

# **DPM Wong Kan Seng's speech at the Administrative Service Dinner and Promotion Ceremony 2011**

**28 MARCH 2011, 7:30PM**

Cabinet colleagues,  
Members of the Public Service Commission,  
Permanent Secretaries,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

## **Introduction**

I am delighted to join you at this year's Administrative Service Dinner and Promotion Ceremony. First, let me congratulate the officers who have been promoted, as well as those who have been appointed to the Administrative Service and the Management Associates Programme. I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to two recently retired Permanent Secretaries who have made significant contributions to the Public Service over the course of their distinguished careers.

## **Mr Peter Ho**

Mr Peter Ho retired from the Administrative Service after serving in the Public Service for 34 years. He was among the pioneer batches of Singapore Armed Forces Overseas Scholarship holders. I first met him when I was serving in the Ministry of Defence during the early years of his career as a naval officer. Years later, we worked together in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Peter later took on senior posts at the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He has held appointments as Permanent Secretary in both ministries.

These various postings provided Peter with a wide range of perspectives and enabled him to subsequently tackle many inter-agency issues. He was also key in the set-up of the National Security Coordination Secretariat. After taking up the post of Head Civil Service in 2005, Peter spearheaded efforts to develop our capabilities to deal with a dynamic and complex environment. These efforts, which include the establishment of the Centre for Strategic Futures, have helped us better understand and address emerging strategic issues.

Peter strongly advocated taking strategic, Whole-of-Government approaches to thinking about issues and executing ideas. The Public Service now works even more closely together. We are glad that he continues to serve as Senior Fellow of the Civil Service College and as Senior Advisor to the Centre for Strategic Futures. I understand that he is unable to join us this evening because he is on an assignment overseas.

## **Mr Liew Heng San**

I would also like to thank Mr Liew Heng San, who retired from the Administrative Service in January after 31 years in the Public Service. Heng San's work has impacted many Singaporeans. As the first Chief Executive of the Land Transport Authority in 1995, he paved the way for developing our land transport system by integrating the rail, road, vehicle licensing and planning functions which had been under different agencies. He put in place major elements of our land transport system. When he was the Chief Executive Officer of the Central Provident Fund, he improved retirement adequacy by implementing CPF LIFE and the Workfare Income Supplement Scheme.

Heng San also made many contributions to industry development in Singapore. As Managing Director of the Economic Development Board in the late 1990s, Heng San developed the Industry 21 blueprint to grow our manufacturing and exportable services clusters. As the Permanent Secretary for Law in the early 2000s, he did much to develop Singapore's legal industry. He also introduced guidelines and legislation to strengthen our intellectual property framework.

## **Strategic Challenges**

Over their careers, both Peter and Heng San saw Singapore grow from strength to strength. We are thankful for their contributions, and must ensure that we continue to attract and retain talented and capable Singaporeans in the Public Service. Our Public Service will continue to see many strategic challenges, and emerging ones, as Singapore grows and the world around us changes. I will now touch on a few of these.

Our economy has rebounded strongly from the global financial crisis. But we are well aware that the post-recession economic backdrop remains uncertain. While we will benefit as the advanced economies recover, and as the emerging economies continue to grow, risks still remain. Budget cuts in the advanced economies may dampen their growth prospects. Some European countries face sovereign debt concerns. Inflationary pressure is rising in Asia. Recent months have seen much political uncertainty in the Middle East. We should closely monitor this and assess how this could impact Singapore.

There are also longer-term uncertainties. Since the last global financial crisis, we are seeing the prospect of more state intervention in markets. This may blur the line between government and business. Meanwhile, the emerging economies, especially China and India, are growing their economic clout and strategic influence. Their relationship with the advanced economies will evolve. The world is becoming more interdependent, more interconnected, more complex.

We may also see resource constraints. We face the prospect of global climate change concerns. With natural disasters and political upheaval in producing countries, the prices of commodities, especially oil and gas, have become more volatile.

Even as we attune ourselves to sense the global winds of change, we must also listen to the rustling of the grass. Locally, we must keep our ears to the ground and engage the public, so that we can develop sound public policies that will better serve the needs of Singaporeans.

Balancing policy trade-offs is particularly complex when global issues intersect with the local. For one, as a global city, Singapore needs to remain open so as to grow – open to trade and investment, open to talent, and, most of all, open to change so that we can stay ahead of the competition. However, Singapore is also a city state and our home. While we bring in new immigrants, we must continue to retain what is distinct and unique about Singapore, and ensure that Singaporeans will truly feel this is home. This means that we must preserve a strong Singaporean core, even as we seek diverse talents to support economic growth. The right balance must be struck.

## **Building Capabilities**

It is a challenge for Singapore to navigate this era of complexity and uncertainty. The political leadership supported by a top quality Public Service has built up a credible track record and a reputation for not just dealing with immediate issues but also for being able to anticipate and plan for the future. We also deliver on what we promise. Singapore has frequently been ranked number one in many areas of governance. This reflects sound policy-making and careful implementation. That Singapore has been able to achieve so much with so little resources is due to the meticulous

and systematic approach to induct the best talent to serve in the political leadership and in the Public Service. We must continue to do this in order to take Singapore into the next level.

Given the challenges in the global and domestic environments, the Public Service also has to ask itself how it can further build the capabilities needed for the future. Let me share my thoughts on three areas – People, Networks and Institutions.

### People

We need a Public Service which is resilient, adaptable and decisive, particularly in dealing with uncertainty and in crisis situations. This is why we need to equip officers with such qualities, and also with skills for emergent areas. We should take several approaches to developing these skills, not just through formal courses but also by tapping on our collective experiences – officers' own experiences, and those of their peers and predecessors. We can also give officers challenging job assignments and exposure opportunities so that they can learn by doing.

Whilst the traditional media remains an important platform for the government to engage the public, the Public Service must also adapt to the growing presence of new media. This is increasingly being used by our government agencies for various means – communication, consultation and engagement. The Government's online platforms face a significant challenge in retaining mindshare if they do not continuously improve and remain relevant to the public. Yet, we also need to think through when and how we engage online. It is critical for ministries to work collaboratively to navigate this new platform.

The Public Service must also have the capability to engage internationally as an increasingly globalised world blurs the line between domestic and foreign policies. Transnational issues now affect many agencies, and a number have established international relations units. We must train our officers with the skills needed to interact and collaborate with people from diverse cultures. These will largely have to be learnt on the job. For example, a number of government agencies have posted officers overseas, including for stints in international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Health Organisation. The Civil Service College has also put in place a series of global orientation programmes, such as training on cross-cultural communication, as well as Overseas Study Visits to countries such as China and Vietnam.

### Networks

Besides developing our people, it is imperative that our agencies work together as a networked government. Our networks must be extensive and integrated to bring diverse people and agencies together. They must also be interdependent, as different capabilities exist in different places. Many issues now affect multiple agencies, and require a whole-of-government response.

Take the issue of climate change. It has important implications for Singapore and cuts across many subjects. It goes beyond the complex international negotiations. We need to develop our domestic carbon mitigation measures across all sectors – industry, transport, building and households. And we need to understand our vulnerability and build up our physical resilience to climate change. Many agencies are involved. Hence, we have established the National Climate Change Secretariat under the Prime Minister's Office to coordinate our government's domestic and international strategies on climate change.

Our integrated Public Service has made us more effective and efficient. But this is not something to be taken for granted. If we do not have public sector leaders and officers who work and behave as a whole-of-government team, this strength will be eroded over time.

I would therefore encourage our officers across the Public Service to form the habit of working across agencies, through formal and informal networks, with other Public Officers, and also, with people outside the public sector. Within self-organised communities of practice, people can share experiences and learn from one another so as to improve their knowledge and capabilities.

### Institutions

Capabilities and networks must endure the test of time. Singapore's success in many areas can also be traced back to strong and lasting institutions, including effective systems and processes that we have put in place. Such institutions enable capabilities and networks to be systematically developed and retained. The Administrative Service is one such strong institution. It has served us well and is key to ensuring that we have a corps of effective public sector leaders. Other strong and lasting institutions are government agencies, such as the Economic Development Board which has been crucial for our continued economic success. Such institutions are important as they enable us to move from the competencies of individual officers and interagency networks, to developing truly sustainable organizational capabilities.

Our portfolio of institutional capabilities must also adapt to a changing world. The past few years have therefore seen us establishing several new government organisations. Some help to ensure that inter-agency issues are coordinated and implemented well. One is the newly-formed National Population and Talent Division. The Division ensures that Whole-of-Government policies pertaining to population and talent are reviewed and developed holistically under a single centre of management. Yet other institutions create capabilities for a specific type of work. For instance, the Ministry of Finance has established a Centre for Public Project Management to advise agencies on managing large-scale construction projects to minimize risks and maximise value. It also evaluates and monitors the pipeline of such projects.

Such institutions and organisations have been a key part of our government's capability. But let me stress that it is equally if not more important to institutionalise a system where we have the right people and the right leaders. This means people who are committed to do their best for the nation. And leaders who can inspire and transmit the right values to their staff, and are developers of new leaders.

### **Role of the Administrative Service**

This then brings me to the topic of how leaders, including Administrative Service officers, fit into a picture of the broader Public Service. Many other Public Services around the world have emphasised good public sector leadership in areas such as identifying strategic priorities and improving whole-of-government outcomes, or being good role models. They also highlight developing future leaders as a key challenge. Likewise, we should place a premium on having good leaders at the vanguard of our Public Service, and a forwardlooking Administrative Service as its leadership core. I will now touch on a few roles that leaders, and Administrative Officers, are expected to play.

### Sustaining Public Service Values

First, we need exemplary leaders who are wellgrounded in the Public Service values of "Integrity, Service, Excellence", and who can serve as good role models for these values. Leaders must set the example for the rest of the Public Service, and help embody in our Public Officers a strong sense of stewardship.

### Policy-making

Next, bold Public Service leadership is important to provide direction, and ensure that our policies are wellable to meet the needs of Singapore and Singaporeans. Our Management Associates and Administrative Officers today have a good grasp of policy-making principles. Their job rotations also give them good exposure to inter-agency issues. However, for our Public Service to also stay relevant, they need to continue to have empathy with the ground, and understand the environment we work in. This will help them take a citizen-centric view when forming and implementing policies.

### Inspiring Leadership

Finally, Administrative Officers have the responsibility to sharpen their leadership capabilities. This is so that they can continue to inspire their people and lead their organisations forward.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, let me reiterate that our Public Service has served our nation well. Our officers have, through their integrity and hard work, earned the trust of our people

But we cannot afford to take any of our achievements for granted. We must continue to remain relevant to the times that we serve in. To navigate an increasingly complex operating environment, we must not only build up organizational capabilities but also individual competencies.

As Administrative Officers, you play a key role. Your ability to inspire and develop your teams will make the crucial difference in how they serve the nation. I am sure you will be more than able to discharge this duty. I wish you all the best.

Thank you.