

# Speech by Deputy Prime Minister, Teo Chee Hean, at Committee of Supply Debate, 2 March 2017

## **A Well-Coordinated, Technology-Enabled, and Future-Ready Public Service**

Thank you Madam Chairperson.

First, let me thank Members for their views and their strong support for the work of our public officers.

Over the past week, Members debated how to position Singapore for the future, and move ahead as one people. As challenges become more cross-cutting, the Government needs to be even more closely coordinated in policy formulation and policy execution, and to harness and manage our national resources more effectively. This will help ensure that the Public Sector is ready to help implement the recommendations of the Committee on the Future Economy and take Singapore forward.

I want to assure Members that our public officers do work tirelessly to serve Singapore and Singaporeans. There are many examples of exemplary public officers who go the extra mile to help those with particular needs or are in distress. From HDB, LTA, WSG, the SSOs – the whole group that Mr Seah referred to. Indeed, we recognise such officers each year to encourage everyone in the Public Service to follow their example. However, no system is perfect and we are constantly striving to do better. Each one of us who serve the public – public officers, Members of this House, and members of the public too – have a role to play. Each year, we also recognise members of the public who have contributed to making our public services more responsive and empathetic. Madam Chairperson, while our public officers at all levels work quietly and tirelessly and do not seek praise, a little encouragement does help. I take the points raised by Members of this House in a positive spirit for improvement. But I hope that Members will rise, from time to time – like Mr Seah today, and Mr Ganesh, and Ms Kuik, in this House to also offer encouragement for the good work of the many public officers who have worked hard and gone the extra mile to serve their constituents and Singaporeans.

It is in this spirit that today, I outline four priorities for the Public Service:

- Integrating Strategic Planning and Execution;
- Driving innovation;
- Building new capabilities; and
- Developing our public officers.

### **Integrating Strategic Planning and Execution**

First, integrating strategic planning and execution.

Mr Cedric Foo, Assoc Prof Fatimah Lateef and Mr Seah Kian Peng asked about coordination

among government agencies and resource management in the Public Service.

Two years ago, I announced the formation of the PMO-Strategy Group. Last year, PMO-SG continued its work to strengthen whole-of-government planning and execution, supporting the Prime Minister and the three coordinating ministers to tackle long term, cross-cutting issues.

As part of the consolidation and strengthening of the core centre-of-government functions, we merged the National Population and Talent Division and the National Climate Change Secretariat into the Strategy Group.

As Mr Seah pointed out, there are cross-cutting issues which have longer term impact. Population is certainly one of them. It frames the work of many ministries – covering areas such as the economy, healthcare, workforce, infrastructure and defence planning, as Mr Seah pointed out. Most importantly, we will also continue to strengthen the Singapore Family, with Marriage & Parenthood measures to support couples to own homes and have children. SMS Josephine Teo will update members on these plans later.

Climate change is another cross-cutting issue with long-term implications that will be even more keenly felt by future generations. Coordinated actions by all countries are needed to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Singapore played a constructive and facilitative role in the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change which came into force on 4 November 2016. Singapore is a Party to the Agreement and has pledged to reduce emissions intensity<sup>1</sup> by 36% from 2005 levels by 2030 and stabilise our emissions with the aim of peaking around 2030.

Mr Kok Heng Leun asked how we intend to achieve this. We have identified four strategies in our Climate Action Plan published last year. We will improve our energy efficiency, reduce our emissions from power generation, develop and deploy low-carbon technologies, and encourage collective action among all stakeholders. This plan is an example of how different government agencies work together, coordinated by the National Climate Change Secretariat, which is now in PMO-SG. We evaluated every option carefully, what its cost was to the economy and to Singaporeans, and what effect it would have on mitigating carbon emissions. Then, we prioritised those which were more efficient and made the most sense for us.

The Minister for Finance has announced in the Budget Speech that Government aim to implement a carbon tax from 2019. This is one of the measures which is efficient and will encourage carbon mitigation. A carbon tax will incentivise businesses and consumers to reduce emissions. And this will complement the regulatory measures we have introduced and provide price certainty to industrial facilities for investments in clean energy and energy efficiency.

The carbon tax revenue will not be earmarked for specific purposes to retain flexibility. In fact, the way Mr Kok described the carbon tax in British Columbia made it seemed like a “panacea” to address all our fiscal needs. If that were indeed the case, the Minister for Finance will be delighted. But we are not earmarking the taxed amounts for specific purposes, but government funds will support measures such as enhancing energy efficiency incentives and training workers in energy management. These will help our companies use less energy, save costs and reduce their emissions.

Industry consultations on the carbon tax have already begun and will be expanded. We will begin public consultations this month. The Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources (MEWR) will further enhance the Energy Conservation Act this year to include energy measurement & reporting, and energy management requirements. MEWR and the Ministry of Transport will also make adjustments to enhance the Carbon Emissions-based Vehicle Scheme and include other pollutants.

Our companies, particularly those with an established track record in clean energy and energy efficiency, are in a good position to seize green growth opportunities in the region and beyond as countries, including Singapore, take steps to reduce carbon emissions.

## **Driving Innovation**

Second, driving innovation. Mr Lee Yi Shyan highlighted that the Public Service needs to be innovative to position Singapore for the future. Our leaders in the Public Service set the tone for public officers to work together and pursue innovative solutions.

The Public Service has embarked on a transformational journey over the past few years to become more innovative, work smarter through technology, deliver seamless services, connect with citizens, and build a future-ready workplace. But this is always a work in progress. We can always do better. We can always be more efficient. We can always be more responsive.

To further these efforts, Prime Minister Lee has appointed Minister Ong Ye Kung to champion Public Service innovation. Minister Ong will focus on a number of key cross-cutting areas that require close coordination among agencies.

For a start, this will cover two key areas. First, the review of regulations to better support innovation and entrepreneurship. Second, adopting procurement methods that support industry development, and helping our companies and people seize new economic opportunities. These initiatives are in line with the recommendations of the Committee on the Future Economy. Minister Ong will also work with the Public Service on further areas to drive change and innovation.

The CFE also highlighted the need to harness technology as a source of comparative advantage for our economy and to protect our national security. Digitisation is creating new industries and transforming existing ones such as finance, healthcare and corporate services. Within the Public Service, we will continue to use technology to drive innovation, increase productivity, and transform and improve the way that we deliver services to the public.

Currently, the responsibility for driving technology adoption in the Public Service is rather dispersed. We are studying how we can better integrate our strategy and processes. This push for a more integrated and technology-enabled government is crucial in our efforts to build a Smart Nation.

I assure Mr Lee that the Public Service will do its part to help Singapore stay competitive, and respond quickly to the fast-changing global developments.

## **Building New Capabilities**

Third, building new capabilities in the Public Service.

Dr Intan and Mr Seah Kian Peng asked about the Government's plans to build new strategic capabilities in the Public Service.

Two key capabilities that the Public Service needs to strengthen are digital capabilities and engineering.

I spoke about the importance of Digital Government earlier.

We need to build up our IT professional workforce to support priority areas.

We will grow a core group of 250 professionals in GovTech and Cyber Security Agency to drive key digital capabilities in areas such as data science and cybersecurity in the Public Service. For example, many of you would be familiar with apps such as OneService and MyResponder, developed by GovTech in partnership with agencies to improve the lives of Singaporeans. OneService allows Government agencies to respond quickly to citizens' feedback. It is therefore not an app for everything in government, but at least one app through OneService. Through MyResponder, close to 800 volunteers were able to provide timely CPR last year and I understand that this has led directly to saving several lives.

Besides using available technologies, these professionals will work closely with our universities and industry to experiment with and create new products and services, and enable further policy innovation. It is important that Government agencies trial new technologies and be early adopters.

We also need a broader appreciation and application of these new technologies in the Public Service. We will therefore be training 10,000 public officers over the next four years in digital capabilities such as using more data analytics and data science in policy formulation, service delivery and corporate services, and strengthening cybersecurity. Minister Yaacob Ibrahim will touch more on our efforts to support cybersecurity professionals in the COS under MCI.

Mr Liang Eng Hwa also asked about building engineering capabilities in the public sector. This is another strategic capability.

Last year, I announced the establishment of three Centres of Excellence (or CentExs), JTC, GovTech and DSTA.

These CentExs have done well. They have partnered many agencies, and research institutions to develop innovative technologies and solutions.

JTC, as CentEx for infrastructure and facilities management, developed their own integrated smart estate and building operations system, called J-Ops. J-Ops uses existing sensors to monitor and analyse essential services and systems not only in one building, but in several buildings from a central location. This raises productivity as our facility managers can optimise ops room personnel

and technicians over several buildings and facilities. In addition, this system also allows them to use data analytics and predictive maintenance to pre-empt issues and reduce energy consumption. This system has the potential to transform how we manage our buildings and facilities.

Some issues are further from the public eye, but no less important. This year, we will build up capabilities in two new CentExs – JTC for underground caverns and LTA for tunnelling. These are important areas to optimise our land resources.

These CentExs will develop and share deep technical expertise within the Public Service and optimise deployment and development of these specialities across the Public Service.

To strengthen the engineering leadership pipeline, we have also introduced the PSC (Engineering) Scholarship since last year to attract bright and passionate young people to pursue exciting and meaningful careers in engineering in the Public Service.

The Government's focus to build engineering capabilities has led to strong interest in Public Service engineering careers. The Public Service recruited over 1,000 engineers last year, bringing the total close to 9,000.

We also look forward to partnering the private sector and companies in building these digital and engineering capabilities in the public sector to further support Singapore's transformation and the delivery of public services for Singaporeans.

## **Developing Our Public Officers**

Finally, developing our public officers. As Mr Seah Kian Peng has pointed out, the Public Service sets the tone for progressive people practices. We invest heavily in the training of our officers so that they have the skills to do their jobs well. Not just today's jobs, but tomorrow's jobs. For example, as I mentioned, the Civil Service College will partner agencies and external providers such as Coursera to train 10,000 officers in digital capabilities. This skills-based approach refreshes our officers' skills, and will facilitate officers' deployment within and across agencies to optimise job needs and job matches.

We have merged a number of career tracks for graduates and non-graduates since 2015 to provide greater opportunities for career progression and development. Once an officer is on the job, it is performance and readiness for bigger job responsibilities that matter.

All officers who perform well and show potential for leadership are given the opportunity to participate in development programmes and be considered for higher positions.

The Public Service will continue to be pro-active in implementing family friendly practices. The Public Service will begin a pilot to enable officers who are starting or growing their families to spend more time with their infants. SMS Josephine Teo will be providing more details later.

The Government recognises the contributions and experience of our older workers. The public and

private sectors, our unions and workers have worked closely together to provide guidelines for re-employment. To support those who want to continue to work, the Public Service took the lead to introduce re-employment in accordance with these guidelines in July 2011.

We review these guidelines regularly. Following our latest review, and in consultation with the public sector unions, from 1 July 2017, we will remove wage reductions on re-employment for public sector officers re-employed to the same job grade. These officers will continue to receive their last drawn salary. This is similar to the practice of most private sector companies.

Public officers and pensioners on older medical schemes currently enjoy medical benefits when they are hospitalised in our re-structured hospitals. As a continuation of this stay, we will also cover up to 28 days of in-hospital stay at community hospitals from 1 July 2017, providing better access for these officers to the services offered by community hospitals. This also supports the Ministry of Health's policy to right-site medical care in the most appropriate setting depending on the medical needs of the patient.

To better support HR policies for our public officers, a new integrated HR and payroll management system is scheduled to come online by 2020. This new system will replace and integrate different systems currently deployed in several ministries and public agencies. The system will automate many manual HR processes and claims and enhance productivity. Our officers can also benefit from integrated and structured career development and learning platforms.

Ms Chia Yong Yong asked about public service employment of persons with disabilities. I have asked our public agencies and ministries to look seriously into this and how we can do more and do better. In recent years, we have introduced a number of initiatives in collaboration with SG Enable, the agency set up to help persons with disabilities gain employment. For instance, the Public Service posts suitable vacancies on SG Enable's job portal. We are also appointing champions among senior management in our agencies to drive the hiring and integration of persons with disabilities in their organisations. We also partner Voluntary Welfare Organisations to create job opportunities. One of our agencies, Vital, worked with the Autism Resource Centre to hire persons with disabilities to support the digitisation of files.

The Public Service has employed about 270 persons with disabilities by end 2016. As an inclusive employer, the Public Service will continue to find ways to expand opportunities for persons with disabilities to take on meaningful jobs in accordance with their abilities.

## **Conclusion**

Madam Chairperson, let me thank Members once again for their strong support for the Public Service.

The Public Service has played an important role in Singapore's nation building. Even as we transform, we remain guided by the core values of Integrity, Service and Excellence.

The Public Service will continue to partner Singaporeans and businesses to transform our economy and seize new opportunities. We will continue to ensure good governance and effective execution to prepare Singapore and Singaporeans for the future.

Thank you.

<sup>1</sup> Emissions intensity refers to GHG emissions per dollar of GDP

Source: [Public Service Division](#)