

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

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 (Jun 12).

This new 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, 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 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 the 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 Wong.

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

On a sense of solidarity, 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.

He 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 reg-



ular 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."

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DPM Lawrence Wong says that 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. PHOTO: SHINTARO TAY, ST

HDB to double interim rental flats for families to 4,000 units over next two years

THE Housing Board (HDB) will set aside more temporary housing for families waiting for their new flats, doubling the number of interim rental flats to 4,000 over the next two years.

Announcing this on Monday (Jun 12), Senior Minister of State for National Development Sim Ann said that HDB had met its earlier target of increasing the supply of flats under the Parenthood Provisional Housing Scheme (PPHS) from 800 units in 2021 to 1,800 in 2023.

The number of such flats will reach close to 2,000 by the end of this year, she noted, adding that application rates for the scheme have fallen significantly due to the higher supply – from over 20 per unit in 2021 to around three now.

“But we understand that buyers who booked their flats in the past two years have experienced longer waiting times because of the delays caused by Covid-19. So, HDB is hard at work to increase the PPHS supply further, doubling it again to 4,000 units over the next two years,” said Sim.

HDB is also studying ways to maximise the available pool of PPHS flats, given the sustained demand for them and limited supply, she said in a speech at the Institute of Policy Studies’ 35th Anniversary Conference held at the Sands Expo & Convention Centre.

These include requiring flat sharing for larger flats, to allow more homebuyers awaiting their new homes to benefit from subsidised rental rates.

Those eligible for PPHS flats must have a monthly household income of S\$7,000 or below, and have an uncompleted flat from HDB’s sales exercises.

Speaking on a panel on “revisiting housing”, Sim noted that almost 40,000 public and private homes are slated for completion in 2023 – the highest number in the last five years.

“Households that are currently renting on a temporary basis while waiting for the completion of their new homes will likely vacate their units, thereby easing the pressure on the rental market,” she said.

She added that HDB’s efforts to meet the demand for public housing – by ramping up flat supply and catching up on delayed Build-to-Order (BTO) projects – have begun

to take effect.

In the May BTO launch, the median first-timer application rates for three-room or larger flats was around 2.3 times, which was closer to pre-Covid-19 levels than before.

HDB resale prices also saw its smallest increase last quarter in more than two years, she added.

Sim also laid out three policy areas that the government has been relooking.

First, it introduced the Prime Location Housing model to address the issue of highly valued HDB neighbourhoods becoming stratified along income lines once units become available on the open market.

With a longer minimum occupation period, restrictions on who the



Those eligible for PPHS flats must have a monthly household income of S\$7,000 or below, and have an uncompleted flat from HDB’s sales exercises. PHOTO: BT FILE

owner can sell the unit on to subsequently and recovery of subsidy, the model will help to keep neighbourhoods as inclusive as possible, said Sim.

Second, as the population ages, the government in 2021 introduced community care apartments – a new type of housing that has senior-friendly designs and fittings, bundled with care services.

Third, the government is re-

looking how it classifies HDB estates, which are currently split into mature and non-mature estates.

“To many Singaporeans, it has become short-hand for how well-equipped with facilities and amenities a town is, and the desirability of having a flat there,” said Sim.

This is then reflected in flat prices, with those in mature estates generally being higher.

However, the distinction between the two types of estates is not always so clear, according to Sim. Some locations within non-mature estates have amenities and connectivity that are as good as older town centres while some locations within mature estates may be less sought after due to specific site characteristics, she noted.

She added that the review will impact policy, “because the current classification guides how we focus our efforts on making public housing affordable and accessible. We hope to share more on this soon”.

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