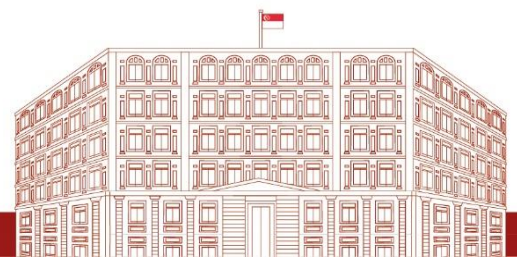


PLENARY ADDRESS BY JOSEPHINE TEO, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION, AT
THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 9th SINGAPORE-CHINA FORUM ON LEADERSHIP IN BEIJING,
CHINA ON 12 SEPT 2023

“Evolving Governance in a Modern World”

(现代化进程中的领导力建设)

1. 尊敬的李干杰部长，各位朋友大家好。 My cabinet colleague Minister Chan Chun Sing has spoken about the key challenges that call for changes to our models of governance.
2. I will cover three enduring goals of governance and three fundamentals of good governance that have always guided Singapore.
 - a. Using two recent experiences, namely our Alliances for Action and Forward Singapore, I will then share three evolutions in governance we have made.
3. In Singapore, three enduring goals guide our approach to governance:
 - a. First, Opportunities. All citizens aspire to a better future. Our policies and governance models must enable our businesses to thrive and our people to prosper.
 - b. Second, Trust and Safety. These are vital for citizens and businesses to have certainty and confidence. Our safeguards must extend to both our physical and digital spaces.
 - c. Third, Community. The aim of governance must ultimately be to foster a sense of solidarity and commitment for society to move forward together. These are what make or break us as a nation.



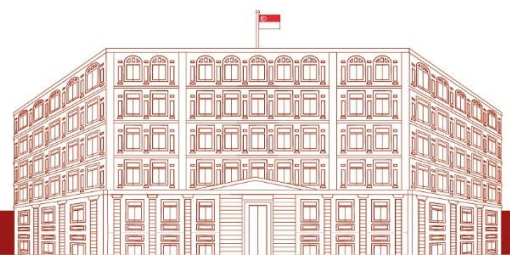
4. In fact, these three enduring goals are very much aligned to what Minister Li Ganjie has talked about. He referred to them as 获得感、安全感和幸福感. They are all underpinned by three fundamentals, ever since Singapore's nation-building efforts began in 1965.

5. First, the rule of law.
 - a. On the international stage, respect for the rule of law by all parties is essential. Particularly for a small state like Singapore, the observance of international law is vital for our sovereignty and independence. Singapore has consistently advocated adherence to international law, and is willing to refer disputes to a binding third-party dispute settlement procedure. An example is the dispute between Singapore and Malaysia over sovereignty of Pedra Branca, which began in 1979. Both sides agreed to refer the dispute to the International Court of Justice, which made its ruling in 2008. Singapore and Malaysia accepted the decision of the Court, and the issue is now conclusively settled.

 - b. Domestically, the rule of law applies to everyone, fairly and equally. The Government's ability to make executive decisions is not unfettered and can be subject to judicial review. This means that, generally, while the Courts cannot examine the merits of executive decisions, the Courts can consider and adjudicate on whether Government agencies followed due process in making decisions, and were not arbitrary. The Government is committed to ensuring all Singaporeans are served by the justice system – the Legal Aid Bureau and the Public Defenders Office ensure that even low-income Singaporeans have ready access to legal representation.

6. The second fundamental is a clean and capable Government and Public Service.
 - a. To uphold integrity and incorruptibility, the system must remain effective to check and punish wrongdoings.

 - b. The Auditor-General's Office is an independent organ of state. Every year, the Government Financial Statements are audited by the Auditor-General and subject to Parliamentary scrutiny by the Public Accounts Committee. The Auditor-General also examines the accounts, systems, and internal controls of individual ministries, departments, and organs of state. The Auditor-General's observations are submitted to the President in an Annual Report, which is published in full to the public, thereby enhancing public accountability in the use of public funds and resources.

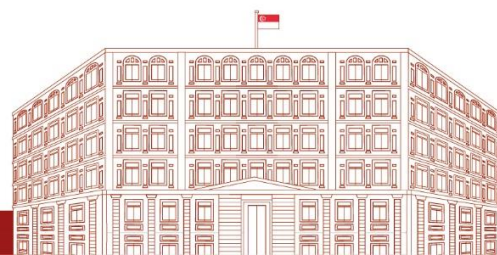


- c. The Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) also plays an important role. The CPIB's independence is protected by the Constitution. Its investigations are scrupulous, thorough, and fearless. The CPIB has never shied away from taking action against senior government officials, be they Political Office Holders, Members of Parliament, or senior civil servants.
- d. These have contributed to Singapore ranking consistently amongst the least corrupt countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. This is a hard-earned accolade which we uphold judiciously.

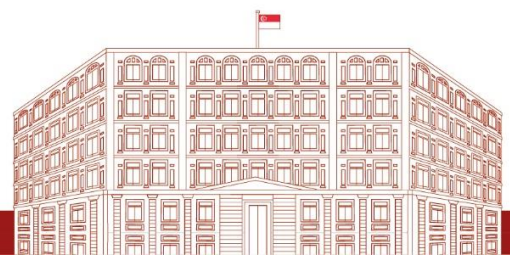
7. The third fundamental of good governance is stewardship.

- a. Stewardship is the idea that every generation must govern itself for the benefit of the next. We are always thinking on behalf of Singaporeans yet to be born. Policies may change to cater to new circumstances but the principles and values behind them should stand the test of time.
- b. In 1970s and early 1980s when our economy grew rapidly, our leaders had the foresight to put aside some of our annual budget surpluses into the national reserves, for a future rainy day. Today these reserves are a critical resource for Singapore's future, to buffer against downturns, foster investor confidence, and generate income from investments.
- c. Another good example is how we provide social benefits. We provide significant subsidies and grants to ensure that public housing remains affordable to citizens from a wide range of different incomes. Today, around 8 in 10 Singaporeans live in public housing, of which, around 9 in 10 own these homes they live in. Healthcare has never been made free of charge. Services are heavily subsidised but everyone pays something through their insurance premiums or Medisave. This approach encourages individual responsibility and is more sustainable for society.

8. Mr Lee Kuan Yew once warned that "honest and effective government, public order and personal security, economic and social progress, did not come about as a natural course of events". This reminder bears repeating as we mark the 100th anniversary of his birth.



9. Let me now turn to the “Three Evolutions”. At the time of Singapore’s independence in 1965, survival was everything. The old social compact was premised upon the Government being able to fulfill urgent basic needs, build an economy and our own defence capabilities.
10. With each passing year, fewer people would have experienced these post-independence challenges first-hand. Earlier this month, 162,000 Singaporeans voted in a national election for the first time; constituting about 6% of all voters. This includes youths born in the new millenia, after the year 2000. Their parents, like me, were born around the year of Singapore’s independence, in 1965.
11. As the profile of our citizens change, so too do their needs, aspirations, and expectations. Therefore, our governance approaches must evolve.
12. For example, younger Singaporeans do not only want to do well for themselves; they also want to see reduction in social inequality. They have legitimate concerns about climate change and want to do their part to contribute to environment sustainability.
13. Therefore, let me share three ways we have evolved.
14. The first evolution is a more consultative approach to governance. From “Governing For” to “Governing With”. 不仅执政为民,也致力于集思广益,磋商执政。
15. Some of you would be familiar with Singapore’s grassroots movement, the People’s Association. Over 60 years on from its establishment, their extensive community networks continue to convey and explain Government policies to citizens, and citizens’ feedback to the Government.
16. These two-way feedback channels remain important, but governance now needs to be even more relational, collaborative, and empathetic.
17. We now involve citizens even at the stage of policy formulation or decision.



- a. Take for example the classification ratings of films. They must reflect community standards and social norms. The Government alone may not always get these right. To inform these decisions, our Films Consultative Panel (FCP) includes Singaporeans from all walks of life, including professionals and also homemakers and students.
- b. In 2021, Parliament unanimously endorsed the first-ever White Paper on Singapore Women’s Development. Over 6,000 Singaporeans – men and women, young and old, provided feedback that guided the formulation of 25 action plans we will implement over the next decade, towards a fairer and more inclusive society.

18. The second evolution is fostering greater buy-in to government policies. From “Grudging Compliance” to “Willing Alignment”. 不仅依法治人，也要以理服人.

19. Information today can spread more freely and rapidly in an unchecked and unverified manner. Falsehoods are not uncommon.

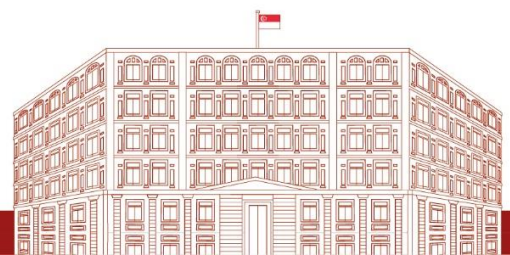
20. If our citizens do not trust the Government, even the best of policies and even the best efforts in communication will not be enough.

21. During COVID-19, most countries had home quarantine and safe distancing. Enforcement helped but could only go so far.

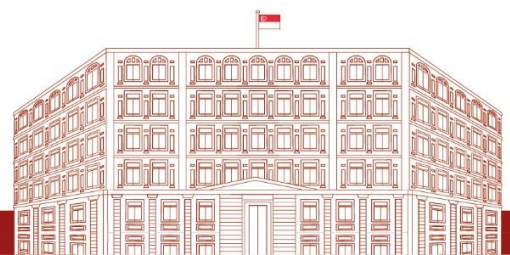
22. We decided it was important to persuade Singaporeans to do their part in the fight against COVID-19. The vast majority willingly cooperated with these measures.

23. Much of it depended on the trust levels in our society, between the people themselves, as well as with Government.

24. Our Multi-Ministry Taskforce on COVID-19 strived to be as open and transparent as possible. To prepare our citizens for the difficulties that lay ahead, the taskforce held regular press conferences to put out new information, and be upfront about the uncertainties and risks.



- a. Over the course of three years, the taskforce held 83 press conferences. The first took place on 27 January 2020, and the last on 9 February 2023.
 - b. Senior Cabinet Ministers including Prime Minister Lee also delivered a series of National Broadcasts to address citizens directly on significant developments.
25. We also expanded and refreshed our communications channels, and launched targeted campaigns, such as VacciNationSG to support our vaccination drive. Over the course of the pandemic, Gov.sg's 10 platforms added close to 2 million more subscribers.
26. Through these concerted efforts, 4 in 5 members of the public thought that the Government provided sufficient information on COVID-19, and 87% said that the campaign materials helped in their decision to get vaccinated.
27. Nothing is more vital in a crisis than trust. The Government and our citizens must be aligned in knowing that we all have the best interest of Singapore and Singaporeans at heart.
28. The third evolution is improving inter-agency coordination. From 'working within' to 'working across'. 不仅各现精彩也会协力合作。
29. In the early years, we could tackle issues along agency lines.
30. Now, every issue is a cross-domain one. It is rare for a truly impactful problem, policy, or solution today to be within the domain of a single agency.
31. Take scams, which can proliferate with unprecedented scale and speed in online spaces.
- a. The Singapore Police Force investigates criminal activities, the Monetary Authority of Singapore works with banks to employ fraud surveillance systems and monitor bank transactions, the Infocomm and Media Development Authority works with telecommunications providers on potential scam SMSes, and the Ministry of Home Affairs reviews existing legislation.



- b. It is not enough for each agency to meet their own Key Performance Indicators.
- c. We recognise the need to support each other. I chair the Taskforce on Online Phishing Scams (TOPS), which works across Government agencies to tackle this problem comprehensively.

32. In summary, we will face more complex challenges, from climate change to market risks. We must continue to harness the power of collaboration across the public, people and private sectors, to remain agile as a nation. This very much aligns with what Minister Li has said earlier, “积力之所举 · 则无不胜也 ; 众智之所为 · 则无不成也”.

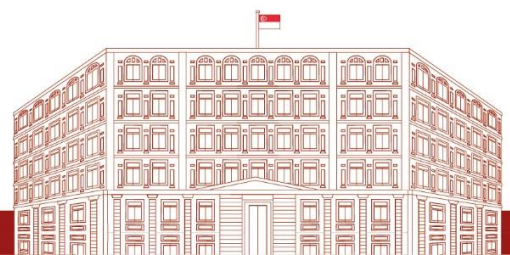
33. Two recent experiences illustrate how Singapore has implemented these three evolutions.

34. The first is our Alliances for Action (AfAs), which is an example of creating opportunity from adversity.

- a. During COVID-19, we set up an Emerging Stronger Taskforce to rally the public, private and people sectors to think collectively about our post-pandemic future.
- b. The Taskforce formed nine Alliances for Action, each focusing on a goal that would require different stakeholders to work hand-in-hand to solve problems quickly.

35. One of these was on Digitalising the Built Environment.

- a. While COVID-19 exposed certain vulnerabilities of the Built Environment sector, the Alliance recognised an opportunity to accelerate its digital transformation.
- b. The Alliance onboarded more than 300 companies and 25 projects to an industry digital partnership. This catalysed the launch of the Common Data Environment Data Standards, which provides a common digital space for information exchange to deliver and manage built assets.



36. Although the pandemic is largely behind us, we continue to support the Alliances for Action model. From the original nine Alliances for Action, we now have more than 30, including on lower-wage workers, online harms, and even online ordering for hawkers.

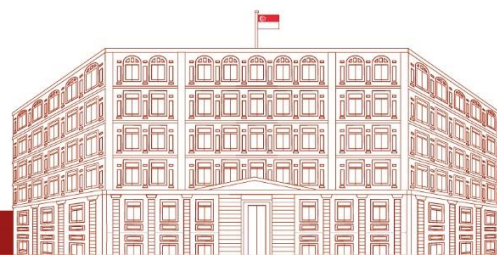
- a. Not all of the ideas from the Alliances will work. Some will be successfully implemented and scaled up.
- b. But the participation of a broader segment of society helps to build a sense of ownership and common destiny. This makes it a worthwhile pursuit.

37. The second experience is Forward Singapore.

- a. Spearheaded by the 4th generation leadership of Singapore, led by Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong and including Minister Chan and myself, the exercise aims to crystallise the new social compact for Singapore.
- b. Singaporeans from all walks of life are invited to come forward with ideas about what Singapore should do differently, across all areas.

38. In particular, I wish to elaborate on an interesting engagement modality – what we call Citizens' Panels.

- a. We bring together a group of citizens who have expressed interest in a certain issue. Over several weeks, they learn about the issue and hear from experts. They then make recommendations to the government, and the government will give its formal response publicly.
- b. As part of Forward Singapore, a Citizens Panel was convened on the issue of employment resilience – that is, how do we support workers to stay employable amid economic uncertainty. Other Panels have covered topics such as work-life harmony, combating diabetes, and recycling.



- c. These Panels are very resource intensive but we have found them to be very useful. They drive the public service to keep an open mind about feedback and concerns from citizens, instead of dismissing them or pushing them aside. Citizens are socialised to the trade-offs that we as policymakers must weigh. Often, a deeper understanding of policy considerations lead citizens to make very similar choices as government.

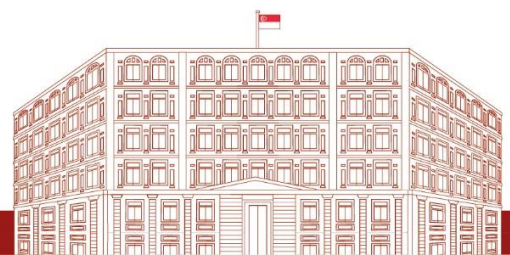
39. The Forward Singapore exercise will conclude in the next few months, but already a number of themes have emerged.

40. The first is what Deputy Prime Minister Wong refers to as “hands-on and heart work”.

- a. These refer to technical, service, and community care roles.
- b. We are already tackling the wage gap between these roles versus those engaged in “head work”, including by tightening our foreign worker quota, and investing more in vocational education.
- c. Beyond wages, we will provide more compelling skills and career ladders, and facilitate the evolution of societal mindsets. Our concept of meritocracy today may be too narrow and need to be expanded.
- d. Such shifts are not easy to achieve. Employers must reflect this in their hiring, training, and promotion decisions. Parents must avoid over-emphasising academic grades. Citizens must mutually respect each other regardless of their vocations.

41. The second theme is a revamped system of social support.

- a. This means meeting the key needs of not just the broad middle class but added support for a range of vulnerable groups.
- b. Singapore’s aging demographic means that our policies must enable seniors to remain active and purposeful in their golden years. It is a vision of “productive longevity”.



- c. These include new infrastructure like community care apartments and active aging centres. Minister of State Faishal will share more about retirement adequacy. But we must also give thought to “softer” elements.
 - d. Silver Zones in selected estates feature enhanced road safety features like additional road markings, dividers, and lowered speed limits, to cater to more elderly pedestrians.
 - e. These make our society more inclusive and strengthen our sense of solidarity.
42. Forward Singapore has been instructive and inspiring in charting out how the Government can better respond to the evolving needs of our people, forge trust with them, and co-create their future.
43. Together with our Alliances for Action, they embody the three evolutions I spoke about earlier – from “Governing for” to “Governing with”, from “Grudging compliance” to “Willing alignment”, and from “Working within” to “Working across”.
44. Let me conclude. In evolving our models of governance, there are bound to be risks. Even as we demand excellence, the political leadership must also set a clear direction, and be prepared to back up our officials where they have tried their best but did not get everything right. Only by fostering an environment where mutual support, continuous learning, and improvement is encouraged, will we have a chance at keeping our governance relevant.
45. In the absence of easy playbooks, there is much to be gained through more frequent sharing of observations and exchanges of experiences. That is precisely the value of the Singapore-China Forum on Leadership, which I am pleased is now into its ninth edition.
46. I look forward to our fruitful discussions later. Thank you.

