

TRANSCRIPT OF SPEECH BY MR HENG SWEE KEAT,
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COORDINATING MINISTER FOR ECONOMIC POLICIES, AT
2023 ANNUAL PUBLIC SERVICE LEADERSHIP CEREMONY ON 19 OCT 2023

Chairman and Members of the Public Service Commission

Head, Civil Service,

Colleagues,

1. I am very happy to join everyone at this year's Public Service Leadership Ceremony. It is good to see so many familiar faces gathered here today.
2. Let me first and foremost extend my appreciation to the 17 Public Service Leaders who have, or will relinquish their appointments this year, for their unwavering dedication and distinguished contributions.
 - a. In particular, I would like to acknowledge Ms Chan Lai Fung and Mr Loh Khum Yean, who retired last month.
 - b. Together, they have served in the Public Service with distinction for almost 70 years. Thank you, Lai Fung, and Khum Yean for your many contributions. We wish you all the best!
3. Let me also warmly welcome the 31 newly appointed Public Service Leaders and 123 PSLP officers to the community. With your fresh perspectives, energy and commitment, we look forward to the difference that you will bring to our collective mission.

Thanking the Public Service

4. 2023 has been a significant year for Singapore.

- a. We closed off our COVID chapter at the first quarter of the year, when we transitioned into DORSCON Green, and put out the COVID White Paper.
 - b. Beyond overcoming the crisis of a generation, we have also bounced back quickly and stronger.
 - c. This would not have been possible without the tremendous efforts from the Public Service.
 - d. Your deep sense of service and effective partnership with the political leadership and our people has enabled Singapore to not only to get through the pandemic but to emerge stronger. Thank You!
5. Emerging from the pandemic means returning to BAU work – except that is it no longer “Business *AS* Usual” but “Business *ABOVE* usual”!
- a. Taking advantage of our favourable position post-COVID, the Public Service have pushed ahead with policies across various fronts.
 - b. For example, MOH recently launched Healthier SG – a multi-year strategy to pivot towards a greater emphasis on preventive care.
 - i. This is an effort of significant scale. We have started by inviting all eligible residents aged 60 and above to enrol, so that they can develop a personalised health plan, and gain access to fully subsidised screenings and vaccinations at a trusted, regular care provider. This will also be progressively extended to those aged 40 to 59.
 - c. Another example – MND pushed on to catch up with BTO projects that were delayed by COVID. Over 70% of delayed projects have since been completed, without compromising on safety or quality.
 - i. On top of this, MND will be rolling out the new “Standard, Plus, Prime” framework next year, to keep homeownership affordable, and ensure

our public housing system continues to remain fair with good social mixing.

- d. On the Forward SG front, agencies have intensified engagements with Singaporeans to hear their perspectives on the challenges and opportunities ahead.
 - i. The Forward SG report will be released soon, to reflect these shared perspectives and how everyone in our society can contribute and shape our future.
 - ii. The report will mark a milestone, but the work continues.
 - iii. The Public Service must think about how to operationalise Forward SG's call to action for Singaporeans. Beyond communicating, we want to collaborate and co-create with them.
 - iv. By inviting the public to consider the trade-offs involved in policymaking, we can build a deeper appreciation of the Government and Public Service's efforts to build common ground amid diverse views.

- 6. To add to all these, the Public Service also conducted the 2023 Presidential Election. This went smoothly, with Singaporeans providing generally positive feedback of their experience.
 - a. ELD had drawn lessons from the 2020 General Election to reduce waiting time for voters, by increasing the number of polling stations, as well as registration and ballot paper counters.
 - b. The VoteQ system was also integrated into the hardcopy poll cards via a personalised QR code, so that voters could check the queue status at their polling station.
 - c. Beyond these design improvements, it was the hard work of many teams and officers, including many of you here, which supported ELD to ensure that the election went smoothly.

- i. From coordinating transport and logistics, security, public communications, to supporting voting for overseas Singaporeans and those in nursing homes, to developing typhoon contingency plans in Hong Kong, this was truly a WOG effort.
 - d. I would like to express my appreciation to ELD, your teams supporting the election, and all 36,000 election officials. Behind the smooth proceedings on Polling Day, there were many hours of training, setting up and preparations as well. Thank you all for your hard work!
- 7. 2023 has not ended yet, but it is clear that the pace for the Public Service has picked up, and public officers have stepped up in tandem. Thank you everyone, for serving with your heart.

A Stronger Public Service in a Changing World

- 8. Looking ahead into 2024 and beyond, we are moving into a world that is more uncertain and volatile.
 - a. Inflation has stabilised, but still higher than what we are used to.
 - b. The US-China contestation looks set to deepen in the years ahead.
 - c. The continuing Ukraine War has political and economic implications,
 - d. And there is now a flare-up of violence in the Middle East.
- 9. Singapore has built on good foundations, with a strong reputation and international standing. However, to ensure that the Public Service is ready for this more volatile future, we must evolve and update the way we work.
 - a. Let me suggest three areas where we must continue to invest in.
- 10. **First, we must continue to implement policies and deliver services well.**

- a. This is our evergreen mission, and agencies have been working hard over the years to streamline services and address issues in a citizen-centric manner.
 - i. Take municipal services for example. There were often response delays because accountability was spread across numerous agencies. Such delays irk residents.
 - ii. Since the Municipal Services Office was formed in 2014 to catalyse inter-agency cooperation, residents' satisfaction levels towards municipal services have improved to 75% in 2022.
 - iii. But MSO went further and recently piloted integrated municipal services in Tampines, where a single operator delivers 10 services.
 - iv. As a result, this has halved feedback resolution time, and increased satisfaction by a further 20%!
 - b. This is a good development because in today's environment, where needs have grown more diverse and issues are more complex and interconnected, robust policy implementation and service delivery are more salient than ever.
11. Beyond streamlining services, we must be willing to re-imagine and re-design policies and service delivery, to bring tangible improvements to our citizens' lives.
- a. Good ground sensing must be coupled with empathy and a willingness to do things differently if needed.
 - b. ComLink is a good example of how we've re-imagined support for low-income families with children.
 - i. This shift came about after MSF decided to explore how to better uplift families with needs through coordinated, family-centric support.

- ii. Instead of waiting for families to turn up at the Social Service Office or other agencies to seek help when their situation is dire, it is better to go upstream and proactively partner the family as early as possible.
 - iii. Going forward, ComLink families will be supported by Family Coaches, who will be the key touchpoint across various government departments and programmes.
 - iv. This approach is more intensive, but offers a better chance of supporting families towards stability, self-reliance and social mobility.
- c. For the broader population, advances in technology bring new opportunities to deliver services in a more convenient and intuitive manner.
 - i. For example, our ServiceSG centres serve as a whole-of-government physical service touchpoint, offering almost 600 services across 25 agencies to citizens who may still require in-person interactions.
 - ii. Even as citizens switch to digital transactions, ServiceSG centres ensure that we do not leave anyone behind.
- d. ICA's New Clearance Concept (NCC) is another example of how we will fundamentally transform the international travel experience for our citizens.
 - i. Come 2024, ICA will progressively incorporate new automated lanes in all our checkpoints.
 - ii. This will allow Singapore residents and departing visitors to enjoy passport-free immigration clearance, resulting in an even smoother and speedier clearance experience.
- e. As the age-old Public Service wisdom goes – policy is implementation.
 - i. We must both design good policies and deliver them well. This is how we sustain and renew trust with citizens.

12. This leads me to my second suggestion – we must partner citizens more deeply.

- a. Since Our Singapore Conversation in 2012, the Public Service has steadily built up citizen engagement capabilities. This has put us in good stead to drive today's Forward SG efforts.
- b. As demographics and aspirations change, we must move beyond engagement and facilitate an active citizenry that contributes to, and enables more robust policymaking amid a more diverse and complex backdrop.
- c. Alliances for Action (AfAs) offer a good model, as they bring stakeholders from different sectors together, to discuss and devise solutions to shared challenges.
 - i. In fact the very idea of AfA came out from the Emerging Stronger taskforce, which was a partnership between the political leadership and private sector CEOs.
 - ii. For example, the recently concluded AfA for Lower-Wage Workers brought passionate citizens, youths, union members, businesses and community groups together to pilot and scale up programmes to uplift lower-wage workers.
 - iii. Their initiatives ranged from strengthening respect and appreciation, to fostering supportive work environments, and increasing support for upskilling.
- d. While this might take a longer time or more effort, the value of modalities like the AfA is that it mobilises like-minded citizens and stakeholders to co-create and contribute together, thus building shared ownership.
- e. I am happy to see that Forward SG engagements have taken on more innovative and participatory modalities like citizen panels, and involved specific groups in direct action on issues that they are passionate about, such as sustainability advocates on Green Action initiatives.

13. Singapore has done well over the years. But we must never forget that we are a very young nation, in an increasingly turbulent world.
 - a. By enhancing partnership with our citizens, especially our younger generations, to build a better Singapore for the future, we foster a deeper sense of citizenship, belonging, and togetherness.
 - b. In this way, regardless of the rough and tumbles ahead, we can tackle the challenges together, and emerge stronger from each rapid.

14. **Finally, we must continue to invest in good governance and leadership.**
 - a. Singapore is a small island-state with no natural resources and a very open economy.
 - i. We have done well so far because we have built up a robust governance system that garners public trust.
 - ii. Over the years, the Public Service and political leadership have worked together to implement policies that keep Singapore exceptional and successful.
 - b. This is not something we can take for granted in today's more fractured world, where public trust is under threat in many countries.
 - i. In today's "post-truth" environment, facts could be less relevant when trying to shape public opinion. It is easy to put out divisive rhetoric or inflammatory remarks as a clickbait, while remaining anonymous.
 - ii. The rise of identity politics is also creating more divisions within society, drawing attention away from points of commonality and efforts to build cohesion.
 - iii. We only need to look around the world to see how societies have become more fragmented and polarised.

15. Now more than ever, we must invest in good governance and good leadership.

- a. It is about continuing to look outwards to engage the world, build new partnerships, pick up best practices, as well as learn from cautionary tales.
- b. Domestically, we must sustain trust and strengthen the shared sense of purpose between the Public Service and the political leadership.
- c. The Public Service ethos of Integrity, Service, Excellence are values that the political leadership shares and upholds.
- d. For the political leadership to give expression to the will of the people, we must work closely with the Public Service to develop policies and programmes. In turn the Public Service must do its best to implement and execute well.
- e. As we undergo this phase of political leadership transition, my colleagues and I look to the Public Service to continue to serve with distinction and professionalism.
- f. We are all entrusted with the task of stewarding the nation and forging a better future for Singapore and Singaporeans. Let us work closely to take Singapore forward, together.

Conclusion

16. In closing, let me once again thank the Public Service Leadership community for steering the Public Service through a busy and challenging year.
- a. We have a lot more to do in writing the next chapter of the Singapore story, within a more volatile and uncertain world.
 - b. We embark on this journey from a position of strength and confidence. Our Government has the trust and support of our people.
 - c. We have developed strong partnerships with countries in our region, and around the world.
 - d. Let us continue to deliver our policies well, partner our citizens more deeply, and uphold good governance and leadership.

- e. This will enable us to retain and deepen trust with citizens, and work effectively with countries and partners around the world.
 - f. In turn, this will strengthen our collective solidarity, deepen our linkages across the world, and enable us to secure a better future for ourselves and our future generations.
17. As we approach the year end, I hope that you will also carve out time to bond with your families and connect with your friends and loved ones.
- a. Thank you for your hard work, and I look forward to an even stronger partnership as we chart our new way forward in our next phase of nation building.
18. Thank you.