

Excerpts from my speech at the Bishan East 46th National Day Dinner on 6th August 2011

Extraordinary Singapore

Now that the elections are over, and the Government has the mandate, it should focus its attention to dealing with the challenges Singapore face.

But I have some concerns. I am concerned that in the aftermath of the GE, we have lost sight of our basics. I am concerned that our society may become divided. I am concerned that we are ignoring the larger and longer term challenges we face as a nation. I am concerned that one day, we stop being the extraordinary people that we are today.

We are not competing against ourselves, or against foreigners in Singapore. Singapore and Singaporeans are competing against the world ... There are great uncertainties ahead of us. How do we mitigate the impact of the problems in the US or EU countries? These countries are heavily indebted, and their governments are kicking the can down the road for political expediency. They are not making the necessary changes to their policies and economies – they can't. Their people and politicians are too divided and not willing to make sacrifices for their long term national interest. How do we manage Singapore's ageing population? How do we equip our young with the skills to compete in the global stage that will be more competitive and volatile?

The good news is we know the formula for the answers. We create a stable environment that gives investors, businesses and talent confidence to come and create jobs here. We invest in education, security and infrastructure so that Singaporeans can live and work freely to pursue their dreams. We maintain fiscal discipline so that we have the resources and flexibility to respond to crisis, much like how we steered through the 2008 global financial crisis.

Most of all, we as a people must have the conviction to build a better tomorrow. Not just for ourselves but for our children and their descendants, so that they could have a better start in life than we had. This was the conviction shared by the people and

by the Government they elected to bring about the change in the last 46 years. This is the Singapore spirit that has held us together since independence and through the trials and tribulations. That was what made us extraordinary.

And I believe so long as we remain united by this conviction, Singapore will remain extraordinary and we will prevail over whatever challenges throw at us.

Engaging Residents

We will develop more channels to engage our residents proactively.

For instance, I would like to have regular dialogues with our youths in Bishan East. During the campaigning, I believe as a group, our youths have much to share and contribute in shaping our policies.

Another initiative is to hold regular face-to-face town hall meetings with residents to discuss municipal matters. These meetings will be held in small groups so that residents can speak freely and candidly about how they feel about issues.

Nurturing a Caring Community

Engaging residents is not just about the MPs and the residents. It is really about nurturing a Caring Community, a community of people that is ready to watch out and to help one another. Each of us does not have to do much but together we can make big difference to someone who needs our support.

An example was the Bishan-Toa Payoh Community Scholarship we launched last year. The funds came from donations and fund raised by our grassroots leaders. This year, we have committed almost \$300,000 to 45 students in the ITEs, polytechnics and universities. to see them through their studies till they graduate over three years. We hope that these scholars will become active community leaders one day, and pay it forward. We are working to improve the lives of our residents as we nurture the community spirit.

Our grassroots leaders have come together to launch another community initiative. Under this initiative, we will hold drives to collect items from our residents and distribute them to those who are in need.

A Cup from the Heart

The first project that we are launching today is “A Cup from the Heart”. Rice is a daily staple for many of us. Many of us have rice every day, but there are some who live amongst us who struggle to put rice on the table for the family and children.

We will start the first collection at the National Day Observance Ceremony next Tuesday. I hope participants can bring with them one cup of rice each. We will collect and pack the rice for distribution to the needy residents in the community. The RC leaders and volunteers will organize other collection drives.

Over time, we hope to expand the initiatives to cover other useful items, such as canned food, stationery or other items for school-going children. We want to start a movement where all of us get to know and help one another. And we can take the first step today with a cup of rice.