

Welcome Remarks by Janadas Devan, Director, Institute of Policy Studies

IPS 35th Anniversary Gala Dinner

26 June 2023

Emeritus Senior Minister, our lifelong Patron, and Mrs Goh Chok Tong,
Ambassador Tommy Koh, our Special Adviser, and still our mascot,
Many distinguished guests, friends, colleagues,

Madam President will be honouring us with her presence in a little while.

I'm very happy that we are able to have her at an IPS event before the presidency comes to an end in a few months.

I think posterity will record her presidency as most significant in our history. Not only because she was the first woman to occupy this office — and hopefully not the last — but above all, because she was a crisis president.

I hope in the weeks and months that remain in her presidency, Singaporeans will learn what senior civil servants who came before her in the darkest days of the crisis, as well as the Council of Presidential Advisers who interacted with her closely throughout, have long known: the professionalism and commands of the issues; the insight and discipline; her care and heart.

I'm sure all of you are looking forward to the dialogue Madam President will hold with Mr Patrick Daniel in a while. It will be her first since she announced that she will not be standing for re-election. We are marking the 35th anniversary of IPS' founding. We are grateful our founder, ESM Goh Chok Tong, is here. Grateful too for the presence of IPS' first director, Professor Chan Heng Chee, as well as three succeeding directors, Dr Lee Tsao Yuan, Mr Jon Quah and Mr Arun Mahizhnan.

I am happy too for the presence of a number of our distinguished S R Nathan Fellows and we have quite a distinguished list. Professor Lim Siong Guan is here, Mr Bilahari Kausikan, Dr Noeleen Heyzer, Professor Wang Gungwu and of course Heng Chee and Patrick who are also Nathan Fellows.

IPS, as all of you know, is a government-funded public policy think-tank. We get an annual grant from the government. Many of the research projects that we conduct, [though] not all, are commissioned by government agencies. Of special importance to us is the one-to-one matching grant we receive from the Ministry of Education for every dollar that we raise from our generous donors and corporate associates, many of whom are present here tonight.

Professor Tommy Koh once defined our relations with the government as follows: "IPS is close to the government but not part of the government." Close, but not part of. That proximity, "close", is as important as that distance, "not part of". Our business has always been and remains public policy. Not politics — policy. Examining policy, discussing policy, publishing on policy, conducting surveys on various matters pertinent to policy issues, and

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providing platforms and opportunities for a wide variety of stakeholders to meet on policy, like conferences, seminars, workshops, citizen panels, deliberative polling, scenario planning exercises and so on.

As you heard just now, 10 years ago on our 25th anniversary, IPS numbered around 30. It has grown four-fold since then. The primary reason for this growth is that with the establishment of IPS' Social Lab, which conducts polling and sensing, and now IPS Policy Lab, which conducts policy experiments and pilots, we have moved in a new direction. Not only researching, talking, and writing about policy, but also experimenting with policy, testing policy ideas, running pilots, figuring out what might work, what doesn't.

We have done some interesting and useful work in these areas, but there is a great deal more that we can do in government as well as in public policy institutions like IPS — to adopt an empirical approach to policymaking; testing proposals before they are adopted, let alone scaled up; building a body of knowledge on policy experimentation and outcomes; constantly tweaking policies with a view to improving them; and thereby improving the lives of our fellow citizens.

I might mention here two projects that will be close to the heart of ESM to give you a glimpse of what we do.

One, we studied the motivations, stressors and needs of private hire vehicle drivers and food delivery riders. Our young researchers, research assistants and research associates were involved in this project, and as a result of their passion, IPS contributed to ongoing efforts to improve the working conditions of platform workers.

Two, we recently established the IPS Programme on Race, Religion and Intergroup Cohesion, which is supported by the Silent Foundation. Its founder and Executive Chairman Mr Teng Ngiek Lian is with us. Among other things, the programme has developed a four-hour course and later an eight-hour course to help people, [as] I quote, (a) Discover their biases, (b) Navigate cultural sensitivities, and (c) Act to build better relations. Discover, Navigate, Act, or DNA. I haven't subjected myself to this course, but I've been told you saw somebody wearing goggles just now. I'm not sure whether that's the one that Apple just produced. That will include the use of biosensors, presumably to pick up prejudices from pupils of your eyes, as well as virtual reality simulations and a forum theatre segment.

These are some of the ways we hope to be of use to the public service, to our various stakeholders and to the people of Singapore. If we succeed, there is no reason why we should not be around for another 15 years to celebrate the 50th anniversary of IPS, when our patron will be close to 100.

Thank you all for gracing this occasion. We are grateful. I hope you enjoy the evening. Thank you.