

Speech by Mr S Iswaran, Minister for Communications and Information & Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations, at the West Coast GRC National Citizenship Ceremony on 4 August 2018

Fellow Singaporeans,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good morning to all of you. It is my pleasure to join you today on this very special occasion, as we welcome 198 residents from West Coast GRC and Pioneer Constituency into our extended Singaporean family. You have come from more than 10 countries, and you have chosen to make Singapore your home. Like many of our forefathers who came from places with different cultures, we all share a common love for this country, and a common aspiration to build our home, our future, together in Singapore.

Safeguarding our social harmony

Singapore has always been an open and diverse society, with immigrants forming an integral part of our history and our identity. Over the years, we have built bridges across our different communities and forged a multi-racial and multicultural society united by our commitment to Singapore, our shared values, and our common aspirations to build a better home in Singapore.

The peace and harmony that we enjoy today did not come about by sheer chance, and we cannot take it for granted. Around the world, cultural and religious differences continue to polarise societies. In the face of persistent intolerance and discontent in various quarters, it does not take much for negative sentiments to spread, and for differences to turn into deep divides in society.

We in Singapore must not go down that path. We must resist it with vigour and with our commitment to this shared vision for our country. We must safeguard our social harmony, and ensure that our diversity remains a source of strength, rather than a cause for division. This requires commitment and effort from each and every one of us, including you, our new citizens.

At the national level, the National Integration Council works together with partners in the community, workplaces, schools and the media to promote integration between locals, immigrants and foreigners. Through the Community Integration Fund, the Council supports ground-up projects that foster positive and meaningful interactions between Singaporeans and newcomers. At the grassroots level, our integration efforts are spearheaded by Integration and Naturalisation Champions, or INCs, whom many of you have met during your Community Sharing Sessions. Our INCs play an important role in helping newcomers to settle in and connect with fellow residents in the community. Many of them have also made that journey themselves, and therefore they are able to empathize and relate to some of the challenges as well as the new experiences that the new citizens face.

Strengthening ties with fellow Singaporeans

It is not just the responsibility of the government, or the community. At the individual level, each of us must also do our part to ensure that we continue to live in a stable and harmonious Singapore. Citizen contributions need not be about doing great things on a grand scale. It can be small and simple acts of kindness that can go a long way and have a significant impact. For instance, being considerate and respectful of one another's customs and practices; getting to know our neighbours, colleagues and schoolmates better over common hobbies and interests; or doing volunteer work together. All of these can help us build a more caring and cohesive society. There are in fact many places, programmes and platforms which offer good opportunities for interaction and friendship building. The community club is one good place to start.

It also helps if we can make an effort to communicate in English to communicate and connect with other Singaporeans as it is the common working language used in Singapore. I want to cite an example, who is Mr Rafal Roczniak from Poland. He first met his Singaporean wife while working in the Middle East. Eight years ago, he came to Singapore with his then girlfriend when both their contracts in the Middle East ended. When he first arrived in Singapore, he could not speak English well. However, he took the initiative to sign up for English language classes at the British Council to improve his language skills. His improved command of English eventually helped him land a job at a bank, and today, he has settled down with his Singaporean wife and two children who are attending our local schools. He is now working as a data specialist in a multinational technology company and is confidently conversing with his colleagues in English. In addition, Mr Rafal and his family also attend community activities organised by their community club, where they enjoy spending time getting to know more people in their neighbourhood. His positive learning spirit – how he took active steps to improve his proficiency in English and interact with his colleagues and friends in the local community – is a source of inspiration and an encouragement to us.

Now that we are all part of the Singapore family, it is important that we continue to strengthen the ties that bind us and each make a contribution towards that. Every effort to make a new connection will go a long way towards building a community that we care about, and a home that we cherish.

Working together to forge a better future

All of you add to the richness and vibrancy of our nation with your diverse backgrounds and expertise, and willingness to share your experiences. This diversity of skills and talents and your various contributions help to create new growth opportunities for our economy and workforce, but also to forge new possibilities for our shared future.

For example, amongst us today is Mr Loong Mun Soon, who moved to Singapore from Malaysia in 2008. Mr Loong started his own engineering company in Singapore four years ago, and together with his business partner, who is a fellow Singaporean, they currently employ about 100 staff. His company has contributed to our engineering industry here, and created good jobs for Singaporeans, some of whom are in key managerial positions. Along with his wife, Mdm Ong Lai Kuan, who is a staff nurse at the NUH Cancer Centre, they are making valuable contributions to Singapore and sinking their roots here.

All of you make equally important contributions in your own ways and in different capacities, some within your workplaces, and some even beyond. Many of you also contribute to the community by volunteering your time and expertise in activities organised by voluntary welfare organisations, non-governmental organisations, and grassroots organisations. Mr Ma Shao Hua is one example.

He came to Singapore from China in 2003 to pursue his masters and PhD at the National University of Singapore (NUS). He met his wife in Singapore, got married here, and they now have a son who is in Primary One studying at Clementi Primary School. As Mr and Mrs Ma saw Singapore as their new home, having studied and worked here, and are now raising their son here, they applied for Singapore citizenship in 2014 and received it in 2015. Last year, Mr Ma started volunteering with the West Coast Heights RC and the West Coast Integration and Naturalisation Committee to get to know his neighbours and community better. Together with his fellow INCs, Mr Ma organised the West Coast Earth Hour in March this year to rally everyone in West Coast to team up, take action against climate change and work towards a more sustainable Singapore.

I thank all of you for your contributions, and urge you to continue being open and involved in working together with our fellow Singaporeans to forge an even brighter future for Singapore and future generations of Singaporeans.

In closing, I want to share with you a quote from Mr S Rajaratnam, one of our founding fathers. It is a quote that I think epitomises what it is to be Singaporean, and holds resonance for past, current, and future generations of Singaporeans. Mr Rajaratnam said, "Being a Singaporean is not a matter of ancestry. It is conviction and choice." I am very glad that all of you have had the conviction to make the choice to take up Singapore citizenship.

On behalf of West Coast GRC and Pioneer Constituency, I want to extend a very warm welcome once again to our big extended family of Singaporeans, and I look forward to you joining in our community events and activities.

I invite all of you to join us in writing the next vibrant chapter of our Singapore story. Majulah Singapura. Happy National Day! Thank you.