

4G leadership will build future of hope and progress for Singaporeans: DPM Heng Swee Keat

Lim Yan Liang

The Straits Times, 20 January 2020

SINGAPORE - Amid challenges such as inequality, economic disruption and a growing generational divide, the fourth-generation leadership will "make every effort to build a future of progress" for Singaporeans, said Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat on Monday (Jan 20).

Painting a vision of how he - who is expected to take the helm as Singapore's next leader in the coming years - and his colleagues intend to lead the country, Mr Heng spoke of his team's "unwavering commitment" to build a future where all Singaporeans have the opportunities to succeed, where no one will be left behind if they give their best, and where everyone will pull together as one.

He also hinted that plans are afoot to give more help to lower- and middle-income Singaporeans.

"We are now studying how we can better help lower- and lower-middle income Singaporeans, including current and future seniors, to meet their retirement needs in a sustainable way," said Mr Heng, who is also Finance Minister. "I will provide more details in the coming Budget."

In his keynote speech at the Institute of Policy Studies' annual Singapore Perspectives Conference, Mr Heng extended an invitation to "all Singaporeans to work with us, and with each other" to tackle the challenges facing the nation.

"My 4G colleagues and I are committed to go beyond just working for you, to working with you, to build our future Singapore," he said.

Just as the founding political leaders fostered a sense of nationhood by introducing policies such as home ownership that gave the people a stake in Singapore, Mr Heng said the "Singapore Together" movement launched last year "will be our new cornerstone of nation building".

New platforms like the Citizens' Panel and Citizens' Workgroup have already engaged Singaporeans on their ideas about making different aspects of life better, such as ways to improve work-life harmony and encourage household recycling, said Mr Heng.

Singaporeans are also being involved in the development of Singapore's landscape such as the Somerset Belt, the Geylang Serai cultural precinct and its parks.

"What we see forming is a new model of partnership, between Government and Singaporeans in owning, shaping and acting on our future," Mr Heng told an audience of students, academics and policymakers on Monday.

"In this process, government agencies are learning to develop and deliver policy solutions in a more collaborative manner." Related Story4G leaders' roadmap for Singapore Together Related StoryWalls are being built worldwide, but S'pore must build bridges: Heng Swee Keat at ST Global Outlook Forum

This more collaborative approach to governance comes at a time of rising geopolitical challenge from the competition between the United States and China, and the acceleration to change in the nature of jobs and the ageing of Singapore society, noted Mr Heng.

As a small nation buffeted by such forces, Singapore needs to work with like-minded nations, while maintaining its unity as a people and cohesion as a nation and "Singapore Together" is the way forward, said Mr Heng.

The Government was encouraged to invite Singaporeans to tackle bigger challenges together, given trends like more Singaporeans voicing their ideas and putting them into action.

Volunteering has also more than doubled over the past decade, with 122 million volunteer hours logged in 2018 compared to 45 million in 2008, noted Mr Heng. Related StoryMore Singaporeans engaged in volunteerism in 2019 Related StoryParliament: Seniors to get more help to stay healthy

A bigger role in shaping policy will also help Singaporeans gain a deeper appreciation of the challenges and trade-offs involved, understand different viewpoints, distinguish truth from falsehoods and find a way forward amid diverse and often-conflicting opinions, he added.

At the same time, the Government will continue to exercise leadership in areas it is expected to, such as in security and defence to ensure Singapore plans and acts for the long term, said Mr Heng.

"I am confident that our partnership efforts to date will set the foundations for the work of a generation," he said.