



PM Lee Hsien Loong at the Swearing-In Ceremony of Mayors (Sept 2020)

PM Lee Hsien Loong | 23 September 2020

PM Lee Hsien Loong's speech at the Swearing-In Ceremony of Mayors on 23 September 2020.

Mr Chan Chun Sing, Deputy Chairman of the People's Association, Mayors, friends, ladies and gentlemen. Very happy to join you today, here and in the other rooms, for the Mayors' Swearing-in ceremony.

Let me first congratulate the Mayors who are being sworn in today. Ms Low Yen Ling, Ms Denise Phua, and Mr Desmond Choo are being re-appointed, and Mr Alex Yam and Mr Mohd Fahmi Aliman are receiving new appointments. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank Dr Teo Ho Pin and Dr Maliki Osman for their leadership and contributions over the years.

Dr Teo is the longest serving Mayor in Singapore's history – 19 years as Mayor! He was one of the five Mayors appointed when we reorganised our CDCs, from nine originally to today's five districts. As Mayor of North West District, he has done much to make ours a more compassionate society. He introduced all sorts of social assistance schemes in North West District – Food Aid Fund, Emergency Relief Fund and Home-Fix Scheme, and many others to complement national schemes and programmes.

He also made the North West a vibrant, active and green district. For example, through his Brisk Walking Club, which became extremely popular, and is still going strong 18 years after the first walk! Ho Pin was a longstanding Town Council chairman, and for a time the chairman of the Mayors' Committee. So he knows his residents and his district very well, and his retirement will be keenly felt. He will be missed.

Dr Maliki has also served as Mayor for a long time – nine years in the South East. Now that he has been promoted to Minister, he has to give up his Mayor appointment. But I know he is relinquishing his post reluctantly, because working on social initiatives is very close to his heart. As Mayor, he personally initiated many programmes to strengthen the community spirit and support active ageing. For example, establishing the Community Laboratory to systematically nurture volunteerism. Also, piloting the implementation of our Community Silver Blueprint. He also made a big effort to engage youths, for example through the "I Am Talented" programme, to give young people the chance to taste life in different professions and acquire specific skills to fulfil their aspirations.

Happily, Ho Pin and Maliki will be succeeded by two equally passionate people: Alex Yam and Mohd Fahmi. Alex is into his third term as an MP, so he is quite seasoned. He has a passionate concern for those who are down and out. He has

spoken up in Parliament on many causes, from protecting victims of human trafficking to strengthening animal welfare. Even before he became an MP, he had served in the grassroots for many years, and was also a District Councillor of North West CDC. So this is like a homecoming for him.

Fahmi is one of our new MPs, but he has been in public service all his life. He was a Colonel in the SAF before joining MUIS last year, to work on social and educational programmes for the Malay/Muslim community. Now he is in the NTUC, working there, and also one of our labour MPs, speaking up in particular on behalf of low-wage workers. Everyone who knows him describes him as a gentle soul with a big heart.

These are precisely the kind of qualities that he will need, and all our Mayors need, who are charged with overseeing our CDCs. CDCs illustrate how we have structured our social support system in a thoughtful and creative way. You bridge residents and the Government. You function not just as hands and legs to implement the programmes, but also as eyes and ears to identify emerging needs and gaps in social support. You are close to the ground and you have a strong network to lean upon, so you can aggregate local needs and resources, build capabilities in your partners, and connect your communities together. You aggregate, you build and you connect. That can be your new slogan.

Most importantly, you can deliver services with a human touch, in a way that government agencies that operate on a national scale, try very hard to do, but will find it harder to do. A resident who is in need and does not know where to get help can just turn to the CDC. The CDC can then assist them or redirect them and lift some of the burden of navigating the bureaucracy off them. The Government fully supports the mission of the CDCs. Hence in

Budget 2020, we provided a further \$75 million grant to support your efforts to build a caring and inclusive community.

CDCs often take a low profile, working quietly but steadily to fulfil their mission. But in times of crisis, their contributions are vital, and become more apparent. For example, when COVID-19 struck this year, the CDCs immediately sprang into action. You rolled out more than 70 initiatives between February and June. One example is the CDC Vouchers Scheme – \$20 million of vouchers to help 400,000 households with the cost of living, including many middle-income families who have been feeling pressured during this crisis. The vouchers are meant to be spent at heartland businesses, which means they not only benefit residents, but also give a boost to our hawkers and SMEs – 8,000 of them now and counting!

Another initiative that the Mayors rolled out this year is the CDC Student Meals scheme. This was implemented within 10 days of the introduction of home-based learning, with the support of donations from the community and private sector. It complemented the assistance that these students were getting from their schools and other sources. It enabled children from needy homes to continue with their education, and not to fall behind their peers.

The Mayors have also stepped up efforts to deal with the economic impact of the pandemic, for example by helping to make their residents more employable. They organised SkillsFuture@CDC 2020, an online event to help residents learn more about job search strategies, and the skills needed to succeed in the future economy. This enabled the CDCs to connect with over a quarter million residents, many for the first time. Today these residents are beneficiaries, but tomorrow they may themselves become CDC volunteers, paying it forward and strengthening the social glue that binds our society together.

To fulfil their duties well, CDCs must be led by strong passionate leaders, who are familiar with the local community, and can mobilise and motivate their councillors, volunteers and partners. I am very happy that we have identified a strong group of Mayors for the next term, with Low Yen Ling as the chairman of the Mayors' Committee. I am confident they will build on the work of their predecessors, and their own work in previous terms, and add to the precious social capital that we have today.

I wish them every success in their new term. The Government will continue to be their steadfast partners, as we work together to secure the future of Singaporeans and of Singapore. Thank you very much.

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