

## Speech for PAP Policy Forum

### 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner

24 Jul 2019

1. Comrades, a very good evening.
2. I am happy to see our party activists here for our PAP Policy Forum's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner.
3. Tonight's theme is "Together for Tomorrow".
  - a. To take Singapore forward, my team and I know that we must not only work *for* Singaporeans; we also have to work better *with* Singaporeans.
  - b. This is not just a form of words, but a reflection of our deep-seated belief on how we can build our Singapore future together.
4. Trust sits at the core of my team's approach to building Singapore for the future. Building and deepening trust is most essential for any political party that wishes to be in Government.
  - a. As the incumbent party in government for more than sixty years, we take trust very seriously.
  - b. Year by year, this bond of trust we have with Singaporeans has been strengthened.
5. Our founding leaders understood this from day one. Mr Lee Kuan Yew and the founding generation of PAP leaders won the trust of Singaporeans by improving their lives.
  - a. They made tough decisions in the early days of nationhood, because they believed that Singapore must walk her own path. Only Singaporeans alone can chart our destiny.

- b. They stood on the side of Singaporeans, fought for workers' rights and improved their lives.
  - c. And in this way, the PAP earned the trust of an overwhelming majority of Singaporeans.
- 6. This carried on through each new generation of PAP leaders, cadres and members. Successive generations of leaders had to win the hearts and minds of Singaporeans in their own way, in accordance with the demands of the times.
  - a. Mr Goh Chok Tong introduced a more consultative government that engaged and listened to Singaporeans more.
  - b. PM Lee Hsien Loong adopted a more inclusive style of governance, encouraged two-way communication between the Government and the people, and introduced policies to build a fairer and more just society.
- 7. As Singaporeans experienced our society progressing from third world to first, they saw that their trust was well-placed in a PAP Government that delivered.
  - a. This bond of trust between Singaporeans and the Government deepened as Singapore was put to the test during the Asian Financial Crisis, SARS, and later the Global Financial Crisis.
  - b. And as Singaporeans supported one another through difficult times, their bonds also became stronger.
  - c. These bonds have allowed us to overcome crises, and even strengthened our institutions.
- 8. And behind it all, PAP activists supported each successive Sec-Gen and their teams across three generations to fulfil their visions for Singapore. This was

how we built a deep reservoir of trust between the PAP Government and Singaporeans over 60 years.

## **Growing Trust**

9. This bond of trust has been hard earned over the years, but can easily be lost if we ever become careless or complacent. This is especially so in today's uncertain and volatile world, where a wave of disillusionment is sweeping across many mature societies.
  - a. The British are still locked in discussions over their future, three years after their referendum over Brexit.
  - b. Closer to home, tensions in Hong Kong remain rife, even after the contentious Extradition Bill was withdrawn.
10. We must resist this wave and never allow it to consume us. **The 4G leadership will grow this reservoir of trust as we enter into the next phase of nation building.**
  - a. We know that trust between the people and their leaders cannot be inherited.
  - b. And the 4G team will have to do so at a time when our politics has become increasingly more contested.
  - c. We must evolve our style of leadership with the times, and forge a renewed bond of trust with the electorate.
11. Singaporeans are now more diverse than in previous generations, and they expect their Government to best represent their diverse needs and aspirations.
  - a. Our society has become more diverse in needs because our population is ageing and different segments are facing different life circumstances.

- b. As a maturing society, our views and values have also become more diverse. Singaporeans are passionate about a wider range of causes. And we must expect a greater diversity of views and more robust debates in the years to come.
- c. In some countries, political parties have exploited such differences in society to stoke tensions and fears, and drive a wedge between people for political gain. Trust is shattered and society fractures, sometimes over single issues. We must never let this happen in Singapore.

12. Trusting one another and staying united, even as we become more diverse, is all the more critical, given the complex challenges ahead of us.

- a. US-China tensions have cast a pall on the global order, and we are already seeing its effect on our economy.
- b. The rapid advancement of technology is fundamentally changing the way we work, live and play.
- c. We also need to confront longer-term issues, such as climate change, an ageing population, and urban rejuvenation.

**13. In a time of change, the PAP's approach to leadership must continue to be anchored on trust, unity and constructive politics.**

- a. We keep and grow the people's trust by always implementing policies with the longer-term interests of Singaporeans at heart.
  - i. Even in tough times, we do the right thing, not the convenient thing.
  - ii. We must be prepared to take difficult decisions today, so that our future generations can have a better tomorrow.

- iii. We must resist a downward spiral towards populism, and not hesitate to call out those who make empty promises and shallow slogans.
- b. We must not go down the road of divisive politics, along racial or religious lines. or pander to narrow interests.
  - i. Instead, we must hold ourselves ourselves to the highest levels of integrity – clean, honest and incorruptible.
  - ii. Our Party symbol stands for action within inter-racial unity. We strive to represent Singaporeans from all walks of life and to win support from the broad middle.

### **Democracy of Deeds**

14. In our next phase of nation building, the 4G leadership is committed to harnessing the diverse strengths of Singaporeans, and partnering them in new ways to take Singapore forward.

- a. We have to draw on the diversity of passions and expertise among Singaporeans to improve our policies and programmes.
- b. But partnership is more than just contributing feedback or ideas. It is also about following through on ideas and suggestions, and making them happen.

15. This is what one of our founding fathers, Mr S Rajaratnam, described as a “democracy of deeds” in his speech on 14 August 1971. As Party activists, I urge all of you to read the speech.

- a. When Mr Rajaratnam gave this speech 48 years ago, there was a growing debate on the state of democracy and the role of opposition parties. At the time, the PAP was not only the ruling party, but the only party in Parliament. Without a Parliamentary opposition, some quarters took to opposing the Government simply for the sake of doing so.
- b. Mr Rajaratnam wanted to set them right. He argued that what mattered was the quality of governance that resulted. And he urged all parties to focus on problem-solving, rather than on slogans and words.
  - i. He encouraged the people to focus on real-world problems, and work with the Government for the good of the country, for the good of our people.
  - ii. He urged the people to dedicate their time to making life better for fellow Singaporeans, and contribute to a democracy of deeds through their daily actions.
  - iii. This was not a glamorous course, but it was the right one if we wanted Singapore to succeed.

16.50 years on, we must continue to encourage this spirit of constructive problem-solving. Through partnering and working with Singaporeans better, we strengthen trust.

- a. We welcome all groups and individuals to join this effort. We may not share the same views on every issue every time, but so long as we have the interest of Singapore at heart, we can work together.
- b. Our future Singapore must be one where every citizen takes action to make a difference for the better of our country, for our people.

## Role of the PAP Activist

17. What does all this mean for the Policy Forum and our activists? **What do we need to do to grow the trust with our people and expand our democracy of deeds?**

a. For 15 years, the PAP Policy Forum has served as a platform for party leaders and activists to engage and discuss policy issues.

i. The Forum has helped PAP activists understand the intricacies of government policies.

ii. This has also been a useful platform for activists to provide more policy ideas.

1. In just the past two years, this Forum has contributed adjournment motions on many important topics, including how we can enhance support for those with mental health, and how we can better protect the environment.

b. But we will need to go one step further. Our activists will need to go beyond giving feedback and suggestions, and turn your thoughts into action.

18. Let me suggest three things you can do. ACT:

a. A - to take Action

b. C - to Communicate and

c. T - to Team Up.

19. First, A, is to take action to give back to society. As an activist, you can do more.

a. Every act counts. Over the weekend, I attended the charity dinner by St Luke's Hospital. They raised a sizeable sum to fund intermediate care needs, and support patients' transition back to the community and home.

But I was most heartened by how thousands of volunteers willingly gave their time to help the patients of St Luke's in many different ways.

- b. While each act of contribution may seem small, the cumulative impact of your actions can make a big difference, which can significantly shape our society.
- c. Many of you are already giving your time to help your fellow Singaporeans at the Meet-the-People sessions, dedicating your time to community projects, or volunteering through existing initiatives such as SG Cares.
- d. I appreciate how our activists have been working hard and giving back even as they juggle busy work schedules and family commitments. If you have a good idea about making Singapore better, there's no better way than to bring together like-minded comrades to turn your idea into reality.

20. Second, C - to strengthen communication. I encourage all of you to stay close to the ground, to better understand the diverse concerns and aspirations of different groups of Singaporeans.

- a. Communication is a two-way process - by understanding our people with empathy, by understanding the intent and approach of our policies, you can better reach out to all Singaporeans, to explain our policies and what we stand for.
- b. This may not be easy, as our policies can sometimes be complex and may not be easily understood.
- c. We must also be open to listening to other points of view. Some Singaporeans may hold a different view about Government's policies. We should not shy away from engaging them. Take the opportunity to better understand their concerns and perspectives. If there are ideas for us to do better, and do these sustainably, we should strive to do so.

- d. To help our activists to be better communicators, we will strengthen training within the party.

21. Third, T to Team Up. Our activists can team up with and encourage those around you to play a bigger part in nation building.

- a. As activists of the party, you can help us to team up with your family members, friends, classmates, and colleagues. Bring the community along with you on this journey, so that they too can contribute to this expanding democracy of deeds.
- b. My team and I will also be sharing with Singaporeans what we want to achieve for our country and people. Just last week, Masagos spoke about combating climate change. Indranee shared the 4G's approach to tackling inequality. My other colleagues will speak on other areas in the months ahead. We want to listen to the views of many more Singaporeans, and work together.
- c. More than ever, today's climate of uncertainty and complex challenges call for teamwork. It is teamwork and trust that allow us to thrive. We must draw on the diverse strengths among us. Singaporeans will have to be open to different views. I encourage you to bring the community on board this process to envision our future together. Through this process, we can also build a stronger culture of respect and tolerance.

22. By taking action to give back to society, better communicating our policies, and encouraging Singaporeans to work as a team to build our nation, you will help to build trust - build trust with the government and build trust with our people.

## Conclusion

23. Comrades,

- a. Earlier in my speech, I said that the 4G leadership will continue to grow the trust that the PAP has built with the people. Let us take the opportunity at the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Policy Forum to reflect on how we can act together to expand our democracy of deeds, starting with all of us in this room.
  
- b. Like the generations of PAP leaders before us, we know that your support is our strength. My team and I will need the support of all activists, to work in stronger partnership with Singaporeans as we grow our trust and build our shared future together.

24. Thank you very much.