

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day 2012 Message

My Fellow Singaporeans,

1. We celebrate National Day amidst an unsettled world. Europe and the US face serious economic problems. Asia is doing better than other regions, but China and India are slowing down and tensions are simmering in the South China Sea.

2. Against this backdrop, Singapore is doing quite well. Our economy grew 1.7% in the first half of 2012 and we are on track for 1.5-2.5% growth for the year. Internationally, Singapore's standing is high, whether with emerging countries like India and China or advanced nations like the US. Domestically, we are clearing the backlog of applicants for HDB flats, building more MRT lines and upgrading our bus services. Our GST Vouchers and U-Save rebates will help lower-income households cope with inflation.

3. Today Singapore is a success story, but the world is not standing still. The next two decades will be very different. The emerging economies in Asia are advancing rapidly. Breakthroughs in science and technology will transform our lives. Singapore will encounter many new challenges and opportunities.

4. We must ask ourselves some fundamental questions: What future do we see for Singapore? What kind of home do we want for our children? I believe all of us want to be proud to be Singaporeans, and to live in a successful country that meets our aspirations. What does this mean?

5. First, Singapore must always offer hope of a better future. We must always be a fair and just society which creates opportunities for all. A nurturing and open environment which gives every citizen the chance to pursue his dreams. A forward-looking community where each generation improves on what they have inherited and hands a better Singapore over to their children. This is the way to root able and enterprising Singaporeans here, and inspire all of us to keep on improving Singapore.

6. Singaporeans all want the best education, to fulfill their potential and be better people. We will equip them with skills and knowledge to thrive in an uncertain world. We must work with parents to bring their children to more equal starting points for primary school, through good and affordable childcare and kindergartens. We will open up more pathways in our education system, to fulfill the diverse aspirations of our young. Let us prepare every child for the test of life, not just a life of tests.

7. Second, Singapore must be an inclusive society with a heart. We uphold meritocracy, to motivate everyone to try their best. But individual achievement must be tempered with a mutual obligation. The successful ones have a duty to contribute back more to society. We need to treat one another with dignity and respect, and to share the fruits of success widely, so that no Singaporean is left out.

8. We have strived for such an inclusive Singapore for many years. Our home ownership programme gives every citizen, rich or poor, a stake in our nation. Our universal and almost free education system equips every child with the tools to succeed in life. Our healthcare system provides every Singaporean with good quality and affordable care.

9. But as new needs have emerged over time, we have enhanced our social safety nets. We introduced ComCare to help the needy, and Workfare for low-income workers. Low- and middle-income couples now get additional Housing Grants to buy HDB flats. In schools, Opportunity Funds enable less well-off students to participate fully in enrichment programmes and study trips.

10. This year's Budget was a further major step. We introduced new programmes. The Silver Housing Bonus is benefiting our ageing population. Increased subsidies for home-based care are helping more families with elderly parents. These are not one-off gestures, but a carefully designed package which lays the basis for stronger safety nets for the future.

11. We will build on these initiatives in a sustainable way. The Government will do more but it cannot do everything. Every Singaporean must play his part in creating an inclusive Singapore. This is how we can nurture a united community, and do the best for ourselves and one another.

12. Third, Singapore must be a home that all of us love. We have built a unique home on our little island, striking a balance between preserving the old and embracing the new. Let us make it even better. A beautiful home with green spaces, blue skies and clear waters, just like here in Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park. A cherished home where we build treasured memories and lifelong friendships. A safe home which we will defend.

13. This feeling of belonging and identity is especially important for an open society in a globalised world. But it is also harder to nurture when we have new immigrants and foreign workers. We are managing the inflow to minimise the strains on our infrastructure and society. But Singaporeans

must remain confident and open, and welcome those who will strengthen our team and help us and our children do better. For their part, new immigrants must make the effort to integrate into our community. They must acquire our social values, our cultural values, adopt our social norms and commit their loyalty and love to Singapore.

14. Even as we keep our society open to immigrants, we will bring up our own next generation. Singaporeans do want to grow their own families. Many couples do wish to have children, and we will do more to support their family life and parenthood. I am happy that we expect more Dragon babies this year, but our fertility trend is still declining. We must go beyond the Chinese zodiac and tackle the underlying causes of our low birth rates. If we can create more supportive social attitudes and work environments, and lighten the burdens of parenthood, we will help couples to have more kids.

15. Beyond specific issues like immigration and procreation, we need to review our policies more broadly, particularly social and education policies. To still be a shining red dot twenty years from now, we must rethink our approaches, and reinvent ourselves. We must anticipate changes and prepare for what lies ahead. Singaporeans will remain at the heart of all that we do, as we update our policies to best serve our people. Core values such as meritocracy, multi-racialism and financial prudence cannot change. But within these broad principles, we should review what needs to change and where we should act more boldly.

16. I have asked Minister Heng Swee Keat to chair a committee of younger ministers to take a fresh look at what we are doing. We will engage Singaporeans in this review, and build a broad consensus on the way forward. I ask for your support in this exercise.

17. Singapore is our shared home. What Singapore becomes depends on what we make of it. With our resources, our resolve, and our imagination, Singapore is well placed to thrive in a changing world. Let us all work together so that our children can always find here hope of a better future, an inclusive society with a heart, and the best home for ourselves and our families.

18. Happy National Day!

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