

**SPEECH BY PAP SECRETARY GENERAL
AND PRIME MINISTER LEE HSIEN LOONG
AT PAP PARTY CONVENTION “ADVANCING SINGAPORE TOGETHER”
ON 10 NOVEMBER 2019 AT 1030HRS**

Comrades

Brothers and Sisters from NTUC

1. Good morning everyone once again!
2. The PAP is celebrating an important anniversary this year
 - a. The 65th anniversary of our founding
 - b. And 60 years since the PAP first formed the Government in 1959

CELEBRATING AWARD WINNERS

3. Let me start by congratulating today’s recipients of the Party Awards
4. In particular, mention Comrade Ong Pang Boon, who is receiving the Distinguished Service Medal
 - a. Comrade Ong belongs to our founding generation of leaders
 - b. I am very happy we held a special 90th birthday celebration for him a few months ago in March
 - c. Today, it is the Party’s privilege and honour to thank Comrade Ong again for his sterling service to the PAP, and to Singapore
 - d. Thank you, Comrade Ong!

SIGNIFICANCE OF TODAY'S CONVENTION

5. This year's Convention is significant
 - a. Because I have to call next General Election by April 2021, at the latest, could be earlier
 - b. So this may well be the last time we meet, before the next General Election
6. 1ASG speaking earlier has described how the PAP government has advanced our agenda since our last General Election. I will not go over the same ground.
7. I want to discuss two issues today
 - a. Firstly, our external environment
 - b. Secondly, our domestic politics

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

8. Our external environment is increasingly uncertain
 - a. Relations between the US and China continue to be tense
 - b. This is difficult for us, because we are friends with both countries
9. The US is the biggest investor in Singapore
 - a. They create many quality jobs – in manufacturing, services, finance
 - b. We also rely on the US for defence technology and training
 - c. I met President Trump in September to renew our defence MOU

10. China is a very important partner for us too
 - a. We have many investments in China and vice versa
 - b. They are also in our neighbourhood
 - c. We have every reason to want good relations with them, and minimise frictions
11. So far, neither the US nor China has really pressed us very hard
 - a. Both are probably hoping to get our support, and get us to side with them of our own volition
 - b. As tensions between the US and China grow, I expect we will come under more pressure, especially on issues that matter dearly to them
12. It will not be easy to manage our relations with both countries
 - a. We have our own principled positions on issues, which do not always align with their interests
 - b. From time to time, we will have to do or say something that one or the other of them will frown upon
 - c. Then we just have to steel ourselves and do it, and be prepared for the reaction
13. This is the only way to preserve our credibility and independence
 - a. Make sure that everyone knows that we act on principle, and only for Singapore's interests, and are not taking one side or the other

Malaysia and Indonesia

14. Nearer home, our relations with Malaysia and Indonesia are good
 - a. When I meet their leaders, we eat durian, or *jalan* together
 - b. But below the surface, there are some difficult issues between our countries
 - c. Important national interests at stake, that cannot be resolved by eating durian or *jalan*
 - d. With Malaysia the key issues are water and airspace arrangements
 - e. With Indonesia, we have also started discussions on airspace issues, as well as on our military training in the South China Sea
15. For all these issues, my approach is to be constructive
 - a. Don't politicise the issue, or clash with them and damage the overall relationship
 - b. Discuss matters calmly, government-to-government, behind closed doors
 - c. Try hard to find a win-win solution that also secures our long-term interests
16. Managing these external issues will not be easy
 - a. We will need a capable government
 - i. Leaders who are tactful but firm, who can negotiate skilfully to defuse bilateral issues
 - ii. And who are confident that they have the full backing of the people

- b. When dealing with foreign policy, this strong domestic support is crucial
 - i. The unity of Singaporeans is our first line of defence
17. This is why our next election is so critical
- a. It is high stakes, not *masak*
 - b. Others will be watching us closely to see if the PAP wins a strong mandate
 - c. Especially at a time of leadership transition
 - d. We must convince Singaporeans to give us a strong mandate
 - e. Not just to return a strong PAP government, but also to secure Singapore for the long term
18. Meanwhile, there are other worrying developments in the world
- a. In many countries, politics has broken down
 - i. Trust in leaders has been eroded
 - ii. People have lost hope
 - iii. Societies are divided
19. I was supposed to go to Chile next week for the APEC meeting
- a. But APEC had to be cancelled because there were mass demonstrations in Chile, triggered by public anger over social issues like public transport fares, healthcare, education and pensions
 - b. The Chileans have lost faith in their political institutions

- i. According to one survey, among the four institutions least trusted by their people, three were their political parties, senate and chamber of deputies

20. Closer to home, in Hong Kong, you have seen the protracted demonstrations and riots

- a. Young Hong Kongers are deeply unhappy with their government
- b. But the angst and pessimism is also about social and economic issues
- c. Their young people feel that no matter how hard they study or work, there is no path to a better future
- d. One young demonstrator summed up this sentiment in a banner which said, “没有未来，何必上学” (“There is no future, why go to school?”)

21. Even in Taiwan, where things are more peaceful, people feel pessimistic

- a. In fact, the slogan on the Hong Kong banner came from Taiwan
- b. A recent survey found that many younger Taiwanese no longer believe that if they worked hard, they would succeed
- c. The majority of Taiwanese felt that their lives have become worse
- d. The spirit of 爱拼才会赢 is weakening

POLITICS

22. Thankfully, in Singapore, our domestic politics has been quite different

- a. The PAP is humbled to enjoy the people’s trust

- b. Singaporeans believe that the PAP will improve their lives and take the country forward
 - c. The anger and frustration that have divided societies elsewhere have not taken root here
23. But Singapore is not immune to these global pressures
- a. These global pressures can overwhelm us too, if we are not careful
 - b. And the consequences will be worse for us than other countries, may even be irreparable, because we are so small and vulnerable
24. Therefore we must work even harder than any other political party, whether in Singapore or elsewhere, to keep this faith in the PAP
- a. This depends on us doing three things
 - i. First, maintain trust in the Party
 - ii. Second, giving people hope for the future; and
 - iii. Thirdly, ensure unity and social cohesion in our society

Trust

25. Several of the speakers earlier have talked about this in different ways. Let me put it together and explain to you how the pieces fit together. First of all, trust
- a. Over the years, we have built up the deep reservoir of trust among Singaporeans
 - b. I think there are three reasons for this

26. Firstly, we uphold in the PAP high standards of honesty and integrity

- a. Whatever we do, we do on behalf of the people, of Singaporeans
 - i. Not only at the national level – the PM and Ministers in government, and MPs in Parliament
 - ii. But every one of our party members on the ground – MPs in their constituencies, branch activists, town councillors
- b. You may be putting the government's budget, you may be awarding town council contracts, or you may be looking after branch funds. It is on behalf of the people, it is the people's resources, you are looking after it, you must do it honestly and in the interest of the people
- c. We must always do things honestly, transparently, and with integrity
- d. That is the way to strengthen the people's trust in the PAP

27. Secondly, the PAP is upfront and frank with Singaporeans. That is why they trust us. We do not just say, we are not 好好先生 and everything is all right, just carry on and pretend nothing is wrong. We are upfront and frank

- a. When there are difficulties, we do not gloss over them or sugar coat the reality
- b. We explain clearly the challenges, and the choices available
- c. So that Singaporeans understand that there are good reasons for what we do
- d. And even if the decision is unpopular, we work very hard to persuade people that this is something we have to do together

28. Take the GST

- a. 1ASG spoke about this just now
- b. Very few governments in the world tell you before an election that they plan to raise taxes
- c. I could have kicked the can down the road, and left this to the future PM and his team
- d. But we had to do the right and responsible thing: to be upfront with voters, to explain why the GST increase is unavoidable, and to give lots of advance notice
- e. At the same time, we are doing two other things
 - i. We put together a good support package to help you cope with the change, especially to help the lower income households
 - ii. We are also making sure the opposition cannot stir this up. You can be sure they will try. By announcing the support package early, well before the GST goes up, and importantly, before the next elections
 - iii. In fact, as last year's Budget, Low Thia Kiang asked why are you talking about the GST now, you are not doing it until later. Comrade Chee Meng stood up and pointed out to him, you were the one who were asking me, asking the government when you are raising the GST. So why are you now complaining we are explaining to the people and if you look at his face, you know that he knows that he has been caught and he says we will talk about it when the elections come

iv. So we are upfront and frank, what you see is what you get

29. Thirdly, what we promise is what we will deliver

a. Our policies have improved the lives of Singaporeans, in concrete and visible ways

i. Necessities of life, whether it is healthcare, education, housing or transport, all are affordable, and high quality, and we keep on working to improve

b. Unlike other political parties, we cannot afford to woo voters with empty words because we do not want them to come back and haunt us

c. So we are very careful what we put into our manifesto! So when you get your manifesto, please read it carefully

30. That is the first thing we have to do, that is to maintain the trust the people have in the PAP

Hope

31. The second thing we have to do is to give people hope for the future

a. To feel confident that there is a bright future for themselves and their children

b. That they are creating opportunities for everyone to improve their lives

c. And that the future Singapore will be better than it is today through our own efforts

- d. That is what I try to do every time I hold the National Day Rally, I sketch out
- i. What the outlook is
 - ii. Where the challenges are
 - iii. What new ideas we have
 - iv. What all of us need to do together
 - v. I am trying not just to give details of the plans that the Ministers will announce subsequently but to give a sense of the direction of the path forward, what we can expect and how we are building a better Singapore

32. Hope and confidence depends on three factors

33. First, there must be opportunities for Singaporeans

- a. Not just opportunities for the country to prosper, but opportunities for individual citizens and their families
 - i. Therefore, we are spending on preschool, so that all children, regardless of background, can have a good start in life

(1) Therefore, we are making heavy investments in a good education at every level, for every Singaporean, to enable you to grow to your full potential. Whichever path you take, you go to ITE, it is a good facility, you go to poly, there are opportunities among many, you go to universities, you have courses which help you get a good job

ii. We make sure that there are opportunities for the students who are coming out from ITE or from poly or from university. Because the economy is expanding and upgrading, and we are creating good jobs

(1) We are launching and pursuing very seriously the SkillsFuture programme, so that workers at work have the skills to take on new jobs, and stay employable

b. All these enable every Singaporean to participate fully in our growth and success

i. And leave no one behind to walk alone

c. So that is one element of hope, individual confidence

34. The second element of hope is that we have bold plans for Singapore's future, and we deliver on them

a. We have schemes to transform the city, and to enhance our standard of living, to make Singapore a really special place to live

b. Today's Singapore is the result of many such plans over the years

i. MRT lines and stations, HDB townships like Punggol 21 Plus, Bidadari and Tengah

ii. And Jewel at Changi Airport, which so many of us have visited, and are proud of

c. But building Singapore is a never-ending project, and we always have new plans in the pipeline. Some early, some forming, some being built, and some almost completed

- i. Tuas Port
 - ii. Changi Terminal 5
 - iii. Jurong Lake District
 - iv. Greater Southern Waterfront
 - v. Each one is a few words but many years of effort, and many many spaces for ideas and opportunities
- d. We will never reach the limit of what we can do in Singapore
- i. The only constraint is our imagination and daring
 - ii. Every new generation will have the opportunity to shape Singapore to what it dreams, to what it imagines can be

35. People also have hope because when we run into serious problems and we can see serious problems, we can show people that there is a way forward

- a. And a prime example of this is climate change
 - i. Rising sea levels is a serious problem for us, like it is for the whole world
 - ii. Our children and our grandchildren will suffer the dire consequences if we don't do anything
- b. But in Singapore, even as the seas rise, we have an answer
 - i. I spoke about this at this year's National Day Rally
 - ii. We are starting preparations, we are setting aside money, and we are building our defences

- iii. And unlike many cities, we are able to do something about it
- iv. With good forward planning, we can even reclaim land from the sea, and turn adversity into opportunity!

Unity

36. The third imperative for us, as the PAP, as the government is to keep our society united and cohesive

- a. Today, we are a harmonious society
- b. People generally have confidence and trust in one other
- c. Our sense of national identity has strengthened

37. But the fault lines of race, language and religion have not really disappeared, and from time to time, we feel them strongly

- a. So we have to continue managing racial and religious issues closely and sensitively
- b. When something happens to cause offence, like people making reckless remarks or offensive posts, we have to take action

38. At the same time, we have to proactively strengthen our structures and institutions that support our multiracial and multi-religious society

- a. For example, two years ago, we amended the Constitution to make sure that from time to time, our President will be elected from the minority groups
- b. The President is the unifying symbol of our multiracial nation

- c. With the President elected by national vote, it is harder for a non-Chinese candidate to be elected
 - d. How would the minorities feel if year after year, the President of Singapore were almost always Chinese?
 - e. In the long term, such a scenario will foment deep unhappiness, and erode the founding values of our nation
39. Amending the constitution was a major step
- a. I knew that not all Singaporeans agreed with it
 - b. I discussed it with the Ministers, thought it over carefully
 - c. I decided that we had to make this fundamental change, for the long term good of Singapore
40. Now that we have introduced this safeguard, the minority races have an assurance that their place in our society will always be safeguarded
- a. Just like the GRC system guarantees that there will always be minority race MPs in Parliament
41. If you ask me, overall, from a short term perspective, this issue is probably a political minus for the government, for the PAP
- a. But this is part of governing
 - b. I am convinced that we did the right thing
 - c. We must never, ever be afraid to do what is right for Singapore
42. Beyond race and religion, we must also prevent new rifts from opening up in our society

- a. Being open and diverse, Singapore is constantly vulnerable to divisive forces that have sown discord elsewhere
- b. There are several potential fault lines: between rich and poor; conservative and liberal; old citizens and new ones
- c. Today I will talk about just one dangerous split that we must guard against and that is a split between the people and the elite

43. In other countries, the masses often no longer trust the elite of their society

- a. People feel that their interests are no longer looked after
- b. The entire political class has lost their respect, and support
 - i. Traditional societies have become feeble
 - ii. Even socialist parties, which are supposed to care for the common man, have lost their base
- c. In their place, populist movements have arisen
 - i. They explicitly want to upend the system, turn things upside down
 - ii. But not necessarily being able to offer anything better
- d. We see this in the US
 - i. The white working class, white meaning Caucasian working class, used to be core supporters of the Democratic Party, but the Democratic Party drifted away from this group

ii. Donald Trump as a candidate, spotted this opportunity, championed the cause of the white working class, and became the Republican Party President, and his supporters voted for the Republicans, actually voting for him, made him President

iii. As President, his base is not the moderate voters who are conservative in outlook but these hard-core supporters in the white working class who are very unhappy with the way things are going.

44. So we must not let this disconnect between the masses and the elite take root in Singapore

a. The PAP must always remain the party of the people

b. Every party member, you may be a leader or an ordinary member, you must identify with the people, we must serve the people

c. And our Government policies must emphasise the needs of the people, and deliver results for them

i. So we are strengthening social safety nets to support those who are most vulnerable and those that need extra help

ii. We are giving our elderly peace of mind on their healthcare needs, with the Pioneer Generation Package and the Merdeka Generation Package

d. We must make sure that our system always works for ordinary Singaporeans, so that they will embrace it as their system. This is what works for them, let us uphold it and help it to do better for us

45. That is why I am very happy to see our brothers and sisters from the NTUC here with us this morning

- a. Last month, I attended the NTUC Delegates' Conference
- b. I spoke about the symbiotic relationship between the Party and the NTUC
- c. This is a key way the PAP stays close to the workers

46. The PAP was born from the unions

- a. We will always serve and represent the workers' interests
- b. We speak up for workers, and give voice to their hopes and concerns
- c. We have never forgotten that the whole purpose of economic and social development is to improve the lives of our workers and our workers' families
- d. This is who the PAP are, and who we must always be
- e. So welcome brothers and sisters of the NTUC!

47. This symbiotic relationship will be even more crucial in the years to come

- a. We will not be able to protect every job. But we will look after every worker
- b. And we can do that only with the strong support of the unions
- c. The PAP will always stand by workers, help you and your children progress with Singapore, and work with you to build a better life

CONCLUSION: LEADERSHIP AND SUCCESSION

48. Comrade Ong Ah Heng who was also from the unions, was Mr Lee Kuan Yew's branch secretary in Tanjong Pagar

- a. He once told me that in the most difficult days of Singapore's independence struggle, people would say 你跟李光耀走不会死的 ("If you follow LKY, you will be alright")
- b. People had faith and confidence in the PAP
- c. They saw what Mr Lee and his generation of leaders stood for, how they fought for their convictions, and what they did for the people
- d. They rallied to the PAP, and together, the people and the Party created today's Singapore

49. We must sustain this faith in the PAP in each successive generation

- a. We must devote ourselves to the service of our people and maintain their trust
- b. We must give our people hope for the future
- c. We must keep our society united and cohesive

50. Each generation of PAP leaders and activists has carried on this mission

- a. In the 15 years that I have been Secretary-General, this is what I have strived to do
- b. And one of my key tasks, from Day 1, was to build a strong team to take over from me, and to be able to carry on doing this after I am not doing it anymore

51. Over the last few years, the 4G team has taken shape
- a. The team know what is expected of them, they know what they must do
 - b. They have a very difficult task, and they deserve the support of all of us, those older than them, as well as those younger than them. Back them, they are our team, they are Singapore's team
52. We must prepare for a tough fight at the next general election
- a. There is great uncertainty in the world
 - b. A lot is at stake
 - c. This election is not just about the PAP doing a bit better or a bit worse
 - d. This election will decide if Singapore can sustain good and stable government, to be different from other countries for a long time to come
 - e. A Government that can safeguard the lives and well-being of Singaporeans today, and tomorrow
 - f. We have done a lot. We have a lot more to do. But there is a lot that we can lose too if politics turns unstable, or becomes dysfunctional
 - g. The next election is about the future of Singapore
53. You have been working the ground for more than four years now, in some cases for more than half a century
- a. Soon it will be time for battle again

- b. We must convince the Singaporeans that the PAP continues to be their champion
- c. And that the PAP will work with them and for them, and advance Singapore towards a brighter tomorrow

54. Thank you very much

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