

**SPEECH BY 1ST ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL,
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR FINANCE
MR HENG SWEE KEAT**

**AT THE PEOPLE'S ACTION PARTY CONVENTION 2019
“ADVANCING SINGAPORE TOGETHER”**

ON SUNDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 2019, 0950

Comrades

Brothers and Sisters from the NTUC

Fellow Singaporeans

Good morning

1. I am honoured to be able to address the Convention today.
 - a. It is my privilege to speak on behalf of the 4G leadership, and see many senior activists including retired MPs here with us this morning.

Honouring Comrade Ong Pang Boon and Senior Activists

2. This year, we celebrate the 65th anniversary of the PAP's founding.
 - a. Warmest congratulations to our activists who will be receiving awards later.
3. Heading the list of recipients is Comrade Ong Pang Boon, who has been awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for his contributions to Singapore and the PAP.
 - a. Thank you, Comrade Pang Boon, for over 30 years of dedicated service in the Party and the Government

4. Comrade Pang Boon and all our senior comrades have laid the foundation for subsequent generations - year after year – and built a better life for all Singaporeans.

a. We are deeply grateful for your hard work and dedication.

b. Thank you!

5. My generation of leaders and PAP activists will build on the foundations you have laid.

a. We will strive to continue to build a better life for all Singaporeans, and strengthen the bonds with our people.

PAP and Singapore: Advancing together over generations

6. When we look back over the last 700 years of our history in our Bicentennial year, we see how Singapore was buffeted by the rise of regional powers and by industrial revolutions.

a. We had many ups and downs, and we had to accept the role determined by kingdoms and nations more powerful than us.

7. That changed when we won the right to self-government, and later on Independence.

a. The pioneer PAP leaders were instrumental in this

b. Since 1959, we have determined our own fate.

8. Generations of leaders helped Singapore to not only survive, but to thrive.

a. The theme of our Convention today – “Advancing Singapore Together” – speaks to the core of our identity as the PAP.

- b. Our mission, since our founding, has been: “To build a fair and just society, where the benefits of progress are spread widely to all.”
- 9. This has not been easy over the past 65 years.
 - a. But guided by this mission, generations of PAP leaders and activists have worked together with our people to improve the lives of all Singaporeans.
 - b. Each generation built on the progress of those who came before them, and in turn, left a stronger, more prosperous and more united Singapore to their children.
- 10. Many older Singaporeans told me that they cried when visiting the Bicentennial Experience, especially when they reflected on our progress since Independence.
 - a. Because they recalled how their lives had improved, year after year, and they were moved as they looked back on how far we have come since those turbulent early years.
- 11. In fact, Singapore is ranked first in the World Bank’s Human Capital Index.
 - a. This means that Singapore is the best place for a child to achieve good health, reach their potential, and live a full life.
 - b. And we achieved this without spending the most money on education and healthcare, but because we did the right thing.
- 12. This is how the PAP has won trust and support – by making a positive difference to the lives of Singaporeans in a sustainable way

13. The 4G recognises that this right to leadership can never be inherited, but must be fought and won anew with each generation of Singaporeans.

- a. The people may change, but our mission does not – the 4G will strive to “build a fair and just society”, and ensure that the benefits of progress are felt by all Singaporeans.

Our challenges ahead

14. Our mission is clear. But the global environment is very uncertain. The US-China trade war is hurting everyone, technology is advancing rapidly, and changes are happening faster than ever.

15. Today, the economy is a key concern for many Singaporeans.

- a. I know many are worried – last quarter, we narrowly avoided a technical recession.
- b. We are watching our economy vigilantly.
 - i. We must not fear – we have the plan and resources to take action when needed.

16. More importantly, even as we navigate these turbulent waters, we must keep an eye on what lies further ahead.

- a. Thinking ahead has been a key strength of the PAP leadership.
- b. There are big changes that are affecting countries and people all over the world.

17. At the Singapore Summit in September, I mentioned what societies around the world are facing:

- a. Widening inequality, as globalisation and the rapid rise of technology reshape jobs and redistribute wealth;
- b. Growing divides between generations as societies age; and
- c. Deeper political polarisation, made worse by social media.

18. In many countries, these trends have sharpened fault lines – across race, religion, class and generations, and triggered terrible clashes.

- a. We see this in the politics of the US, the conundrum over Brexit, the unrest in Chile, and closer to home, the ongoing protests in Hong Kong.
- b. These should be clear warning signs for anyone in politics, including all of us in the PAP.

19. Singapore is not immune to these forces.

- a. In fact, we faced many challenges over the course of the PAP's and our nation's history.

20. Many of us here have lived through the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis and the 2008 Global Financial Crisis.

- a. You would know of family, friends, and residents who lost their jobs. The mood then was sombre.
 - i. In 1997, I was serving as the Principal Private Secretary to our late founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, and
 - ii. In 2008, I was Managing Director of the Monetary Authority of Singapore.

b. In both crises, I saw first-hand how our leaders and our people responded decisively.

i. Thanks to the prudence of our earlier generation of leaders, we accumulated reserves.

ii. These were used to stimulate the economy, and provide guarantees for our people's bank deposits.

iii. We rode the crisis well – the economy rebounded quickly, and not a cent was lost from our banks deposits.

iv. Singaporeans held together.

Advancing Singapore for the next generation

21. We have kept our people united through times of difficulty because the PAP has always rallied Singaporeans around a clear set of values.

a. We lead with *integrity*,

b. Uphold our *multicultural* identity,

c. Build a *meritocratic* society, and

d. Preserve our spirit of *self-reliance*.

22. So I was glad to hear our Comrades reaffirming these values earlier, sharing how they have translated them into action to serve our people.

a. Comrades Kirpal and Wan Rizal spoke about how education has enabled them not only to uplift themselves, but also to better help others.

b. Comrades Rachel and Alex both touched on the importance of trust, and how we can go the extra mile for those we serve.

i. Alex mentioned: " 路遥知马力, 日久见人心 " 。

ii. This means that it is only after a long journey that we know the strength of a horse. And indeed, it is only after a long time that we know a person's heart, convictions and values.

23. Indeed, the PAP must commit to serving Singaporeans, with all our heart, and our strength.

a. Our values will continue to guide our way into the future.

b. They give us the strength of conviction to always do the right thing for Singaporeans.

i. To ensure that we progress as a nation, and

ii. For our progress to translate into good outcomes – for our people, our children and grandchildren.

Investing in our people

24. From the early days since Independence, we have done the right thing by investing in our people.

a. This is how we have a society that is both meritocratic and fair, by giving everyone opportunities for success throughout their lives

25. Education is the basic starting point to bring out the best in our people.

- a. It has been four years since I left MOE. But the dedication of our teachers, the passion of our students, and the commitment of our parents have left a deep imprint in my mind.
- b. You have our commitment that we will carry on working together with our teachers and parents to enable every child to fulfil their potential.

26. And I am very happy that we have continued to make progress.

- a. We are now investing heavily in preschool.
 - i. Comrade Desmond and Comrade Indranee are working to give every child a good start in life.
 - ii. We will ensure that we have high quality, affordable and accessible preschool options for parents – through our PCF preschools, and other anchor and partner operators.
 - iii. We will also open fifty MOE Kindergartens by 2023.
- b. In the schooling years, we are making changes to nurture our children more holistically.
 - i. I am very glad that Comrade Ye Kung is implementing changes to the PSLE scoring system, and introducing subject-based banding in all secondary schools.
- c. In higher education, we started programmes to enable our ITE and Polytechnic students to learn in practical settings.
 - i. We also established two more autonomous universities – the Singapore Institute of Technology, and the Singapore

University of Social Sciences – to create more pathways for our students.

27. Our efforts do not stop there. They extend to the working years.

a. Comrade Josephine is equipping Singaporeans with the skills and confidence to pursue their career aspirations, even if they face setbacks.

b. We are also increasing the retirement and re-employment ages, so that older workers who wish to work longer, can do so.

Growing our economy and rejuvenating our city

28. For our people to realise their aspirations, we must create many more opportunities – and this means transforming our economy and rejuvenating our city.

a. Comrade Chun Sing is driving our industry transformation and economic restructuring efforts.

b. With the help of Brother Chee Meng and our Brothers and Sisters in the NTUC, we will support every worker in their transformation journey. Every worker matters!

c. Comrade Iswaran is looking at how we can harness digital technology to create new opportunities for our people.

29. At the same time, we must keep Singapore a vibrant, connected and liveable home for our people, and an attractive place to do business.

a. Comrade Lawrence is developing new areas, such as the Greater Southern Waterfront, to create exciting new spaces for us to live, work and play.

- b. Comrade Vivian is spearheading our Smart Nation efforts, to find new ways for technology to transform our city.
- c. Comrade Masagos has embarked on having zero-waste, promoting urban farming and renewable energy. These will create new economic opportunities, and make our city green, liveable and more secure.

Strengthening our social safety nets

30. By investing in our people, growing our economy, and rejuvenating our city, we bring new opportunities for our people to improve their lives.

- a. This is what our value of self-reliance is about.

31. But this alone is not enough. The changes and disruptions are taking place so quickly, that not everyone is able to keep pace.

- a. The PAP will not leave anyone behind

32. Therefore, in the last few years alone, we have strengthened our social safety nets, changes that Singaporeans appreciate.

- a. We raised income ceilings for BTO flats and enhanced housing grants, so that Singaporeans find housing more affordable.
- b. We also introduced the Pioneer Generation Package and the Merdeka Generation Package, and enhanced CHAS, to make healthcare even more affordable.
- c. For those who still need a bit more help, we enhanced Workfare and introduced Silver Support.

33. Our commitment to Singaporeans is that even as we create new opportunities, we will tackle inequality.

- a. So that no one will be shut out of opportunities, or left behind by progress
- b. As long as you are willing to work hard, we will support you to make a better life for yourself and your family.

Building a sustainable future

34. This has been the PAP's promise to each generation. But at the same time, we know that our duty is not just to earlier generations or our own generation, but ultimately, to future generations.

- a. This is why, in recent years, we have taken serious efforts to strengthen protection for the environment.
 - i. For example, Sec-Gen spoke at the National Day Rally about what we are doing on climate change.
- b. Our founding generation left us a Garden City, and we must improve it, and make Singapore a City in a Garden.

35. As a responsible government and a responsible people, we must also make sure we have enough resources to execute our plans – not just for one or two years, but long into the future.

- a. Our needs are growing on many fronts, such as in healthcare and preschool education.
- b. The world is also become more uncertain, and it is wise to be prepared

36. This is why we are planning to raise the GST.

- a. I announced two years ago that we would do it in the next term of Government
- b. I know it is unpopular

37. In fact, many of you have asked me not to talk about it anymore – elections are coming

- a. But if I don't bring it up, the Opposition parties definitely will – so it's better that you hear it from me
- b. We could have waited for elections to be over before announcing it, but that would not be the honest thing to do.
- c. The responsible thing to do is to be upfront, and tell the people that it will happen
 - i. This is what integrity means
 - ii. We don't hide from difficult truths
- d. In this way, our people and businesses can plan ahead.
- e. And you have my commitment that we will help Singaporeans cope with the change

38. Why do we need to raise GST? We are doing this so as to better care for our people –

- a. To continue providing better and more services so that our seniors can stay healthy and live well, even as they age, and

- b. To continue to take care of our children, so that they can be at their best.

39. How do we help our people cope?

- a. Many of you know this – that we have the GST Voucher, when we have the GST.
- b. The GST Voucher is a permanent scheme that helps seniors and lower-income households.
- c. When the GST rate goes up, we will enhance the GST Voucher. I said so in Budget 2018.

40. At next year's Budget, I will provide more details of the GST support package

- a. This will cushion the impact of the increase, for all Singaporean households
 - i. More will be given to those with less, because this is fair
- b. We have had such support packages each time we raised the GST. But this time, we are announcing it in advance
 - i. This is not an “election goodie” – the package will only be given when the GST is increased next term
 - ii. But we know that Singaporeans are concerned given the current economic outlook
 - iii. So we want to assure you that there will be help during the transition
 - iv. So that Singaporeans need not worry

- v. Or be riled up by the Opposition who want to find something to get people to be angry

41. Even with the support package, I know that some unhappiness will remain.

- a. So we will need each one of you to help explain this to our fellow Singaporeans, and persuade them why an increase is necessary.
- b. Like generations before us, we are taking a bit of pain for the good of our children, and generations to come.

Building our future Singapore together

42. The 4G leadership is clear about the fundamentals to Advance Singapore Together.

- a. But the 4G leadership cannot build Singapore's future alone
- b. We must have the support of Singaporeans.
- c. Singaporeans must trust us, and partner with us
- d. This will not come easy – because there will be those without constructive ideas, whose aim is to rile people up, create mistrust, and mislead them into making the wrong choices.

43. Many of my colleagues in the 4G and I entered politics in 2011.

- a. It was a watershed election for our Party
 - i. Lost Aljunied GRC in the elections.
- b. There was anger on the ground.

- c. The political mood remained tense even months after the election.

44. As one of the new PAP MPs learning the ropes, we knew that we had to win back the trust of our people.

- a. Over the next few years, we worked hard to do precisely that.
- b. In Government, we started “Our Singapore Conversation”.
 - i. We talked to Singaporeans from all walks of life,
 - ii. And listened to their views and concerns, hopes and dreams for Singapore.
- c. Within the PAP, we also renewed the party’s organisation, membership and communications.

45. My experience in those first few years, engaging with Singaporeans, has shaped my view of politics.

- a. Seeing the passion, creativity, and can-do spirit of our people up close strengthened my conviction that our future depends on the people and Government working even closer together than before.
- b. Many of my colleagues went through a similar process.

46. So our experience shaped our approach to leadership.

- a. We want to put partnerships with Singaporeans front and centre.

- b. We want to bring everyone together, expand our common space, and harness our diversity as a strength.
- c. Instead of just working for our people, we want to work with our people.
 - i. Working with you, for you – this is our commitment to Singaporeans.

47. This is why I launched the Singapore Together movement in June.

- a. In the months since then, the 4G leaders and I have been engaging Singaporeans on what we want to achieve for our country and our people.
- b. We have presented our plans for the future, listened to feedback and taken in new ideas.
- c. We are also exploring new ways to tap on the expertise and passion of our people.
 - i. As part of the Youth Action Plan, Comrade Grace and other leaders are working closely with our youth, moving from conversation to action, and empowering them to make their ideas and vision for Singapore a reality.
 - ii. Through new consultative approaches such as the Citizens' Panel for Work-Life Harmony and the Recycle Right Citizens' Workgroup, we are finding fresh ways to co-create solutions to different problems.
- d. My team and I will also have a number of engagements in the coming months in preparation for the Budget.

- i. We held one engagement with the unions a few days ago.
- ii. I would like to thank all the Brothers and Sisters from the NTUC, who shared their views, hopes and ideas about how the Government and unions can work more closely together.
- e. The Singapore Together movement is gaining momentum, and I am excited to walk this journey together with all Singaporeans.

Maintaining trust and integrity

48. The 4G is committed to working with our people. We are ready to win their trust. But to earn our privilege to lead, Singaporeans must trust that the members of the PAP, the 4G leadership especially, are men and women of integrity

- a. We serve for the good of Singapore, not for ourselves.
- b. We will always uphold and defend the high standards of integrity and trust that have underpinned Singapore's success.

49. This is why, a few days ago, I moved a motion in Parliament on the governance of the Aljunied-Hougang Town Council.

- a. Some supporters felt that we should not move this motion as it could be misunderstood.
- b. But in this case, we were convinced that it would be wrong for us to keep silent.
 - i. The issues were very serious. They called into question the integrity of elected officials.

ii. As the party in power, it is our responsibility to ensure the integrity of the system in Singapore.

iii. We must and have taken a clear stand on this matter of principle.

50. As PAP activists, the Motion should also be a solemn reminder that we set an even higher bar for ourselves, and Singaporeans will expect no less.

Conclusion

51. This may be our last Party gathering before the next General Election.

- a. Singaporeans will judge us not simply by what we say during the campaign period.
- b. They will look at what we have done over the last five years
- c. They will look at our legacy over the last sixty-five years.

52. Comrades, our track record is clear for all to see

- a. We have served Singaporeans well over the generations.
- b. Our parents and grandparents are living longer and better, they can look forward to their silver years.
- c. Our sons and daughters are getting better education, and opportunities we would not have dreamed of in the past. Their future is bright.

53. This is what the PAP's mission is about – progress, fairness and justice

- a. Generations of PAP leaders and comrades have served with integrity, conviction and compassion.
- b. We have always done what is right by Singaporeans, for Singaporeans.
- c. The 4G will do the same.

54. The 4G will need your continued support as we undertake the responsibility of taking our country forward.

- a. In recent months, I have spoken to the PAP Policy Forum, our Women's Wing and our Senior Group.
- b. At those instances, and today, I ask for your support to translate our vision for Singapore into action.
- c. As party activists, you can be active agents of change too.
 - i. Remember – we are a party of action!
- d. With your support, we can mobilise Singaporeans to work together, and build an even better Singapore.

55. Together, we can win the trust of our people and secure a decisive mandate at the next election.

- a. Together, we will have the strength and confidence to bring progress for our people.
- b. Together, we can expand our democracy of deeds and build a fair and just Singapore.

56. Majulah PAP!

57. Majulah Singapura!