

Dialogue key to fostering trust between Government and people: DPM Heng Swee Keat



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Linette Lai Political Correspondent In St Gallen (Switzerland)

For Singapore, the key to fostering trust between the Government and the people lies in dialogue, partnership and always keeping the promises it has made to the citizens, said Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat yesterday.

This is a legacy, he added, handed down from founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, who had said the Government must never, in an election, pledge what it cannot deliver.

"Credibility is important. What we promise, we must do our very best to deliver," said Mr Heng, who had been the late Mr Lee's principal private secretary.

The DPM, whose appointment to the No. 2 position this month signals his standing as the next prime minister, was responding to a question at the 49th St Gallen Symposium in Switzerland on how the Singapore Government builds trust with its citizens when in other countries, this trust has broken down.

One key element is dialogue and interaction with the people by MPs at weekly Meet-the-People Sessions, and via platforms like Our Singapore Conversation, said Mr Heng, who is also Finance Minister.

He hoped the next round of the conversation will focus on imbuing in people a take-charge attitude when they see a problem that needs fixing. This, in turn, will require leaders at all levels of Singapore society, he added.

Building trust also involves working in partnership, like what is being done in Singapore's tripartite system, the DPM said.

DELIVERING ON PROMISES

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DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HENG SWEE KEAT, who was speaking at the 49th St Gallen Symposium in Switzerland.

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For instance, when the Government was working on restructuring the economy, it gathered together business leaders, business chambers, large trade associations and unions to talk about what should or can be done, he said.

Trust is also about honesty, even when undertaking difficult decisions, like raising the goods and services tax from 7 per cent to 9 per cent. This is to take place some time between 2021 and 2025.

"Some people said, 'You are mad to announce a tax increase so far ahead'. I said our projection is that we have an ageing population; if we want to keep our healthcare system sustainable, we each have to do more to take care of our seniors."

He added: "We believe it is better to be honest with our citizens than to say we have solved the problem."

Mr Heng was speaking at a public dialogue with the symposium's chairman Dominic Barton, a former managing director of consulting firm McKinsey.



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He attended the symposium as part of a five-day study trip to Switzerland, where he visited Swiss companies and research institutes to learn more about productivity, R&D and industry development efforts there.

At the symposium, he took part in various closed-door events as well, including chats with participants and Singaporeans studying at the University of St Gallen.

At the open dialogue, Mr Heng also said that even as Singapore presses ahead with economic transformation, it must protect workers and help them adapt.

"Economic transformation has to continue; we can't just stop," he said. "The key is how do we do it and not protect jobs, but protect workers. How best do we prepare our workers for jobs of the future?"

He stressed that the Government does not pursue economic growth and innovation for its own sake, but to improve the lives of people.

"In whatever we do, as political leaders, it is critical that we put people at the centre of all that we do."

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