

# Sustainability is key

By DAVID CHAN

**P**RIME Minister Lee Hsien Loong focused on several shifts in social policies in the areas of housing, health care and education. A key to success in these social policies is sustainability.

Sustainability was evident in PM Lee's rally speech. Changes in health policies are to be funded through higher Medisave contribution rates, and rises in MediShield premiums and taxes when economic conditions are right.

Sustainability was also relevant when he called on Singaporeans to work with the Government and the community to build a better Singapore for ourselves and future generations.

PM Lee described the plans as acts of faith in Singapore, stressing the need to ensure Singaporeans stay united and have an honest and trustworthy leadership - all important pillars

of sustainability.

Beyond these fundamentals, there is a need to implement social policies in such a way that they are complemented and supported by all other public agencies, and reinforced by policies that may not appear to be "social" in nature.

This means the key performance indicators of economic and manpower agencies, and the evaluation of their policy success, have to be well integrated with the intended outcomes of social policies.

For example, an economic agency should focus not only on getting more investments, but also pay special attention to whether those billions translate into better-paying jobs for citizens in the lower- and middle-income groups. Manpower policies that raise employment rates must also improve job and career prospects of all Singaporeans.

At their core, the policy shifts in housing, health care and educa-

tion mean that the state will be more proactive in taking care of vulnerable Singaporeans, and investing in every Singaporean to equalise opportunities, especially for those from less-advantaged families.

There is thus a need for social indicators that measure citizen well-being and quality of life, social mobility and diversity in success and excellence. These indicators need to go beyond counting the frequency of activities and events, to include clear and measurable key social outcomes and impact indicators.

Social policies have to be sustainable to achieve the intended policy outcomes and avoid unintended consequences. It is also important for policies to cohere and work together to lead to positive change, to prevent them from polarising or alienating people.

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