

4G leaders to engage people on charting Singapore's future

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Singapore's fourth-generation leaders will, in the coming months, set out how to achieve their vision for the country and engage people on building this future together.

Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat yesterday detailed how the 4G leadership team plans to work with Singaporeans in this Singapore Together movement, to create a shared future where everyone will have a part to play.

In a 45-minute speech at a Reach-CNA dialogue on building the country's future, he raised four broad themes that his team will share their vision on.

- One, how to remain a resilient nation in the face of major developments worldwide, from geopolitical shifts to climate change.
- Two, how Singapore can remain a city of possibilities, by transforming its economy, harnessing technology and building a home, where sports, arts, culture and heritage can flourish.
- Three, how to build a society with more opportunities for all, provide a strong foundation for all children, and create multiple pathways so people can fulfil their potential and aspirations.
- Four, how to build an even more caring, gracious and cohesive community, as well as strengthen Singaporeans' identity as one people.

"We will listen to your views and explore together what the Government can do, what each of you can do, and how we can create partnerships to take good ideas forward," said Mr Heng. "In the process, I hope you will know better who we are, what we believe in. And as we jointly figure out where we want to go, I hope we will get to know each other better."

He noted that many more Singaporeans want to play a bigger part in nation-building today, citing some who have pursued their passions and given back to society.

"This is how this little red dot remains a successful country," he said, encouraging more Singaporeans to come forward to propose ideas for shaping Singapore's future and take action to make a difference.

At the same time, he highlighted the importance of enlarging and safeguarding common space, and building trust among communities. This can only happen by keeping an open mind, and looking at issues through others' perspectives, Mr Heng said.

It also entails recognising that other viewpoints may be as valid, and that not all ideas can be taken on board wholesale or accepted.

"The Government must also be prepared, if necessary, to step in if particular groups pursue their agenda in ways that divide society or impede the good work of other groups," he said.

Otherwise, there is a risk of alienating other Singaporeans, especially those who cannot speak up for themselves, he added.

Singapore has also become more diverse, in terms of needs like those faced by a growing silver population, and in terms of views. Sharper debates on many issues have arisen as a result, from LGBT rights to freedom of speech and nature conservation, he said.

While a contestation of views and ideas is good for Singapore, it can also divide the country, he cautioned. Singaporeans could end up living in self-enclosed silos on social media, and be influenced by exclusivist and extremist ideologies from elsewhere.

"We must not allow our differences to divide us... Instead, we must retain and harness our diversity as a strength," he said.

Staying united is critical to navigate challenges, he added.

At the same time, there are many exciting opportunities ahead, he said, pointing to how Singapore is at the heart of an economically vibrant Asia, and investing in a big way to transform itself.

Dr Gillian Koh, deputy director (research) at the Institute of Policy Studies who took part in the dialogue, welcomed Mr Heng saying those with diverse viewpoints have a place in shaping Singapore's future, as long as they are working in the country's best interests.

Added Dr Koh: "He made it clear in his speech that this modality of community engagement is very much a part of his DNA as a leader."

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