

**SPEECH BY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PROF S.
JAYAKUMAR AT THE ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE
DINNER & PROMOTION CEREMONY
30 MAR 2006 AT THE GRAND COPTHORNE
WATERFRONT HOTEL**

My Fellow Ministers
Members of the Public Service Commission
Permanent Secretaries
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

INTRODUCTION

First, let me congratulate all the officers who have been promoted, those who have been confirmed or absorbed into the Administrative Service, and those who have been appointed to the Management Associates Programme.

TRIBUTE TO RETIRING/RETIRED PERMANENT SECRETARIES

2 This is a fitting occasion to recognise the contributions of four permanent secretaries who have made sterling contributions to the Public Service and Singapore's development. Collectively, they have put in over 130 years of dedicated service to the nation.

3 **Mr Koh Cher Siang** retired last July after having served for 35 years in the Public Service. He had worked in the Ministries of Finance, National Development, Prime Minister's Office, Community Development, and Education. As Permanent Secretary, National Development from 1979 to 1987, Mr Koh led the Ministry and its agencies to meet the challenges in the building and construction industry, raising the level of home-ownership among Singaporeans, and transforming Singapore into a garden city. When he was Commissioner of Inland Revenue from 1997 till last year, he spearheaded IRAS's transformation into a world-class tax administration agency, through pioneering new initiatives like the electronic filing of tax returns.

4 **Mr Tan Guong Ching** retired last August. He had served 33 years in various capacities - in the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministries of Communications and Information, Environment, Housing and Development Board (HDB) and the Ministry of Home Affairs. As Chief Executive Officer, HDB, from 1995 to 2000, Guong Ching developed the HDB into an organisation of

excellence by being the first public sector organisation to win the Singapore Quality Award. As Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Guong Ching provided steady leadership during a tumultuous period which saw cross-border threats, including transnational terrorism and SARS. He guided the homefront efforts to confront these challenges and enhanced our security and emergency preparedness.

5 **Mr Eddie Teo** retired from the Administrative Service in December last year after 35 years of service. Eddie had spent the bulk of his distinguished career in the Intelligence Service, becoming Director of both ISD and SID at one point. As Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence, he broadened Singapore's defence relationships with other countries. At the Prime Minister's Office, he fostered a culture of innovation, enterprise and service orientation within the public sector. Eddie continues to serve as our High Commissioner in Australia, which is why he is unable to join us this evening.

6 **Mr Lam Chuan Leong** is retiring on 1 April. During his 35 years in Service, he had served in the Prime Minister's Office, and the Ministries of Defence, Communications and Information, Trade and Industry, National Development, Environment and Finance. As Permanent Secretary, Trade and Industry, Mr Lam built up MTI's capabilities to assess the challenges facing Singapore's economy. At the Ministry of Finance over the last two years, he has been instrumental in increasing private sector involvement in public services, through the Public Private Partnerships, which brings together the expertise and resources of the public and private sectors to provide services at the best value to the public.

7 I wish the four Permanent Secretaries all the very best in their future endeavours.

8 This is my first time addressing the Administrative Service. However, after more than 20 years in the Labour, Law, Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs Ministries, I have had the pleasure of working with over a dozen PSs and numerous other Administrative Officers. Despite differences in personality, style and character, they all shared essential characteristics/traits which are the hallmark of our top civil servants. They are all people of integrity and conviction, steeped in the policy-making process, principled in their views, and with the ability to keep both the strategic picture and the finer details all in the same perspective. Working with them has only reinforced my belief that we have the right system of selection and evaluation in place and that it is essential for the good governance of Singapore that the public service gets its fair share of the best and brightest in each generation of our young people.

9 At this occasion last year, PM spoke about continued leadership renewal, the public service and its relationship to the political leadership, and the need for the civil service to engage with the public at large. Essentially, the *raison d'être* of the Administrative Service. The year before, Minister Teo Chee Hean outlined the challenges facing the Service: (a) enhancing inter-agency collaboration; (b) taking risk and embracing diversity; and (c) deepening understanding of

businesses and markets. Basically, re-engineering the work to face new challenges.

10 Today, I would like to touch on the “intangibles”. By this I mean the “intangible value” that the Admin Service adds to the public service as a whole, the not-easily-quantifiable value that makes our civil service a world-class one. These intangibles include:

- A broad and long-term perspective
- The “Networked Government” Approach.
- The importance of “core values”.

A BROAD AND LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE

11 Governments across the world are grappling with emerging trends and new challenges such as demographics, terrorism and the threat of new pandemics. Globalisation has intensified competition from which the public sector is not immune.

12 Technological advances are also accelerating the pace of change. Harnessed to good use, technology, like the Internet, enables us to work effectively across organisational barriers, to provide integrated e-services and to serve the public in new ways. With greater connectivity and more information readily available, our citizens expect their government to be more accessible, transparent and responsive to their concerns.

13 At the same time, the issues confronting the government are increasingly complex. National security and counter-terrorism, the plight of low-wage workers, a greying population, and the Integrated Resorts are multi-faceted issues which require cross agency cooperation, often involving stakeholders outside the government.

14 The Singapore Public Service has always aimed to stay ahead by anticipating problems and opportunities. We must continue to take the broad and long-term view to lay the groundwork for the challenges of the future, and not just focus exclusively on the issues of the day. As Administrative Officers, it is your responsibility to make policy recommendations in the long-term interests of Singapore and Singaporeans. This may mean recommending difficult and unpopular decisions at times. Notwithstanding the accolades we have received from around the world, we should not rest on our laurels. We must constantly be re-assessing our policies and approaches, even though current strategies are still working well for us today, in order to ensure continued success for the future.

NETWORKED GOVERNMENT

15 The challenges facing the Public Service today are increasingly complex. At present, the Service is structured along organisational lines, with ministries and statutory boards each having clear roles and accountabilities. This arrangement gives individual agencies the autonomy to act fast, and the freedom to innovate. It is responsive to customers’ needs. However, the current structure

could undermine our ability to tackle cross agency issues. There is the risk of working in 'silos', exacerbating the problem of inter-agency coordination.

16 We have to strike a balance. On one hand, we must retain the diversity, flexibility and responsiveness of having a decentralised system. On the other hand, we have to find ways of bringing the many agencies together so that they can effectively think and act as one networked government, working towards the larger national outcomes.

17 Those Administrative Officers who have worked with me would know that I have long advocated this integrated approach. They know my exasperation when policy process on an issue gets bogged down by agencies and officials who stick too closely to their narrow briefs. Occasionally, the process runs the risk of an impasse which needs to be broken by interventions at the PS level and sometimes at Ministerial levels. We should never let the policy process be hostage to narrow parochial briefs or agency turf battles. As such, I welcome the concept of a "networked government".

18 The challenge for the Public Service is to refine the systems and structures to facilitate networked government at all levels. To this end, there are inter-Ministerial Committees and inter-agency groups to deliberate policy issues and recommend solutions. There is also a Strategy Committee which periodically reviews whole-of-government outcomes, and surfaces issues which require strategic trade-offs. At the same time, where necessary, new units are established to oversee and co-ordinate the work of agencies. These include the National Security Co-ordination Secretariat to deal with counter-terrorism, the "National Research Foundation" to oversee research priorities in Singapore and the "Overseas Singaporean Unit" to engage overseas Singaporeans.

19 However, structures and systems alone are not enough. Networked government requires a common understanding of national priorities, a shared ethos, a culture of working across boundaries and seeing things from the customer perspective. Public officers at various levels must be attuned to broader considerations, so as to better align their work priorities to achieve national outcomes.

20 Administrative Officers are best placed to take the lead in building a networked government. Through the milestone programmes and rotational postings, the officers would have acquired different sectoral perspectives and a more rounded view of government. As Administrative Officers, you would be expected not just to do your own job well but to also contribute to inter agency work and service-wide initiatives. Officers will be recognised for effectiveness at solving cross-agency problems and for identifying cross-agency opportunities for collaboration.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CORE VALUES

21 The Admin Service is also the embodiment of the core values that underpin our society and our way of life - personal integrity, incorruptibility, meritocracy, multi-racialism, equal opportunity and commitment to serving the country. As current and future Public Service Leaders, Administrative Officers must also have a commitment to excellence in public service and an unwavering dedication to serving the people of Singapore. As role models, they must disseminate to their officers these key values which underpin the public trust. Without these core values, policy frameworks, inter-agency cooperation and new concepts like “networked government” would only be the hollow shell of governance - lots of noise but little substance.

22 Senior Administrative Officers are also expected to groom younger leaders to fill their shoes. Good leaders systematically impart their skills and wisdom to successive generations. Our retiring or retired PSs are not just men of proven ability; many of them are teachers and mentors as well. Developing people and grooming the next generation of leaders for the Public Service should be part and parcel of every Administrative Officer’s responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

23 The Administrative Service is a select cadre of public officers, which provides the core of leadership for the Public Service. There are many new demands on leaders in the Public Service. Great responsibilities rest on your shoulders to make Singapore’s tomorrow better than it is today. I am confident that you will rise to the challenge of a first-class Public Service, one worthy of Singapore.

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