

## **Singapore cannot assume it is immune to divisive forces: Heng Swee Keat**

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SINGAPORE has already seen some semblances of nativist tendencies here, the Republic's deputy prime minister said on Monday as he warned the country cannot assume it is immune to divisive forces that have swept across the world.

Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat said increasing pessimism about the future and the lack of progress have led people in other parts of the world to view their governments and institutions with distrust, ushering in an era of "anti-politics".

This has led to insurgent political parties – including far-right parties – exploiting these fears and frustrations for their own political gain, he said.

"We have already seen some semblances of nativist tendencies here in Singapore, such as some of the public discourse around foreigners. If we do not act decisively, and if we allow these forces to creep up on us, our hopes and concerns can be exploited to create fear and anger, our diversity can be turned against us, our unity can fray, and our society can wither," Mr Heng said.

He was speaking at the Institute of Policy Studies' Singapore Perspective Conference 2020, basing his half-hour address on three key words: "differences", "we" and "together".

He noted that Singapore's strong sense of unity was key to Singapore's "improbable success" - having capable leaders that worked together with a united people. In the early years, Singapore's founding fathers fostered a sense of nationhood by introducing policies that gave people a stake in Singapore, he said. These policies centred around welcoming foreign investment, creating jobs, providing education and proper housing.

He said this shared experience of progress strengthened the trust between the government and the people, creating a virtuous circle.

In a world of increasing uncertainty and disruption, Mr Heng said this approach must remain core to the government's mission, especially in the face of longer-term issues.

"The way ahead will not be easy, but you have the unwavering commitment of the government, and from the 4G leadership. My colleagues and I will make every effort to build a future of progress for Singaporeans in the coming decades," Mr Heng said.

However, the process is one of co-creation, Mr Heng said, as he cited various platforms for Singaporeans to be directly involved in designing policies, including the Citizens' Panel and Citizens' Workgroup as well as Budget outreach programmes.

"There are many possibilities for us to work together, such as keeping Singapore safe and secure, developing the full potential of our people, growing our economy to create more opportunities and resources for our people, making sure Singapore will become a green, sustainable, and liveable city, and building a caring and cohesive community," Mr Heng said.

He invited Singaporeans to work with the government on these challenges and opportunities, adding that more details will be announced in the coming months.

He said these are the early days of the Singapore Together movement, which will be the new cornerstone of nation building.