

Singapore's refreshed social compact could see new approach to success, skills: Lawrence Wong

Other key shifts include a revamped system of social support and a renewed sense of social solidarity, said DPM Wong.

Natasha Ganesan

Channel NewsAsia, June 12, 2023

SINGAPORE: Singapore could see a new approach to success and skills as part of the country's refreshed social compact, said Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong.

Mr Wong highlighted other key shifts such as a revamped system of social support and a renewed sense of social solidarity, during his speech at the Institute of Policy Studies' 35th anniversary conference on Monday (Jun 12).

On the new approach to success, he said that engagements with Singaporeans showed that it is "less about the pot of gold at the end of the road and more about our sense of purpose and fulfilment along the way".

Besides celebrating those who move to the top of certain professions, those who choose to spend more time with their families to be better parents and caregivers should also be equally embraced, said Mr Wong.

He added that those with talents in diverse areas such as the arts and sports, or those who serve in retail services, should be recognised.

Mr Wong said the refreshed social compact must be more inclusive and cannot be limited to a few selected pathways of advancement, with some given higher status than others.

"We must provide many more ways for our diverse talents to be the best possible version of themselves, to make a difference in their own ways, all deserving of equal respect in our society," he added.

On education and skills, Mr Wong pointed out the need to recognise that formal education early in life is "not the endpoint".

"Our refreshed meritocracy must be a continuous one, with learning opportunities across multiple junctures of life. Everyone must have the chance to try again, do better, and move forward in life, years after leaving school."

He added that Singapore is looking at major changes to strengthen SkillsFuture and to provide every citizen with opportunities to reskill and upskill themselves, which will be a key part of the refreshed social compact to become a full-fledged learning society.

Social Support and Solidarity

Singapore will do more to assure those in the broad middle group and the vulnerable so that they can meet their needs and not be left behind, Mr Wong said on Monday.

He highlighted some key areas that are currently looked at such as support for the unemployed, lower-income families, vulnerable groups and seniors.

Those who are unemployed will receive help with their day-to-day needs, as they go about skills training and job search, while the support for lower-income families will enable and empower them to move forward, uplift their wages and close the early gaps in their children's lives.

There will also be support for vulnerable groups including persons with disabilities as well as seniors in terms of their long-term care, living arrangements and retirement needs.

A renewed sense of solidarity is also needed to underpin Singapore's refreshed social compact, Mr Wong added.

While surveys conducted suggest that overall trust in Singapore remains high, there is still scope for improvement at the local and neighbourhood levels, the Deputy Prime Minister said.

The country must continue to find ways to strengthen this sense of trust between people in Singapore, said Mr Wong.

"We want every group to celebrate their own cultures and traditions, as these are part of their roots and identity.

"At the same time, we encourage everyone to look beyond your own communities, to come together, and to expand the common ground we share as Singaporeans."

This must be done "deliberately and purposely" to facilitate more inter-group interactions, he said.

"Such interactions are deeply personal decisions. The government cannot force it to happen. Therefore there are no easy policy interventions," he added.

In his speech, Mr Wong said Singapore's social compact is "not forged by confrontation or coercion or asserting the rights of one group over another", but rather built through regular interactions, accommodation and compromise, as well as mutual respect and fellowship.

"The Singapore way is not insular, it's not tribal. It's always open, inclusive and big-hearted," added Mr Wong.