

SPEECH BY PROF S JAYAKUMAR, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND COORDINATING MINISTER FOR NATIONAL SECURITY AT THE 2009 ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE DINNER AND PROMOTION CEREMONY, 30 MARCH 2009, 8:00PM AT THE GRAND BALLROOM, MARRIOTT HOTEL,

My Cabinet colleagues

Members of the PSC

Permanent Secretaries

Ladies and Gentlemen

INTRODUCTION - A CHALLENGING GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

The world has been in a tail spin after the global financial crisis first triggered by sub prime mortgage defaults in the United States. Internationally, many nations are facing greater domestic pressure to adopt protectionist measures. Restrictive "Buy America" provisions nearly made their way into the US stimulus bill passed last month. Even the European Union is having a hard time maintaining its essential value proposition as a single market for goods, capital and people. A new term, "deglobalisation", has entered the lexicon, to describe the scaling back of the international integration of trade, capital flows and jobs.

2 Singapore, being closely plugged into the international economy, has been particularly hard hit. We are now experiencing our

worst recession since independence. The full impact of this and ramifications are yet to be felt, but our economy shrank 4.2% in the fourth quarter of 2008 and trade shrank by nearly 36% in Jan 09. MTI has forecasted that the Singapore economy will shrink by 2% to 5% in 2009 and further downward revisions in the GDP forecast cannot be ruled out.

3 On the security front, the reality that international terrorism remains a constant threat was brought home to Singaporeans during the terrorist attacks in Mumbai last November which sadly claimed the life of a Singaporean lady. Within our region, economic difficulties could lead to unemployment and social stresses which could spill across borders. The ability to keep focused on security will be tested as governments are preoccupied with their own economic and political distractions.

4 In such times, the natural reaction understandably is to focus more attention on the local and more immediate challenges. However, it would be equally important for the Administrative Service, in carrying out its duties, not to lose sight of fundamentals and to remain focused on what I consider to be 3 fundamental aspects:

- First, keep an international outlook;
- Second, take a strategic view and be long-term focused, even as we deal with immediate and short term challenges; and
- Third, be guided by our core values.

Let me deal with each aspect in turn.

LOOKING OUTWARD – KEEPING AN INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK

5 In today's interconnected world where events in one country or region can have repercussions worldwide, it is essential for the Public Service to maintain a global outlook.

6 Every Administrative Officer has to be attuned to international developments, to understand how these can potentially affect Singapore and to think through options for safeguarding Singapore's interests. Gone are the days when it was just MFA or MTI which had to deal with international issues. Whether it is Pedra Branca, FTAs, national security, boundary negotiations, climate change talks, or foreign worker policy – nearly every Ministry is in one way or another

involved. Its officers must approach issues not from a narrow segmented organisational perspective of that Ministry, but rather from the viewpoint of how its expertise and experience can further value add to the inter-agency discussions to formulate sensible policy responses which is in Singapore's best interests. My own experience and observation having chaired many inter-agency committees in recent years, is that there is now a greater awareness of, as well as practice of, the "Whole-of-Government" approach. This is something which the Head of Civil Service, Mr Peter Ho has rightfully given high priority and attention to.

7 Administrative Officers should also be confident in dealing with foreigners and foreign governments and be prepared, where necessary, to explain Singapore's position and stand on various issues. I am glad to note that the Administrative Service is increasing international exposure for its officers, for example, by deploying more officers to overseas assignments so that they can gain such experience.

8 Over the years, Singapore has established a solid track record as a good country to live and work in. The World Bank in its "Doing Business 2009" Report has again ranked Singapore as the World's Easiest Place to do business. The World Economic Forum in its Global

Competitiveness Report also ranked Singapore as the most competitive country in Asia and 5th worldwide from 2007 to 2008. High ratings for the effective and efficient services provided by the Civil Service have no doubt contributed to these impressive rankings. The “Singapore brand” that we have painstakingly built up over the years has enabled us to gain more international space and recognition. But we must not rest on our laurels as other countries are learning fast and are narrowing the gap.

9 Many countries are keen to learn from our experiences. Within the Civil Service, we have been sharing our knowledge and skills with our international partners. For example, under the X-PSC (or Exporting Public Sector Capabilities) initiative, public sector agencies have shared their knowledge and expertise with their overseas counterparts in areas such as governance, water studies and development of training curriculum for teachers. We should broaden such global engagements and build on the valuable international ties.

LOOKING LONG TERM – ANTICIPATING THE FUTURE

10 Besides looking outwards, we also need to look long-term. The Public Service has always understood the value of taking a “long-term” perspective, due to the nature of the issues we deal with. The Resilience Package 2009 aims to do just that, not only in helping businesses and Singaporeans deal with immediate needs but also, for the longer term, equipping and preparing Singaporeans for the recovery. The Package will help build up our capabilities by investing in world-class education and training opportunities, providing best care services for the aged, building up our innovative capabilities, as well as investing to build up infrastructure and turn Singapore into a sustainable and livable city in the long run. These investments with long-term impact will help ensure that Singapore emerges from this crisis even stronger and more competitive.

11 Over the years, the Service has built capabilities to help public officers anticipate and plan for discontinuities in the future. Our previous National Scenarios have provided the context and basis for agencies to carry out their internal strategic planning with Whole-of-Government priorities in mind. We have complemented these national efforts with scenario studies on more focused topics, like the impact of

the New Media and Climate Change. These will challenge the Civil Service to develop strategies and policies to maximize the opportunities for Singapore while minimising the negative impacts of these potentially disruptive developments.

12 In more recent years, we have also developed a Risk Assessment and Horizon Scanning tool, also known as the RAHS programme, which promotes the use of strategic anticipation tools to assist government agencies in thinking about the future and developing useful strategies. To date, the RAHS methods and technology tools have been employed in anticipatory projects in the areas of energy, education and security. RAHS and Scenario Planning are complementary efforts in our bid to anticipate change and be better prepared for the future. I encourage you to explore the use of such innovative futures thinking tools to enhance our capabilities in taking a long term view.

LOOKING INWARD - REMEMBERING OUR CORE VALUES

13 I have spoken about looking outward and looking forward. We should also not forget our core purpose and values.

14 Since its establishment, the Administrative Service has provided the leadership core for the Public Service over many decades. Working closely with the political leadership, it guides the Public Service to respond nimbly and decisively to the needs of Singapore's development. This is after all the Public Service's *raison d'être* – to serve the people of Singapore with humility, integrity and empathy.

15 Public services should not be delivered mechanically and public policies cannot be formulated based purely on intellectual understanding of issues or theoretical models. It is essential for Administrative Officers to keep in close touch with concerns and sentiments on the ground in order to develop policies which are well targeted to needs and which are well communicated to those affected.

16 I note that the Public Service Division has put in place various programmes to help Administrative Officers gain exposure to ground sentiments and issues. As Head Civil Service, Mr Peter Ho has mentioned, these include the Community Attachment Programme, where Administrative Officers are attached to grassroots organizations like Resident Committees, and the Community Involvement Programme, where Administrative Officers have the opportunity to work closely with the ground. In addition, Administrative Officers are

being seconded to grassroots organizations such as the Community Development Councils. I hope that our Administrative Officers will make the best use of these opportunities to gain deeper insights into the needs and concerns on the ground, and translate the experiences and insights into better and more effective policies.

CONCLUSION

17 Singapore has been fortunate to have had over the years, a pool of very talented, dedicated and highly professional people in the Administrative Service to help deliver a first rate public service. The Government is committed to following the best human resource practices to recruit, develop and retain some of the very best of our school leavers each year in order to ensure that there is a steady flow of high quality officers to help lead the Civil Service and Singapore into the future. Your challenge is maintaining these high standards.

18 An effective Public Service boils down to each and every officer playing his or her part, committed to serving Singapore and Singaporeans. To keep learning, innovating, striving for excellence, and maintaining a high level of integrity and commitment. Many challenges as well as opportunities lie ahead for Singapore but I

remain confident that the Administrative Service will rise to the occasion and work hard to deal with these challenges effectively.

19 In closing, let me congratulate those who have been recently appointed into the Administrative Service, as well as those who have been appointed to the Management Associates Programme. My congratulations also go to the many officers who were promoted in this year's exercise.

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