

**Full speech by Dr Lee Boon Yang, Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts, at the IT Leader Awards 2009.**

Mr Wilson Tan, President of the Singapore Computer Society,  
Members of SCS,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening.

Introduction

1. Thank you for inviting me to SCS's Annual Dinner and IT Leader Awards. I am delighted to join this celebration of the best in infocomm innovation and leadership. I would like to begin with my heartiest congratulations to this year's Award winners. You have served the infocomm profession and industry with distinction. Each one of you has made sterling contributions to the industry. Your achievements will inspire younger infocomm professionals to focus on the many opportunities available in this sector. I hope that more Singaporeans will emulate your bold and innovative approach to make infocomm an exciting and rewarding profession and career.

2. Infocomm has been achieving steady growth. Today it is an important sector of our economy. It contributes about 6% to national GDP, and there are altogether 139,000 infocomm professionals employed in the economy. Infocomm empowers and enables many other industries to remain competitive in the global market. That is the good news.

3. The bad news is that with the economy going into recession brought on by the global financial tsunami, the infocomm industry will not be spared the effects of the economic crisis. Infocomm's performance is intimately linked to the state of the rest of the economy. It is not recession-proof.

4. We have to prepare for tough times ahead. Government has already taken preemptive measures to prepare the economy for a difficult year. The recently launched Resilience Package valued at \$20.5 billion is an unprecedented effort to help workers and employers weather the recession. For the first time we are tapping into our past reserves. Infocomm professionals, workers as well as infocomm companies will benefit from the government's Resilience Package to save jobs and minimize retrenchments.

5. Over and above the Resilience Package, MICA and IDA will deploy additional resources for several measures targeted at the infocomm industry during this recession.

6. Recently in Parliament, I mentioned that we will allocate \$70 million for Calls-for-Collaboration to co-develop infocomm business solutions. This includes funding for programmes to encourage infocomm adoption among small and

medium enterprises, as well as to develop more infocomm-enabled solutions for sectors such as education and logistics. We will also encourage the development of Next Generation services to make full use of the nationwide ultra-high speed broadband network that will be rolled out from early next year. These CFCs will take into consideration the poor business climate and potential difficulties faced by infocomm enterprises to raise capital for such projects. IDA is considering an increase in its support for these CFCs to attract wider participation and speedier rollout. I hope that infocomm entrepreneurs will see the long term benefits and not be overwhelmed by the short term concerns. We should leverage on our excellent track record of public-private partnership to prepare for the upturn in the economy.

7. In the longer term, developing our talent pool remains the cornerstone of our strategies to grow the infocomm industry. Earlier this month, IDA conducted an informal poll<sup>1</sup> which showed that while the employment outlook for 2009 is likely to be more subdued, certain job categories are still in demand; these include software development, project management and business process outsourcing management.

8. The economic slowdown may result in hiring freeze and reduction in training budget. But we must retain and grow our talent pool if we want to remain competitive. Any loss of infocomm talent will have a negative impact on the industry. Hence, our manpower strategies will not only help infocomm professionals keep their jobs but also help them upgrade their skills for jobs in greater demand. This will ensure a steady pipeline of infocomm talent to fill the gaps and meet the needs of the industry. Tonight, I would like to highlight three of our efforts to support capability development.

#### Infocomm Manpower Professional Development

9. Firstly, we are expanding the National Infocomm Competency Framework, or NICF in short, to cover about 200 job roles, up from the previous figure of 30. NICF will cover a wider range of infocomm jobs, including those in other sectors such as financial services and healthcare. NICF has been developed by the industry, for the industry; and is one of the most comprehensive competency frameworks that has been developed globally. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr Foong Sew Bun, Chairman of the NICF Steering Committee, his team members and many more industry professionals, for their fine efforts in developing and shaping the NICF.

10. I am pleased to note that about ten leading companies in the healthcare industry<sup>1</sup>, including Singapore Health Services, National Healthcare Group and Integrated Health Information Systems, will adopt the NICF this year. These companies will leverage on the NICF in areas such as job sizing and profiling, recruitment, staff training and development. Some 500 infocomm and healthcare professionals from these companies are expected to undergo training in NICF courses over the next two years. For ease of access, the NICF is made available

online so that companies and infocomm professionals can use it for competency assessments, career planning and capability upgrading. If you have not seen NICF online, I suggest that you take a look at [www.nicf.sg](http://www.nicf.sg) to see how it can be of service to you or your employees.

11. Secondly, we are enhancing the Critical Infocomm Technology Resource Programme, or CITREP. From the 1st April 2009, we will increase funding support for infocomm course and examination fees from 50% to 80%. More entry level courses will be eligible for funding support as we aim to also encourage fresh graduates and entry-level professionals to go for training. Companies sponsoring their employees for training will qualify for Absentee Payroll at \$50 per day. In total, we are ready to help up to 10,000 infocomm professionals benefit from the Enhanced CITREP over the next two years. If the need is for more, we will consider.

#### Meet Future Manpower Needs

12. The third measure will ensure a sustainable pipeline of talent to meet the future manpower needs of the infocomm industry. We will allocate an additional \$30 million to attract good students to study infocomm, bringing our total investment in scholarship-related programmes to close to \$64 million.

13. IDA recently launched the Integrated Infocomm Scholarship programme for outstanding 'O' level students to pursue infocomm-related diploma and degree courses from polytechnic straight through to university. This will serve to develop the Polytechnics as a key source of infocomm talent. IDA will also extend the National Infocomm Scholarship<sup>2</sup> or NIS programme for another three years. This scholarship is currently offered in partnership with 26 infocomm and user-sector companies, including banking, telecom, media, infocomm and consultancy companies. This means that scholars are assured of a wide selection of exciting infocomm jobs when they graduate.

14. Besides scholarships, IDA continues to build the pipeline for infocomm talent by engaging our students and youths. There are now 250 Infocomm Clubs with more than 10,000 club members in schools. I am also encouraged that the National Infocomm Competition continues to see an increasing participation rate among students from many schools.

#### Role of the SCS

15. Let me also take this opportunity to recognise the role of the Singapore Computer Society as the voice of the local IT professional community. SCS has made important contributions to the development of our infocomm industry. I applaud you for taking a far-sighted approach to partner the government to develop our skill and capability for a vibrant and innovative infocomm industry. I hope that you will continue to foster a strong spirit of enterprise and innovation among your members and uphold your high professional standards.

## Conclusion

16. Even as we work hard to stay on top of the current economic climate, we must make strategic investments for the future. MICA and IDA will commit a total of \$125m on the initiatives I have just outlined to help the industry and infocomm professionals weather this recession and build up capabilities. The larger challenge for us is to make the infocomm job an exciting and attractive one. We must work together to nurture and inspire the best of our young talents to take up infocomm careers. I am confident that our partnership will result in a strong and vibrant infocomm industry able to weather this recession and ready to exploit all the opportunities which will come with economic recovery.

17. I wish you a pleasant evening and a successful year ahead. Thank you.