



## National Day Rally 2024

PM Lawrence Wong | 18 August 2024

Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Lawrence Wong delivered his National Day Rally 2024 speech on 18 August 2024 at the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) Headquarters.

PM spoke in Malay and Mandarin, followed by English.

### "A Singapore Where We Realise Our Dreams"

Friends and fellow Singaporeans,

Let me start by expressing my deepest gratitude to those who came before us.

We have achieved so much in Singapore over these last 60 years.

It is because of the strong foundations laid by previous Prime Ministers and governments, as well as successive generations of Singaporeans.

ESM Goh Chok Tong and Senior Minister Lee Hsien Loong are with us tonight.

We thank them for their service.

I have known both of them for a long time.

ESM Goh was Prime Minister when I started work in the civil service.

Equally important, he was my Member of Parliament in Marine Parade.

Growing up, I benefited greatly from the improvements he brought to the estate.

Back then Marine Parade was a new town, and the nearest kindergarten was quite far away. I attended it for a few days, but had difficulties adjusting, and I kept crying. My parents were at their wits end. They eventually allowed me to stay home, and I missed most of my first year of preschool.

Fortunately for me, at about the same time, Mr Goh set up a PAP kindergarten in Marine Parade, conveniently located near my home. I had a good teacher; I felt comfortable there; and I settled in well.

Later, as a teenager, I even received an education award from him!

That is me at 16 on the left with my family, and Mr and Mrs Goh. This was in 1989, you can see in the picture, this was before we started Edusave nationwide.

So this was a special Marine Parade initiative.

Senior Minister Lee was Finance Minister when I was at the Ministry. As a young officer, I supported him on a few Budgets.

Later he became Prime Minister and he was looking for a Principal Private Secretary (or PPS).

I was nominated to go for an interview. But I did not expect to get the job. Yet he gave me a chance to work alongside him.

So I did the best I could. And I learnt much from him. As you can see, even his gong fu moves.

I saw first-hand from him what devotion to country meant. I figured I would only be PPS for 3 years, while he would be Prime Minister for much longer. He had to run a marathon. I could afford to sprint, and go all out to support him. And that is what I tried to do.

Politics then was the furthest thing on my mind.

Frankly, no one in my family or circle of friends expected me to take this path.

But when Mr Lee asked me in 2011, I could already see the difficulties he faced in putting together a younger team.

I had been in the public service long enough to know that without effective political leaders, our system would not function effectively.

And that is why I decided to step forward to serve.

In the last 13 years, I have had the chance to work in different ministries, learning much from my senior colleagues in Cabinet.

Now the leadership baton has passed to me.

I have a bigger responsibility. But I have not changed.

I may be Prime Minister. But I am also a fellow citizen and a friend, sharing the same experiences and concerns as all of you.

I am here to serve you and our country.

And I pledge to give my all to this endeavour.

We are writing the next chapter of our Singapore Story amidst great uncertainty around us. Powerful forces – over which we have no control – are changing our environment.

In geopolitics, our biggest concern is the intensifying rivalry between America and China.

Everyone is watching closely the upcoming presidential election in the US.

But whichever candidate wins, it is clear that America's attitude towards China is hardening.

Meanwhile, China is convinced that America is seeking to contain it, and suppress its rise.

The mutual suspicion and mistrust will continue.

It will affect not just relations between the two powers, but also international trade, security, and cooperation.

As a small country, totally reliant on trade and a stable global environment, we are bound to be impacted.

Another thing we have to contend with – rapid technological disruptions.

We have all experienced the impact of the Internet over the last 30 years.

Artificial Intelligence is likely to have an even greater influence on our lives.

It will transform how we learn and work; how we collaborate and interact with each other.

Then there is climate change – an existential threat hanging over the entire world.

We have to do our part to reduce our carbon footprint. That itself will require major adjustments in our lifestyles and how we do business.

And we also have to prepare for the worst – to protect ourselves against warming global temperatures and rising sea levels.

How can our little red dot survive and endure amidst these profound global changes?

Mr Lee Kuan Yew once said that Singapore needs a government that is both prudent and bold.

That is the approach my team and I will adopt.

We will be prudent.

To honour and respect the past.

To uphold the fundamentals that have served us well, and remain relevant to us.

But we must and we will be bold.

We will not let the past constrain our ability to shape our future.

We will look for fresh and better solutions, and choose the best way forward for our nation.

That is why my team and I embarked on the Forward Singapore exercise.

We have seen what happens in other countries when the broad middle falls behind. The centre does not hold. Societies begin to fracture and collapse.

Do not assume this cannot happen here. It can – and it will – unless we take decisive actions to prevent it.

So we need a renewed social compact where every Singaporean feels there is hope; where all citizens, even the most disadvantaged amongst us, know that they can get a fair shot in life, that they can get ahead if they make the effort and work hard.

That is what Forward Singapore is about. It is to keep our society strong and

united; to share the benefits of progress with all, not just some; to uplift all Singaporeans, not just a few.

Forward Singapore is also about our shared values, and our hopes and dreams for our future.

We have heard from many Singaporeans, especially the younger ones.

They want to strive and work hard for their goals.

But they do not want to be trapped in an endless rat race, or be caught in a constant cycle of comparisons based on narrow definitions of success.

They seek a more inclusive society, with space to explore and experiment, and opportunities to pursue their chosen paths, including less conventional ones, off the beaten tracks.

They hope for a more caring and gracious society – where there is more support for Singaporeans to get over setbacks in life, and where we all do our part to help one another succeed.

I share these aspirations.

I believe we have reached a stage where all of us, young and not so young, want a refreshed Singapore Dream.

A Singapore:

Where we feel for our fellow citizens and support one another.

Where we thrive and flourish on our own terms – in ways that are less prescribed and determined, more adventurous and open.

Realising our new ambitions will require a major reset – a major reset in policies, to be sure; but also a reset in our attitudes.

This evening, I will share what we have done to reset policies, and what more you can expect in the coming months. There are many items on our agenda, and I cannot cover everything in one session. So I will focus on a few key areas: the economy, families, housing and education.

The transformations we seek will unfold over several years. To achieve our shared goals, I need your help. Because making the lasting changes we are aiming for will require a mindset shift in all of us.

Together, we can chart our new way forward for Singapore and our fellow citizens.

## Economy

I will start with the economy.

Sometimes people accuse the government of being too obsessed with economic performance.

But we are not trying to grow at all costs, nor to grow for its own sake.

We seek economic growth, because that is how we create more opportunities and a better quality of life for all Singaporeans.

The truth is our next phase of economic development will get harder.

We are competing in a different environment.

In the past, developed countries were happy to outsource their manufacturing to

cheaper locations in Asia.

People used to say “invented in California; made in China” – you get the best of both worlds.

That era is over.

Now the slogan is: “invented in California, made in the USA”.

European and other developed countries too are taking the same approach – to rebuild their critical industries, and to re-shape global supply chains in their favour.

Meanwhile, the developing countries are moving up. They do not want to be left behind.

China has its “Made in China 2025” strategy.

It too wants to be technologically self-reliant, and to dominate the industries of the future.

These are the new realities. How do we compete and earn our living in such an environment?

We have to work even harder to stay competitive, and push the frontiers of innovation and productivity.

That is why we are investing heavily in research and development, and in new infrastructure and technologies.

Our strategies are working.

I have met many CEOs of multi-national enterprises in recent months.

They are all keen to grow their presence here. Because in this troubled world, they see Singapore as a stable, reliable, and trusted partner.

So we are attracting new investments and these will help us build new capabilities across a range of industries.

We are also nurturing and growing our own enterprise eco-system.

I remember more than a decade ago, someone lamented in a dialogue – “why aren’t we able to produce more start-ups like Creative”.

In fact, we have been doing so.

More home-grown companies are using their creativity, knowledge, and ideas to grow and expand overseas.

You would have heard of SEA, Grab and Razer, just to name a few.

But smaller enterprises are making great strides too.

You know I enjoy playing the guitar. I am not performing tonight. But I will tell you a guitar story.

If you look closely at guitarists playing on stage, you often see them with several pedals on the floor. They use these pedals to produce different sound effects.

This is a highly competitive market, with many, many brands and options to choose from. To stand out, you need innovation, quality and a deep understanding of what musicians want.

One Singaporean company – Morningstar Engineering – has done just that.

It is founded by two SMU graduates – James (Toh) and Benjamin (Chia).

They are musicians themselves. They started pursuing this as a hobby and side project. James is passionate about technology too, so he started to tinker and build his own guitar pedals. He shared his creations on a music forum, and he realised others were interested in what he was doing.

Initially it was just a two-man show – they kept their day jobs, operated out of their homes, and worked on weekends and evenings to assemble and pack their products.

But the orders started filling up quickly, and so they had to focus on the company full-time. With support from Enterprise Singapore, they participated in trade shows overseas, and grew their brand and market.

Now, many professional guitarists around the world who use digital effects for their music would have heard of Morningstar Engineering or their pedals.

That is quite an achievement. So congratulations James and Benjamin!

Whether in music, F&B, fashion or other areas, Singaporean entrepreneurs are carving out new niches, and making their mark globally.

We will do more to encourage this spirit of innovation and enterprise.

Tonight, I will touch on two more areas: our regulatory environment, and our people.

The first is to ensure a business-friendly environment and to keep the regulatory burden to a minimum.

On the whole, we do quite well.

Our agencies understand the importance of minimising regulations, and they only impose rules when necessary.

But over time, the rules have grown, and sometimes overgrown.

Earlier this year, I received feedback from a company that wanted to convert their factory into a dormitory for their workers.

They started the process in April last year.

They had to apply to 7 different agencies, one by one.

And they managed to get permission to proceed only after 9 months.

I decided to ask for more details about the case.

It turns out some of the delay arose because the information the company submitted was not complete.

But even if they had done everything properly, the application would still have taken several months.

I think that is still too long. We can and we will shorten the process.

Let me share another example.

Previously, to put up a drone show in Singapore

One: You needed a permit for the show.

Two: Every drone had to be registered.

And three: Every registered drone had to have a sticker on it.

Some drone shows can use more than 1,000 drones. Like the ones you see here. That means more than 1,000 stickers!

Now there are valid reasons to register drones – because of aviation safety and security.

But when the drones are used for a specific purpose, like a show, and they stay within a pre-approved area, the risks are more manageable.

So after receiving this feedback, we streamlined the process.

Now you only need one permit for a show, regardless of how many drones you use!

And no more stickers!

You also save money in the process.

Previously, a drone show using 1,000 drones would incur more than \$25,000 in compliance costs.

Now, it will cost just \$500.

That is a lot of savings!

Now, I want to be fair to our regulators – they are doing their jobs.

Every agency has legitimate concerns to deal with.

Furthermore, each time an incident happens, be it an injury at a workplace, or a food poisoning outbreak, the regulators come under great pressure to tighten the rules further.

Each new rule may seem small.

But the small changes add up.

And that is why every few years or so, we have to do a thorough and proactive review of our rules and processes, and prune them back where possible.

We have an excellent civil service who can do this work.

But sometimes there are difficult trade-offs to be made. Relaxing some rules also means accepting more risk, and Singaporeans need to understand and support these changes.

So I have asked DPM Gan Kim Yong to oversee this work.

He has roped in a few ministers, and they have been hard at work.

I am sure this will improve things, and I hope this will go some way in helping businesses, especially our Small and Medium Enterprises.

Second, we will do more to equip Singaporeans with the skills to stay competitive.

We have an excellent workforce in Singapore.

But the pace of change across industries and workplaces will accelerate.

Some jobs will become obsolete, but new jobs will be created, hopefully with better pay.

To adapt to this churn, we must all embrace lifelong learning.

Many of us have grown up thinking that studying and learning is all about passing exams, and getting the qualifications for a job.

That mindset really has to go.

We study not for the exam, or the paper qualification.

We study to improve our skills, and to keep on doing better.

And that process of learning and achieving skills mastery must continue throughout life.

I know it is not easy for everyone to do this.

Some are able to adapt and thrive.

But others feel the changes are happening too quickly, and find it hard to keep pace.

That is why we introduced SkillsFuture nearly a decade ago.

And we are now giving this a further boost – to strengthen SkillsFuture as a key pillar in our social compact.

One new scheme is the SkillsFuture Level-Up programme.

All Singaporeans aged 40 and above would have received a \$4,000 SkillsFuture Credit top-up in May.

The credits are already in your accounts!

Please take full advantage and make good use of them!

Of course effective skills upgrading takes commitment and time.

You cannot become an expert just by going for a 1- or 2-day course.

Workers will need time off for full-time training from work, and this can stretch over several months. They may not get paid and will need help with their daily expenses.

So from next year, we will provide a new training allowance under the SkillsFuture Level-Up programme.

Essentially, if you take time off from work to study full-time, you will get an allowance of up to \$3,000/month.

Every Singaporean age 40 and above can benefit from this – many of you in this room, I am sure.

And you have 24 months' worth of allowance, everyone.

If you do the sums, that adds up to \$72,000 per person!

So you can space out your training, and get fresh injection of skills whenever you need it as you progress in your career.

This is for those taking full-time courses. Now you may ask: what about those who choose to train part-time?

They will continue to receive their salaries, of course.



But it is not easy to work and go for classes after that.

There will also be expenses associated with training, like fees and books.

So we will extend some of the training allowance to those who attend part-time courses as well. They will get some of it.

MOE is working on this, and will share more details when ready.

Going for training is not easy, especially for older workers.

But I assure you: you are not alone.

The government will be there to support and help you, every step of the way.

Anyone who wants to upgrade their skills – at any point in their lives, no matter how old – will be given the opportunity to do so in Singapore.

This is my commitment to each and every one of you.

So I hope we all embrace this spirit of learning, and be a nation of learners!

Another new move we will make under SkillsFuture is to help those who become involuntarily unemployed, for example when they are retrenched or when their companies go bust.

We have been studying this for some time.

Some countries have unemployment insurance.

But the experience has not always been positive – because after getting a generous benefit, the person might find it more attractive to stay unemployed than to go back to work.

That is why the government has always been wary about such schemes.

But we also know that losing a job is a major setback, which can seriously destabilise workers and their families. And we have to do something – to lessen the strain on those who are affected.

That is why we searched for an alternative. Just as we created Workfare instead of Welfare, what would be better than unemployment insurance? How can we help in a way that minimises the negative outcomes we have seen elsewhere?

We discussed this with our brothers and sisters from NTUC and the Labour Movement who have been championing this initiative for some time. Now, we are ready to introduce a new SkillsFuture Jobseeker Support scheme.

The scheme will focus on helping lower- and middle-income workers.

If you lose your job, we will provide you with temporary financial support. How much? In total, up to \$6,000, over a period of up to 6 months.

So we will help you get through the setback and bounce back stronger.

But you must do your part too!

What should you do? Go for training, career coaching, as well as job matching services. These are essential investments that you need to make in yourself to find better jobs.

So this is the essence of our renewed social compact. We will have your back, we will stand by you; but you too must take responsibility for your actions, and make an effort to pull yourself up. Together, we will get through every setback.

This is a new scheme and Minister Tan See Leng will provide more details about it in due course.

As our economic transformation continues, we will do more to enhance Singapore businesses, and to equip and support every Singaporean, including when they encounter setbacks. A growing economy will create more opportunities and jobs for all. We will ensure the benefits are shared widely, and that everyone gains from our nation's progress.

That is what we will achieve together through Forward Singapore.

## Families

Let me now speak about families.

Our families play a key role in supporting each and every one of us to realise our aspirations and dreams.

We know from surveys that most young Singaporeans want to marry and have children.

But they also have other competing aspirations and life goals – like to establish their careers or pursue their personal interests. In the end, these are deeply personal choices.

What the Government can and will do is to create a more family-friendly environment in Singapore. And hopefully this will motivate more Singaporeans to translate their aspirations into reality.

One major focus is preschool.

We have greatly expanded the number of preschool places over the last decade.

I know in some areas it can still be difficult to find places, especially in new housing developments.

We will continue to ramp up and set up more centres.

And we will keep the fees affordable.

Our aim is for the expenses at full-day childcare to be as affordable as that in primary school.

So we will lower the fees at government-supported preschools to achieve this.

Today parents pay around \$300 per month for primary school and after-school student care combined.

We will keep expenses for dual-income families at roughly the same amount for full-day childcare at government-supported preschools. So that is about \$300 a month.

Those with lower incomes will get additional subsidies. So for the less well-off, their expenses for childcare can be as low as \$3 a month.

We will continue to update our policies to keep preschool affordable and convenient.

But not all changes involve policies. Some have to do with our attitudes and mindsets too.

In particular, we have come a long way in promoting women's development in Singapore.

But I think some of us still believe that fathers should be the exclusive

breadwinners, and mothers the main caregivers.

That has to change.

Women these days have every opportunity to excel in their careers.

It is not possible for them to pursue their goals, and still carry a heavier share of the caregiving and housework responsibilities.

So fathers must play a bigger role.

Fortunately, we do see encouraging signs of change.

Workplaces are becoming more supportive of fathers taking time off.

More fathers are playing a bigger role in their families – even changing diapers and doing housework!

I had a chat with a colleague from the Ministry of Finance, Arash. He became a father when he was busy helping me with Budget preparations two years ago.

But he was still able to take time off for paternity leave and for parenting duties.

I am sure his wife Simran who is a lawyer appreciates that greatly. After all, her husband is the designated chef for their son, and also the one in charge of all his laundry! Keep it up, Arash!

I hope we have more fathers like him, and more taking their paternity leave too.

When paternity leave was introduced more than a decade ago, only about 25% of fathers took it up – just 1 in 4.

Today more than half do. So it is more than 1 in 2.

And that is a big improvement.

But it still means that close to half of fathers do not take their paternity leave.

We can do better. Tonight, I will give this a further push.

Earlier this year, we doubled paternity leave from 2 to 4 weeks.

We left employers to offer the additional 2 weeks on a voluntary basis.

From 1 April next year, we will make this mandatory.

That means if fathers apply for leave, employers must agree.

So I hope all fathers make good use of the 4 weeks to spend quality time with your babies!

I know many parents would like to spend even more time with their children, especially when they are infants.

They often ask us, can we introduce more parental leave.

But employers and businesses are concerned about managing manpower gaps when their employees are away for an extended period.

We looked at countries where parents enjoy more generous parental leave, some stretching out to a year or more.

They adopt a different approach.

They provide long durations of leave, but part of it is provided at reduced pay, or

even unpaid.

Employees also have to be open to taking on a different role when they return to work a year later.

In Singapore our leave provisions are shorter.

But most of it is fully paid. And in most cases, you can return to the same job when you come back to work.

Because we have a different system, it is hard to make a direct comparison with other countries. But having studied the matter carefully, I think we can further enhance our leave schemes.

Currently, fathers have 4 weeks of paternity leave, and mothers have 16 weeks of maternity leave.

We also have an arrangement currently where husbands can share up to 4 weeks of their wife's maternity leave.

In other words, if the fathers take more, the mothers end up with less.

I think that is not so ideal.

So we will replace this arrangement with a new Shared Parental Leave.

We will provide 10 additional weeks of shared leave.

The additional leave will be shared between parents – so either fathers or mothers can take it.

This is a big change. We have engaged employers and they have asked us for some time to adjust to it.

So we will roll this out in 2 steps.

We will start with 6 weeks for babies born from 1 April 2025.

And we will increase this to the full 10 weeks a year later.

The additional 10 weeks will be paid for by the Government.

In other words, fathers have 4 weeks. Mothers have 16 weeks. On top of that, both have 10 weeks to share between them.

That is 30 weeks, or about 7.5 months, of paid leave, which parents can take to spend time with their children.

I hope this move will go some way in reassuring young couples – we are building a Singapore made for families; and we will help you keep a good balance between your working and parenting responsibilities.

So go forth! Embrace your marriage and parenthood journey!

There are married couples with children, who would like to have bigger families.

But they worry about the additional costs.

As each child grows up, the demands on their resources and finances grow too.

These can be expenses for activities outside school or even groceries for the family.

These can all add up very quickly.

I understand your concerns.

We will do something to help you.

We will introduce a new scheme for Large Families.

Under this scheme, we will provide more support for those thinking about having a third child.

And more help to parents who already have three or more young children.

We are still working out the details of the scheme, and I hope to share the good news in the Budget next year.

## Housing

Another concern of many Singaporeans, especially young couples, is housing.

Our current problems arose because of COVID-19 and the disruption caused to the construction industry. Supply of new residential units slowed down, and so the prices went up.

But we have since implemented a series of cooling measures to help stabilise the market.

And we have been busy ramping up supply.

Minister Desmond Lee and the team at MND and HDB have been hard at work. As you can see, they have been on the ground, supervising project after project.

By early next year, the backlog will be cleared – all the BTO projects delayed by COVID-19 will be completed. And residents can collect their keys soon.

Earlier, MND had committed to launch 100,000 new flats from 2021 to 2025.

By December, they will exceed 80,000 units.

By next year, they will deliver all 100,000 units, as promised.

Our efforts are starting to stabilise the property market.

From time to time, we read media headlines about the prices of HDB resale flats.

I know it is a big concern for home buyers.

We track the prices closely too, especially how they move in relation to incomes. That is what we call the House Price-to-Income ratio.

I will show you the ratio for the median price of 4R HDB resale flats after grants, compared to the median annual household income in Singapore.

This is the House Price-to-Income ratio. A decade ago in 2014, it was 4.8. That means the price of the resale 4R flat (after grants) was nearly 5 times annual income.

It came down over the years, as you can see, to below 4 in 2019.

Then you know what happened.

COVID-19 struck, and the ratio spiked up, to 5.

It is now slightly better – 4.8 now.

It is still higher than the pre-COVID-19 years.

In fact it is the same as it was a decade ago.

To put in perspective too, our current House Price-to-Income ratios are in fact significantly lower than most major cities in the world be it London, Sydney or Hong Kong.

But we know there is still work to be done. And we are pressing on with efforts to make HDB flats more affordable.

The key is to ramp up supply, which we have, and will continue to do.

First-timers applying for BTO flats can already see some improvements.

They are more likely to get a queue number.

Waiting times to book a flat have also shortened.

We will continue to do better.

Waiting times for most projects are now around four years.

We aim to shorten this by building ahead of demand.

So over time, more BTO projects will have waiting times of less than three years.

We also pay special attention to the BTO flats in the mature estates.

Their prices are often higher, reflecting the higher value of property in these choicer locations.

We want to ensure that Singaporeans can afford HDB flats in these locations too. And that is why we made major changes last year with the new HDB classification of Standard, Plus, and Prime flats.

What does the new framework mean for you?

We have explained it before. But this is a major change. So let me go through it again.

First, we have location: standard flats are available across the island and remain the majority of our housing supply. Plus flats refer to those in choicer locations within each region, perhaps near the MRT station or town centre; Prime flats are those in the choicest locations in Singapore.

Next we have subsidies: the usual subsidies for standard flats, more for the Plus flats, and the most subsidies for the Prime flats. This will keep the Plus and Prime flats within reach of the majority of Singaporeans.

Finally, there are restrictions: tighter conditions will apply for the Plus flats and the tightest conditions for the Prime flats. And when these flats are resold later, the additional subsidies will have to be returned to HDB – so it is fair for all.

The first batch of BTO units under this new framework will be launched in October.

Tonight, since it is my turn to be your housing agent, I will give you a sneak preview.

The October sales exercise will include BTO projects in many towns like Sengkang, Bayshore, and Kallang/Whampoa.

Let us take a young couple who hopes to buy a 4R BTO flat in the new Bayshore Vista project. It looks something like this.

A resale flat in this area is quite expensive. I am sure all of you know that.

But this will be sold as a BTO Plus flat at a lower price of \$580,000.

The couple has a combined income of \$7,000.

They will enjoy an Enhanced CPF Housing Grant of \$25,000.

So they can take a 25-year HDB loan.

And they will be able to service their mortgage mostly with their CPF savings, with minimal cash outlay. So that is how we keep flats in this area affordable for young couples.

Take another example of a couple with lower income applying for a 3R flat.

They can try for a unit at Sengkang – there is a project at Fernvale Sails.

This is a standard BTO flat, it will cost about \$300,000.

This couple has an income of \$4,000.

And because their income is lower they will enjoy a higher grant of \$55,000.

They too can get a 25-year HDB loan.

And they can finance it entirely with their CPF; that means zero cash outlay.

Of course, the couple can also try for a 3R Plus flat at Bayshore, but that will be more of a stretch for them financially.

So I think we can do more to help lower-income couples get their first homes.

Currently they can get an Enhanced CPF Housing Grant of up to \$80,000.

We will increase the Grant, especially for the lower-income groups.

Minister Desmond Lee will share more details soon.

This is my assurance to all young Singaporeans: once you start work and wish to settle down, we will make sure that there is a HDB flat that is within your budget, in every region. We will always keep public housing in Singapore affordable for you!

Besides married couples applying for BTO flats for the first time, I know there are other groups concerned about housing.

One group is the elderly.

We are implementing the new nationwide Age Well SG – to enable our seniors to stay active and age well within their communities.

We are also expanding housing options for our seniors.

We have introduced the Community Care Apartments. This is a new housing concept that integrates elderly-friendly housing with care and social services.

The keys to the first Community Care Apartments – Harmony Village @ Bukit Batok – will be handed over to residents later this year. And I am sure they are looking forward to it.

We will continue to launch more of such projects – integrating housing with care.

Of course there are seniors who prefer not to move – they want to age in place,

where they currently live. So we are also studying ways to improve our existing homes, and to make them more senior friendly. That is something that MOH and MND are actively working on.

As I mentioned in my Mandarin speech just now, we will care for our seniors in Singapore; we will ensure everyone can age with dignity, security, and peace of mind.

Another group that is concerned about housing is singles.

Today, they can buy BTO flats, but only 2R flexi units, and only after they have turned 35.

I have asked MND to see what more we can do for singles.

It is hard for us to make any major near-term changes, because we are still ramping up the supply of new flats to catch up with the demand.

But there is one move we can make now.

Today, married children and their parents who are buying new flats to live with or near one another get priority access to BTO flats.

We do this to make it easier for families to look after one another.

I think we should not limit this to married children. After all, many single children also want to stay close to their aged parents to take care of them.

So we will extend the priority access to all parents and their children – married or single.

This will take effect from the middle of next year.

And more details will be provided by MND in due course.

Whether it is preschool, parental leave or housing, we will do whatever we can to strengthen families in Singapore. When families are strong, our society is resilient, and our future is secure.

## Education

All parents want the best for their children, and in Singapore all parents place great emphasis on education. It is truly the most important gift that we give to our young.

We have a solid education system – it is amongst the best in the world.

But it is also competitive, and it can lead to anxiety, pressure and stress.

So it is important to refocus on the objectives of education: it is about sparking a joy for learning; and helping every child realise their full potential.

To achieve this, we must support our teachers and school leaders, who have a most challenging job.

They have to teach their subjects in a way that engages students; instils in them character and values; and develops in them broad-based skills.

They also have to manage high and sometimes differing expectations from parents.

For example, I heard about an exchange at a parent-teacher session.

The parent asked the teacher: “how’s my child doing”?



And the teacher thought he was asking about schoolwork; so he shared about the child's academic performance.

But the parent in fact wanted to know about his child's overall well-being, and how his child was doing as a person. So he left with a negative impression, feeling that the teacher only cared about grades.

But then you also have the opposite reaction.

For example, a few schools have adopted play-based learning to engage their students.

What is play-based learning? Essentially, the teachers take on a more facilitative role, and give their students more space to engage one another, to play and to learn through playing.

But a few parents were concerned.

They asked: what are the teachers doing? Why are my kids spending so much time "playing"? Please give them more assignments and homework!

So these are real challenges our educators face on the ground.

It is not easy to get the balance right.

International experts often have differing views on education. But they all agree that teachers are the most important factor in a high-quality system.

In Singapore, we are very fortunate to have teachers who are dedicated to their profession, and deeply committed to bringing out the best in every child.

Several of them are here with us this evening. We salute you. Thank you for your service!

I met several school principals recently, to better understand what is happening in our schools, and how we can help them do their jobs better. I was very encouraged by their enthusiasm and passion.

They are trying out new ways to engage students, and to make learning more interactive and meaningful.

Take language lessons, for example.

There is a lot happening in our classrooms these days to help students gain confidence in communicating and speaking good English – for example, they get more opportunities to speak and to share their experiences; to role-play a scene from a story like you see here in this picture; or to engage and work together with their classmates.

This new approach is especially important for the teaching of mother tongue languages.

I spoke about this in Mandarin just now.

But other communities worry too about their respective mother tongue languages.

It is not easy for our children, who are all growing up in an environment where English is the main language.

That is why language learning cannot be a tedious process of memorising words, idioms, or rules. I know I said I did that studying Mandarin last time.

But we have to make the language come alive, develop interest in it, and make the learning process enjoyable.

This is precisely what our educators are doing – for languages and also for other subjects. Our students are benefitting from this new approach.

Recently, the OECD looked at the Creative Thinking skills of 15-year-old students across 64 countries.

Our students did very well!

Some were surprised to hear the results. After all, we have never had the reputation for being creative. Passing exams, yes, but being creative, not so.

Nevertheless, the results show otherwise, and we should be very proud of our students and our teachers.

Tonight, I will show you one of the test questions so we can all see whether we are creative.

Students were shown this picture.

They were asked to come up with titles for this picture.

Let us think about it.

What would your answer be?

An obvious answer is: “The Giant Book”. It is very obvious, it is a big book.

But our students gave far more creative answers! Let me show you some of their responses.

One of them said, “Garden of Love”.

Another said, “Following a path that leads to nowhere”. I suppose there is a path here meandering around the tree, and also a path that leads to nowhere.

My favourite is: “A book that shows something but tells nothing”. Because it is full of empty pages.

That is just one of many questions in the OECD assessment. Our students gave creative responses, and these responses came from students of all backgrounds.

In fact, Singapore students from lower-income households did better than the average student in OECD countries.

So I believe we are doing the right things for our young.

I understand why some are still concerned.

All parents want their children to have a good head-start in life.

So we put some pressure on them to work hard and to push their own limits.

But too much pressure will do more harm than good. It can snuff out the joy of learning early in life.

These are contradictions and tensions which all parents encounter. It cannot be resolved through policy alone. We have to manage this together as a society.

On the government’s part, we will keep on improving our education system.

For example, we have done away with the T-score and changed the PSLE scoring system.

That means students are no longer graded on a curve.

They are assessed based on their own performance, and not how they compare against their peers.

If you master the materials and meet the standard, you will do well.

If others meet the standard, they will do well too.

And if more students get similar good PSLE results, we should all celebrate!  
Because it means our students are doing better.

And over time, more posting outcomes to secondary schools will be determined by ballot.

We have also removed streaming in secondary school – Express, N(A) and N(T), these are things of the past.

Students come in at Secondary 1 and are in mixed form classes.

They take subjects at different levels, based on their abilities.

If they do well, they can take subjects at a higher level later.

We will continue to study what further changes we can make.

MOE has said “every school is a good school”. But not everyone is convinced.

Sometimes parents seek my help to appeal to a particular school for their children.

So I tell them: I will try my best, but even if you cannot get your preferred choice, there are still other good options nearby. After all, I went to Haig Boys Primary and Tanjong Katong Secondary, both schools in my neighbourhood.

And I think I turned out okay.

But they reply: No, you are the exception. Nowadays going to the right school is very important! So what to do!

In the end, Singaporeans will have their own preferences and considerations where school choices are concerned. It will not be possible to convince everyone.

But what I can assure you is that we are committed to doing our best for every school. Every child in Singapore will get a good education, regardless of the school they attend.

We will enhance the learning environment and infrastructure across all our schools.

We will make better use of technology for learning.

We will re-design libraries, science laboratories and learning spaces.

We will ensure a conducive environment in every school, for teachers to work, and for students to learn, interact and collaborate with each other.

Some schools have more students from disadvantaged backgrounds, or students with greater learning needs.

We will provide more resources to these schools.

They will get more funding.

They will get more teachers and staff to support them.

And we will also do more to help these students build social networks that they can tap on later in life.

At the same time, there are students with higher abilities.

They can go faster. We should also support them and stretch them to their full potential.

We started the Gifted Education Programme, or GEP in 1984 to nurture these students.

We have gained useful experience and lessons, and updated our approach along the way.

For example in 2004, we changed the GEP for secondary schools. Instead of one centralised programme, we empowered schools to conduct different programmes to benefit more high-ability students. This has worked well.

But for primary schools, we have continued to identify and pull out the students for GEP, and place them into 9 Primary Schools.

After 40 years, I think it is time to update the GEP.

So we will discontinue the current form of the GEP in primary schools. And we will replace it with a new approach to stretch students with higher abilities across all our Primary Schools.

We will equip the schools to identify their own high-ability learners – so this will benefit more students.

Every primary school will have its own programmes to stretch these students in their areas of strength and interest.

So the students will continue in their own primary schools. They can remain with friends and teachers whom they have bonded with.

Beyond the school-based programmes, there will be some students who can benefit from even further stretch in particular subjects. They can come together for after-school enrichment modules in a nearby school, to learn and interact with one another.

I have sketched out the broad moves we will make. And Minister Chan Chun Sing will share more details later.

This is a significant change. But it is also consistent with our philosophy in education.

Every child is different – they come into our school system with different abilities.

We take care of all of them – not just the early bloomers and high-ability students; but also those like me – growing up in the heartlands, attending PCF kindergartens and neighbourhood schools.

Whatever the start points, we will help everyone to learn, develop and grow, and realise your full potential.

Some students are more talented in vocational and technical skills, and better able to apply their abilities in a practical and hands-on environment.

That is where ITE and the Polytechnics come in. They are doing excellent work equipping students with industry relevant skills.

In particular we are supporting ITE graduates to progress in their careers and earn higher wages.

Many of them can benefit by taking up a Diploma programme in their chosen area.

And that is why we introduced the ITE Progression Award.

It will support people like Mohamed Irfan.

He graduated with a Higher Nitec in Civil & Structural Engineering Design in 2016.

He developed an interest in IT, and wanted to go further. So he recently enrolled in ITE's Work-Study Diploma in Data Centre Infrastructure and Operations.

The Progression Award will provide him with a \$5,000 top-up in his Post-Secondary Education Account; and when he finishes his diploma, he will get a top-up of \$10,000 in his CPF account.

I hope more ITE graduates will follow Irfan's example to deepen their skills; and take advantage of the ITE Progression Award. You will get our full support!

After earning a diploma (be it in ITE or Polytechnic), some students can go further. But they need a different learning model that draws on their strengths. That is why more than a decade ago, when I was at MOE, I helped to set up a different degree pathway.

We call them "applied degrees" – more closely linked to industry, more hands-on learning and more work-study programmes.

Two Autonomous Universities now offer such applied degrees – the Singapore Institute of Technology or SIT and the Singapore University of Social Sciences or SUSS.

SIT will move to its new campus at Punggol later this year. This is within the new Punggol Digital District. So there will be more opportunities for industry collaboration.

SUSS will also have a new campus. This will create more opportunities for Singaporeans to pursue degrees in much-needed areas like early childhood education, and social work.

In the past, we perhaps put a lot of weight on the skills of the head – brainpower, analytical abilities and intellectual knowledge.

Now, we equally value other skills – skills of the hand, including in craftsmanship and technical expertise; and skills of the heart, which are needed in many critical areas that demand empathy and human connections.

The arts and sports too are fields which we should not neglect.

That is why we have the School of the Arts or SOTA.

If I had the chance to redo my education, I would definitely have opted for something like this!

We also have two arts institutions in Singapore – LaSalle and NAFA, offering mainly diploma programmes.

So previously, students who wished to pursue the arts at a higher level – let us say at the degree level – would have to go overseas.

But recently, LaSalle and NAFA came together to form the new University of the Arts Singapore.

This is a private university, and it offers degrees in its own name.

But it is supported by the Government.

We will support it as it develops its plans for new facilities.

We will provide it with matching grants for its fund-raising efforts.

And we are also providing subsidies for Singaporean students in the new university, to the same extent as students in our Autonomous Universities.

So when we talk about multiple pathways, we mean it seriously – we are backing these goals with resources, and fully committed to nurturing the diverse abilities of every Singaporean.

Our education system is never static; it is continually evolving.

We have made changes over the years, and we will continue to make bold changes to improve it further.

We will uphold high standards.

We will also embrace diversity and flexibility.

Students will not be forced into predefined moulds that limit their potential.

Because everyone is different. Everyone will have different paths, learn at their own pace, and develop their abilities and talents to the fullest.

These changes are already happening. I was especially inspired by Jensen Low.

He graduated with a Nitec in Baking and joined Marche restaurant as a team leader.

Jensen put what he learnt in ITE to good use. He led a team to develop a cooking process for crepes that was eventually adopted by Marche restaurants not just in Singapore but worldwide.

Because of his good performance, he was promoted to Assistant General Manager in less than 3 years. He was then the youngest person ever to be appointed to this position in Asia.

The company saw his potential, and sent him for further training in Switzerland.

He became Director of Operations in Canada.

And now he is back in Singapore, as the Vice President of Foodservice and Operations in Marche's parent company. Well done, Jensen!

I want to see a Singapore that produces many more success stories like Jensen. Where we do not pigeonhole, or typecast people based on their backgrounds or the schools they go to.

Where everyone can strive and excel, take pride at what they do, and be recognised for their efforts and work.

Together we can make this happen.

So to all our youths, I encourage you to make full use of the opportunities ahead of you. No matter what your start point in life, you have the chance to go as far as you want in your chosen field. We will be there to support you and cheer for you as you chase your rainbow!

**Olympics and Sports**

I have spoken about the arts. But this past month, we have been focussed on sports – cheering for Team Singapore at the Olympics.

We are proud of all our athletes.

Like Max Maeder.

This is his first Olympics. He was up against tough opponents and difficult wind conditions.

But on National Day itself, he gave us a wonderful birthday present and delivered a bronze medal for Singapore!

At 17, he is the youngest athlete ever – not just in Singapore, ever – to win a medal in an individual sailing event in the Olympics.

So with his maturity, dedication and skills, I am confident he will have a great future ahead of him.

But sport is not just about medals. It is also about grit and determination, doing your best and pushing the limits.

You see that never-say-die spirit in our athletes. Like Shanti Pereira.

She is our fastest ever woman athlete.

Unfortunately, she suffered an injury before the Games.

But she took it in her stride – and as she put it, “this is a part of my journey... it’s going to make me stronger”.

And I have no doubt it will.

All our athletes fought hard and competed with courage against the best in the world.

Like badminton players Loh Kean Yew and Yeo Jia Min who gave their all against higher-seeded players.

Swimmer Gan Ching Hwee who set two national records and personal bests.

Teh Xiu Hong who achieved Singapore’s best ever Olympic result in shooting.

Or Stephenie Chen who got into the finals for kayaking in her first Olympics.

We are also very proud of our para-athletes who have overcome enormous obstacles to excel in their sports.

Like Daniel Chan, our national shooter. He suffered damaged nerves in his arm and shoulders from birth.

But he refused to let this define him or the way he lives his life.

He says if he wants to do something, it is not just to have fun; he wants to be good at it!

His motto is “Dreams keep you alive”.

He and other para-athletes will be chasing their dreams and flying our flag high soon at the Paralympics later this month.

I have invited some of our athletes to the Rally tonight.

I invite them to stand, so we can show them our appreciation.

Well done Team Singapore!

And to our Paralympians, we also wish you all the very best for the Games!

I am glad that more young Singaporeans with the talent in sports are taking it seriously, and excelling at the highest levels.

Mindsets are changing.

In the past, parents were not so sure about their children pursuing sports as a career.

Now we see more successful role models, like the ones we saw just now.

More young athletes are taking sports seriously, and training full time, with support from the government.

We will do more to strengthen the sporting culture in Singapore.

Through the President's Challenge, we will mobilise the community further to work with the government to nurture sports talents, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Together, we will support all Singaporeans in realising their sporting dreams.

Our plans are taking shape at Kallang.

This is the Sports Hub.

You can see familiar buildings here – the National Stadium, the Indoor Stadium, and the Aquatic Centre; as well as the Kallang Football and Tennis Hubs, which opened this year.

The Sports Hub has made our sports scene more vibrant.

I was at MCCY when we opened the Sports Hub.

I remember having to resolve several teething issues.

But there are many happy memories too.

Like when we hosted the 2015 SEA Games. This is a picture with our Team Nila volunteers who really made a difference at the Games.

Or the Finals for the Women's Tennis Association.

And more recently we have hosted many lifestyle and entertainment events.

I was not at this concert. But I am sure many of you went and had a good time!

There is still much more we can do. Now that the Government has taken over the Sports Hub, we have the ability to unlock its full potential, and make the whole Kallang area more alive.

So we call this our Kallang Alive Masterplan.

Let me share some of our ideas.

The indoor stadium is already 35 years old and no longer meets the requirements of today's sporting and entertainment events.

So the first idea is to build a new indoor arena, at this location.

It will have a capacity of 18,000, bigger than the current indoor stadium.



So we can host more top-tier events here.

And our athletes can compete on home ground.

And Singaporeans will have more opportunities to cheer them on.

Second, we will build better facilities for our Team Singapore athletes at this location.

We will have new sports science and sports medicine facilities.

We will bring together the national training centres for several key sports – which are now spread out all over the island, and we will site them here under one roof for better synergies.

We will move the Sports School here from Woodlands. And in this way, our student athletes can study and train, together with the senior athletes.

So this will be the new Home for Team Singapore!

Third, we will make Kallang a place for all Singaporeans to enjoy sports.

You do not need to be an elite athlete to enjoy the facilities at Kallang.

You may be a weekend player, or a beginner or someone trying to pick up a new sport. Whatever your level, so long as you have an interest in sports, there will be something for you here.

Currently a main road runs through the Sports Hub.

We will convert it into a pedestrianised community boulevard.

We will inject sporting facilities and programmes along this stretch for everyone to enjoy.

Let me show you a video of how it will look like. Here is the boulevard, it is a long stretch that goes all the way to the waterfront. We will have activities for everyone and we will make the entire area come alive.

We will make Kallang a new lifestyle destination for people to watch more sporting and entertainment events; take part in sports; and enjoy quality family time together!

## Conclusion

Kallang Alive is just one piece in our larger plans to remake our city centre.

We have the Kallang Basin over here, and we have Marina Bay.

Linking the two is the Marina Channel, where the Barrage is located.

These three water bodies form a continuous waterfront in the heart of our city.

Many exciting new developments are coming up around the entire waterfront. Let us take a closer look.

At Marina Bay, we will have a new National Service or NS Square. Once it is ready, it will be the home to future National Day Parades, and a gallery paying tribute to National Service.

We are all familiar with the Bay South Garden, this is where the two domes and the super-trees are located.

Across the channel, we will have a new Bay East Garden. And at the heart of this Garden, we will have the Founders' Memorial.

We will build a new pedestrian bridge – to link the Bay South Garden to the Bay East Garden and the Founders' Memorial.

So you can walk, jog or cycle along the entire waterfront promenade, from Gardens by the Bay to the Sports Hub; after 2 rounds, you would have done more than a half-marathon!

All round the waterfront, we have space for new precincts:

Nicoll and Kampong Bugis: these precincts are near our historic districts, with some of our oldest landmarks. We will introduce new residential and recreational uses here, so a new generation of Singaporeans can realise their ideas for our ever-evolving city.

Tanjong Rhu: this is currently made up of private housing. We will introduce new HDB flats here, so that more Singaporeans can have access to affordable homes near the city centre.

At Marina South and Marina East: These are large plots of land for more than 10,000 new homes. They will be well served by our MRT network. So these can be sustainable and car-lite precincts with cycling networks and pedestrian friendly streets.

The history of modern Singapore started right here in this area.

Now from here, we can extend out and remake our entire Southern coastline.

On the West all the way to Pasir Panjang, we have the Greater Southern Waterfront.

Stretching out to the East, we have the future 'Long Island', which will also help to protect against rising sea levels.

Taken together, it is an entire stretch of 120 kilometres of prime waterfront coastline.

So there are many possibilities for us to imagine and build our future city.

These are major investments. They will take decades to bear fruit.

After all, the plans for reclaiming and developing Marina Bay started right after Singapore became independent.

Likewise starting now, we can lay the foundations for a better Singapore in the decades to come.

Let me return to the theme with which I started this evening.

Can Singapore endure in this troubled world?

I believe the answer is a resounding yes!

From the beginning, there have been sceptics who said that Singapore will not make it.

But we did! Time and again we have defied the odds and proved the sceptics wrong.

Decades ago, when I was studying at Michigan in America, I learnt about one of the most famous ghost towns in the state.

Oddly enough, it was called Singapore.

It was founded in the 1830s and it became a busy lumber and ship-building

town.

No one really knows the origins of its name.

But it was very likely inspired by a British port in the exotic Far East founded in 1819.

The town lasted for about 50 years, before it was swallowed up by shifting sand dunes.

And today, only a signboard remains as a marker of its existence. This is how it looks like.

Singapore in Michigan did not last very long.

We want this Singapore to be around for a very long time – for the next thousand years and beyond.

You and I will not be around for so long.

But our faith in Singapore will endure.

Our Singapore spirit will not fade.

It will live on in every generation that calls this island home.

For we are an indomitable people.

When the going gets tough, we do not back down.

We press on, we strive to do better.

We stay united and stand by our fellow citizens.

Like what we did during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We care for one another, and we help each other along.

We move forward together as one united people.

That is how we make this little red dot shine ever more brightly.

I believe Singapore's best days lie ahead of us.

We have new ambitions to pursue.

And we are taking bold steps to turn our hopes into reality.

We can be a society where every citizen is respected, every voice is heard, every dream is nurtured.

We can be a nation where everyone can flourish, thrive, and be the best possible version of ourselves.

My fellow Singaporeans – your dreams inspire my actions.

I ask for your support as we embark on this journey. We have much to do, and a full agenda ahead.

Let us join our hands and hearts, and chart our new way forward, together.

Thank you and good night!

## ★ Videos and transcripts ★

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National Day Rally 2024 (Malay)



National Day Rally 2024 (Mandarin)

## ★ Watch more ★

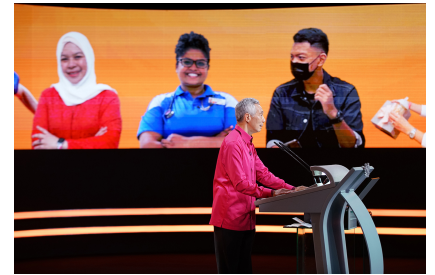
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National Day Rally 2023



National Day Rally 2022



National Day Rally 2021



## Prime Minister's Office Singapore



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