victim support, youth engagement, research and volunteerism, and more initiatives will be rolled out over time.
17. In a similar vein, we hope that more women will feel free to participate fully in Singapore's digital future. Raising the participation of women in tech and growing the pool of talent continues to be an ongoing effort. While Singapore reportedly boasts one of the highest proportions of women in the tech workforce already, we believe that still more can be done.
18. We co-created a solution to raise the awareness of women in tech. IMDA funded The Curious Podcast to celebrate and highlight the outstanding achievements of women in research and innovation. Last year, we launched the SG Women in Tech Corporate Pledge initiative, and sought to bring about another 3P collaboration for this cause. Companies including Shopee and Microsoft came on board and stepped up measures to support and coach women and committed to practise fair hiring. These are steps that we must take together in the right direction of a fairer and more inclusive Singapore.
19. These are some areas of concern for the ever-evolving digital space where many issues come about, hence the importance of coming up with innovative ideas and solutions that matter to the community, and how we can play a part in making the world a better place. Perhaps there are other areas for collaboration that have yet to be addressed. Join us in the Digital for Life movement as we develop joint solutions to our challenges together. Let us come together to build an ecosystem that fosters a more inclusive digital future.
20. In closing, let me pose this question to us: why should the digital future we are building together be any less inclusive than it is innovative? That is the challenge for all of us.
21. Singapore's journey towards becoming a digital society will open new opportunities, challenges and occasions for us to reflect on the kind of future we want for ourselves. Let us

¹ "Sunlight AfA Releases Topline Findings from Poll on Online Harms at Webinar", 25 Mar 22, MCI Pressroom



raise our ambitions, that Singapore would be more than just digitally innovative on the cutting edge, but a digitally inclusive community where none is excluded or marginalised. Thank you.

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