

Success is less about means, more about meaning, says DPM Wong on renewing social compact

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SINGAPORE – Conversations between the Government and Singaporeans over the past year have shown an emerging consensus on what the refreshed social compact could look like, said Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong on Monday.

This compact is centred on a new approach to success and skills, a revamped system of social support, and a renewed sense of solidarity, he said in a speech that also reiterated the domestic challenges and troubled external environment facing Singapore.

Speaking at the Institute of Policy Studies 35th Anniversary Conference held at the Sands Expo and Convention Centre, Mr Wong said that in terms of success, society still tends to converge around certain material definitions.

But in the end, success should be for each person to define as there is no single measure of achievement.

“Success is less about means, and more about meaning... We must value the success of every individual – each one pursuing his or her own path,” he said.’

Entrenched mindsets will have to be changed, though it is not an easy task, he added.

It must also be recognised that formal education early in life is not the endpoint of Singapore’s meritocracy, said Mr Wong.

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

On social support, Singapore has been careful in designing its social safety nets in a way that boosts a sense of ownership and agency over their own circumstances for vulnerable groups, he noted.

As Singapore enters a more volatile and unpredictable environment, the Government will do more to assure both the broad middle and the vulnerable that they can meet their needs in life and not be left behind, said Mr Wong.

Measures include support for the unemployed, lower-income families, vulnerable groups, including those with disabilities, and senior citizens.

On a sense of solidarity, Mr Wong said that society needs to be less about “I”, “me” and “mine”, and more about “we”, “us” and “ours”.

“No one succeeds alone. Every success story is a shared story. We all stand on the shoulders of those who came before us,” he said.

Mr Wong added that while the Government wants every group to celebrate its own culture and traditions, which are part of its roots and identity, it also encourages everyone to look beyond their own communities to expand their common ground as Singaporeans.

“We have to do this deliberately and purposefully to facilitate more inter-group interactions.

“Such interactions are deeply personal... and therefore there are no easy policy interventions. But we should certainly continue to find ways to strengthen our sense of community and human connections,” he said.

He added that ultimately, Singapore’s social compact is not forged by confrontation or by asserting the rights of one group over another.

“Instead, it is built through regular interactions, through accommodation and compromise, and a spirit of mutual respect and fellowship. The Singapore way is not insular, it’s not tribal; it is always open, inclusive and big-hearted,” he said.