

**REMARKS BY TEO CHEE HEAN
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND
COORDINATING MINISTER FOR NATIONAL SECURITY**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

I am happy to join you at the book launch of *The Challenges of Governance in a Complex World* by Mr Peter Ho.

Working with Mr Peter Ho

Let me first say a few words about Peter. We have known each other for some forty-five years, as friends and colleagues. In fact, we had an early life-changing experience together. We were freshly commissioned Infantry officers and one day, the two of us were asked to report to the Istana. Before we could brace ourselves for it, we found ourselves in Mr Lee Kuan Yew's office, standing before him. Mr Lee explained that the Maritime Command, as the Navy was then called, was being built up and needed more officers, and he wanted us to go over from the Army. He said to us, "Young men, I would like you to give the Navy a try. You will give it a try, won't you?" As you know, there was only one possible answer to that question. Both of us said, "Yes sir!", and we were out of his office, and in the Navy. Peter, at least, was an accomplished swimmer and life-saver.

We were struck that the Prime Minister would take time to meet two 18-year-olds, just to convey what seemed to be a simple instruction, like a posting order. I share with you this anecdote, because it carries a lesson on leadership and the Public Service – the importance of looking at the big picture, while also attending to the details of implementation; looking at the long-term strategic planning and priorities, while developing our human resources to match them.

Over the next four decades, Peter and I have carried those lessons with us. We have worked closely together. I have never quite asked Peter whether he enjoyed working with me but I certainly enjoyed working with him. We worked together particularly at the Ministry of Defence, developing and implementing plans for the Navy, thinking through our defence policy strategically when Peter was Director of Policy and then Deputy Secretary of Policy in Mindef, and initiating the transformation of the 3G Singapore Armed Forces. Peter also served as the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for six years where he built up our engagement with many countries especially with ASEAN.

We worked closely together when Peter was also concurrently Head of Civil Service from 2005 to 2010, where he led the public service to address many new, cross-cutting challenges. Peter chose to take on wicked problems. He helped to overcome institutional silos and interests, setting up the National Security Coordination Secretariat, National Population and Talent Division and the National Climate Change Secretariat to address cross-cutting national challenges. Some elements have now been incorporated as part of the Prime Minister Office's

Strategy Group and the centre of government structure that we have established and institutionalised.

Peter is particularly associated with developing capabilities in another key area of governance that brings the whole of government together. That is futures thinking and planning, to grapple with the growing complexity and uncertainties of our times. This is a tall order for many governments as governments are typically focused on fighting the fires of the day. It takes intellectual honesty, imagination, and courage to acknowledge and take on challenges that by definition are not well-defined and for which there are no easy or definitive solutions.

Peter also promoted openness and created space for civil servants at various levels to experiment and test their ideas. His advice to young officers was always, “Don’t wait to be told what to do. Create your own reality.”

The public service, and our public officers, have indeed benefitted from his more than three decades of stellar service in the Public Service.

Addressing Complexity

After retiring as Head of Civil Service in 2010, Peter continued to play a key role in thought leadership on his pet subject – strategic futures – as Senior Advisor to the Centre for Strategic Futures and Senior Fellow with the Civil Service College.

In 2016/2017, he accepted the S R Nathan Fellowship from the Institute of Policy Studies. Through his IPS-Nathan lectures and this book, his ideas on governance and managing complexity are now being shared with a wider audience.

This book contains ideas that Peter is propounding not only after retiring from government, but developed over his years in service. For instance, he has adapted the use of “black swans” - the characterisation of our cognitive biases, with that of the proverbial “elephant in the room” to come up with a “black elephant” that we must guard against and address, well before issues fester.

As Peter put it, “the Government will have to assume new levels of entrepreneurship with its attendant risks and uncertainties ... [There is a need for] a new paradigm in governance — one that is Whole-of-Government, networked, innovative, exploratory and resilient.”

Conclusion

Peter has a life-long passion for governance, and remains highly committed to the well-being and future of Singapore. We continue to benefit from Peter’s experience and ideas given his roles as Senior Adviser to the Centre for Strategic Futures, Chairman of the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Singapore, the Social Science Research Council, and the National Supercomputing Centre Steering Committee, among others.

Yet, little is known of Peter among the general public. I know he prefers it that way. But his ideas and insights are important for the public as they provide an appreciation of the

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challenges that we face and how we might approach them. This book bears re-reading a few times as the reader will surely uncover new insights each time. It is a valuable contribution to the scholarship on governance in Singapore. I also hope that this book will inspire our young Singaporeans – the 18-year-olds of today – to consider a career in the Public Service, and to create a better Singapore for our people and for future generations.

It is now my honour and pleasure to launch Peter Ho's new book *The Challenges of Governance in a Complex World*. Thank you very much.

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