

**SPEECH BY SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT AND CHAIRMAN PAP.SG TAN  
CHUAN-JIN AT THE PAP SENIORS GROUP'S CELEBRATION OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS (IDOP) ON SUNDAY 13 OCTOBER  
2019, 3.30PM AT HOTEL MIRAMAR**

1<sup>st</sup> ASG Heng,  
Comrades,

1. Good afternoon.
2. On 14 December 1990, the United Nations General Assembly designated October 1 as the IDOP which is a day when the world comes together to mark the contributions of older people, and to raise awareness of opportunities and challenges that comes with aging in today's world. Today, we at PAP.SG are holding our inaugural IDOP celebration as well. There is much to celebrate
3. Before I start, let me share with you how I see this whole topic of ageing in Singapore can transform. It is a reality that we know will happen. It will affect all of us at some point or other. It therefore makes sense for us to fully embrace it and make it work for us all. In fact, should we not try to be able to say this, that our best years are ahead of us? Can we be that best place on earth to retire and grow old in? Not only in terms of policies and initiatives at the Government level, but also community activities and individual ownership and participation. This is a completely #SGTogether effort that is required. And I believe that we can achieve quite remarkable outcomes if we all chip in together. And if you look at the kind of set up that we have here in Government and in the community, the type of structure in place, it is exciting to imagine how far we can go in realising this vision
4. But it is really important that this vision and our ideas are not stuck at the rhetoric level. It needs to be translated into action. I hope to share on three practical efforts that are already taking place today.
  - a. One. Share with you on some of work on the ground; many of us are doing it at the branches;
  - b. Two. Highlight the efforts made on seniors' issue at the national level; and

- c. Three. Talk about our SG Ambassadors' Handbook, which 1<sup>st</sup> ASG and I will launch today.

#### *Local Initiatives Throughout Singapore*

5. There are many different local senior-related initiatives throughout Singapore. More are participating and more are beginning to help out.
6. Let me just focus on four interesting local programs that have been introduced in the past few years.
7. First. At Siglap, Comrade Dr Maliki and his volunteers spent a lot of effort to develop a comprehensive silver blueprint for his community.
  - a. Dr Maliki and his team succeeded in making the Siglap community centre a preferred destination for seniors to spend time at. More than 100 seniors would gather for various activities, every single Wednesday.
  - b. He even fundraised a Silver Mobile Van, to bring seniors from all parts of Siglap, including those from the private estates, around for social activities.
8. Second. At Ayer Rajah, Comrade Foo Mee Har rallied more than 100 volunteers to create the Ayer Rajah's Senior Friendship Circle.
  - a. Every Sunday morning, besides a hearty breakfast, seniors can bond over interactive games, karaoke, health talks, health screenings, free haircuts, and monthly birthday celebrations.
  - b. This circle has grown from strengthen to strength, and has touched more than 1,200 seniors from different races and walks of life.
9. Third. At Fengshan, Comrade Cheryl Chan and her volunteers have worked hand-in-hand with Peacehaven Salvation Army to make Fengshan a dementia friendly community.
  - a. Every Tuesday, healthcare professionals, volunteers, and staff from Peacehaven Day Care Centre will teach seniors how to recognize symptoms of dementia, exercises to do to slow down the process of dementia, and encourage healthy diet that will keep it at bay.
  - b. Regular functional checks are also done. If dementia is detected, the team will reach out to the senior's family members, including helping them work out a routine to help the seniors.

- c. The volunteers from Fengshan also identified various Go-To-Points in the community for dementia seniors who are lost.
  - d. They also actively educated the broader community to spread awareness on how to care for and support seniors with dementia.
- 10. And fourth. In Bedok, Comrade Lim Swee Say continues to build his signature social work program - Bedok Cares. His volunteers and him have meticulously identified seven groups of vulnerable seniors, and tailor made programs to assist them.
  - a. These seven groups include the lonely, disabled, caregivers, vulnerable and at risk, frail, active agers, and needy.
  - b. Though such systematic outreach, his volunteers have connected more than 405 seniors to various intervention programs.
- 11. There are many many more examples. Let's think about scaling these ideas and replicating them.

*An Exciting Year with Regards to Seniors' Policy*

- 12. One of PAP.SG's most important goals is to advocate on issues that impact our seniors' quality of life, care and security.
- 13. From the middle to late last year, PAP.SG embarked on a comprehensive exercise to gather views from our activists, and from experts in healthcare and aging issues. In January 2019, we presented a paper entitled Empowering Us to Live with Purpose and Dignity in Our Senior Years, where we recommended that seniors be supported in areas of employment, housing and public spaces and also be active in sports or leisure activities.
- 14. The following month, PAP.SG held one of the largest private member motion debate in parliament, with more than 33 parliamentarians and 6 members of the government front bench speaking on the issues.
- 15. I am glad our Government has recognised some of these suggestions.
- 16. First. With regards to seniors employment,
  - a. The government has announced that by 2030, the retirement age will increase from 62 to 65 by 2030, and the Re-employment age from 67 to 70.
  - b. The Public Service will lead by example, starting in 2021

- c. The Central Provident Fund (CPF) contribution rates will be raised for workers above 55, start to taper down after 60 and level off after 70.
  - d. With all the policies, we will finetune the timing to factor in the current economic uncertainties.
17. Second. With regards to caregivers,
- a. MOH has committed to rolling out a Caregiver Support Action Plan over the next two years to enhance financial support; flexible work arrangements and respite care options for caregivers, that is very important for all caregivers.
18. Third. With regard to better healthcare affordability,
- a. The government rolled out Merdeka Generation Package this year.
  - b. Beyond this, per capita household income threshold for subsidies on a dozen healthcare services and for existing CHAS subsidies has increased; these adjustments will benefit more than 365,000 people.
  - c. Starting next month, the government will also introduce of new tier to the CHAS scheme for all Singaporeans, regardless of income, who suffer from chronic ailments.
19. Fourth, with regards to more diverse housing choices,
- a. New guidelines to set standards of care in assisted living facilities have been launched.
  - b. The government will launch its first assisted living pilot site for public housing at Bukit Batok next year, and is also exploring such retirement housing models for private residential sites.
  - c. A dementia care village, the first of its kind in Singapore, will be built in Sembawang, and more new site at Gibraltar Crescent will be made available for tender for care and residential options for people with dementia.
20. Fifth, with regards to helping seniors travel safely, designated priority train cabins for vulnerable commuters, including seniors, will be piloted on one of the rail lines.
21. Last of all, with regards to more ground-up effort to help seniors, the government has set up the HealthySG Taskforce. This Taskforce will make recommendations for transforming Singapore's health promotion landscape,

with the infusion and integration of health in various aspects of Singaporeans' lives and the environment.

22. All these are added on to the many other existing initiatives.

*PAP.SG Ambassadors' Handbook*

23. Now let me touch on my final point - PAP.SG Ambassadors' Handbook.

- a. Actually, the idea for the handbook came about from you, our senior activists.
  - i. Frequently, our senior activists will encounter elderly residents who often queried them about various government initiatives at Meet-the-People Sessions.
  - ii. Our activists have to visit different government websites for information on the initiatives or regulation relating to seniors.

24. This is a challenging task.

- a. Because we have a lot of government programs and so many initiatives for our seniors.
- b. And since our government actively takes in feedback, there are many frequent improvements to our programs, which is not easy for all of us to track.

25. That is why many of you have suggested the possibility of a handbook with all the relevant information at your fingertips. And this is exactly what we have done.

- a. The PAP.SG Ambassador Handbook includes information on Healthcare initiatives relating to seniors, the Central Provident Fund (CPF) contribution rates for older workers and other information pertaining to seniors.

26. Coming up with this Handbook is not a trivial task.

- a. Our PAP.SG Exco Member, Dr. Thang Leng Leng led a team that synthesized information from all government ministries.
- b. They also went through in-depth discussion with some of our activists to make sure the information is relevant and useful to you.
- c. Clearly, we will also upload this online and will be easier to update this regularly.

d. Thank you, Leng Leng, for a job well done!

## Conclusion

27. Let me now conclude. An ageing population brings about deep and serious challenges to many societies. Most countries will struggle with this and will find it difficult to address.
28. But let's reframe the narrative.
  - a. Ageing should not be perceived as a problem that must be managed.
  - b. Such a negative narrative can become self-fulfilling.
  - c. Instead, we should boldly reframe our narrative and create a positive agenda.
29. In fact, one could argue that Singapore is possibly better placed than many other countries to thrive, even as we age as a society. Preparing a society for successful ageing requires long-term planning. Long-term planning is exactly what we do well in Singapore. In the not distant future, we may well have one of the few remaining sustainable healthcare systems that continue to deliver good outcomes for her people. With SGCares and our community networks, we can organise ourselves better, be data-driven, but also with lots of hearts and hands to engage our seniors in various ways. No one should ever be really isolated if we can help it. And we should all remain active in so many different ways. ActiveSG lifestyles and even our gig economy isn't just for the young but for all of us!
30. Imagine. How exciting this can be? If we can really empower ourselves, we will be free and independent to live our lives fully. We will all truly become the Merdeka generation...free and independent. Let's come together, work hard and make this happen. Let us make Singapore to be one of the best place in the world for seniors. Let us make Singapore one of the best place for all of us.
31. Thank you.