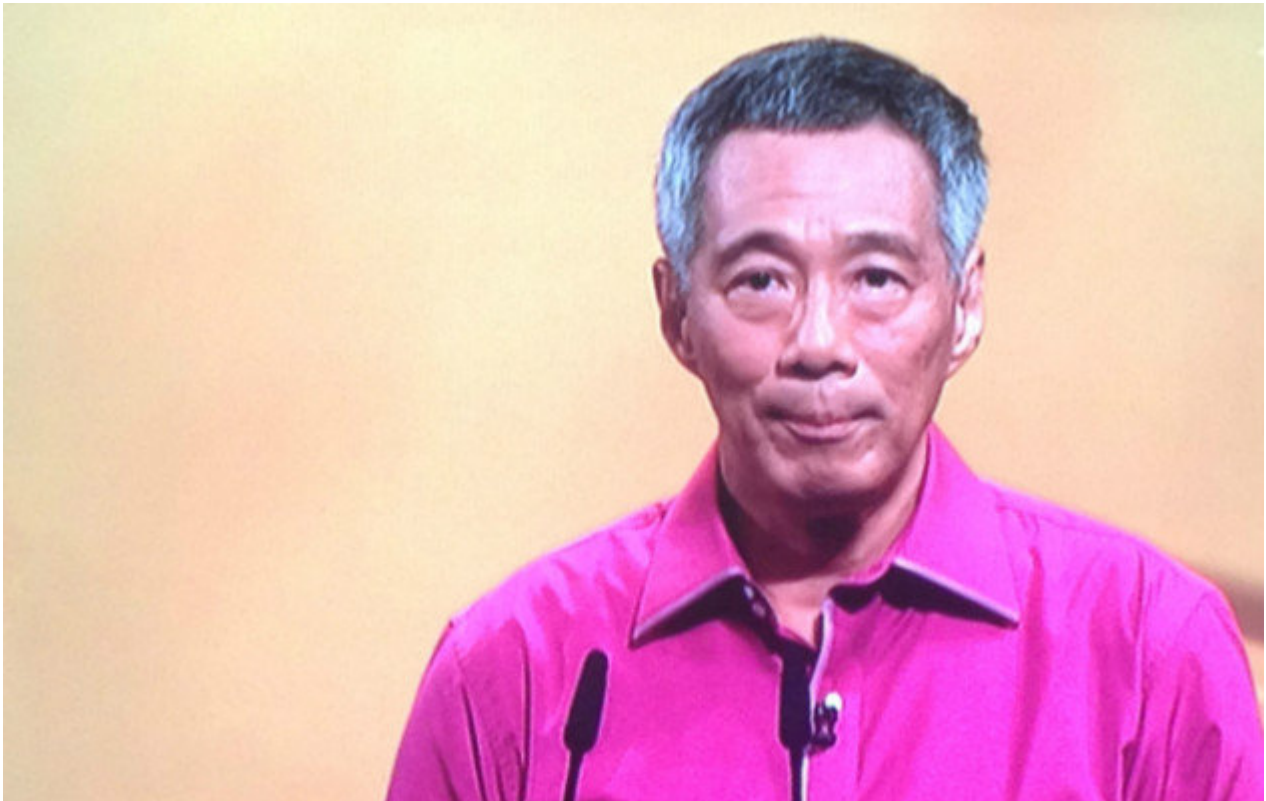


PM Lee tears during emotional National Day Rally with 'heart'

YAHOO! NEWS

By Elizabeth Soh | Yahoo! Newsroom – 11 hours ago



Yahoo! Newsroom/Yahoo! Photo - PM Lee's speech at this year's National Day Rally was described as "heartwarming" and focused.

Light-hearted and encouraging – that's the reaction of many Singaporeans to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day Rally speech on Sunday night.

"I think it was a well thought-out speech with a right amount of heart and it was very focused on Singaporeans," said businessman Ronald Lim, 56.

"PM Lee touched on issues that resounded with people of different ages and my takeaway is that I feel more informed about what we are facing."

In his two-hour long English speech from ITE's sprawling new Ang Mo Kio campus, PM Lee unveiled major reforms in housing, education and healthcare, drawing applause for policies and changes geared towards more inclusiveness. The changes also included more support for less fortunate Singaporeans.

But perhaps the most memorable moment of all was when Lee became visibly emotional after sharing the heartwarming success story of visually handicapped A-star researcher Dr Yeo Sze Ling.

“Sze Ling proves that you can do well if you try hard, no matter what your circumstances, and that is also how we can contribute back to society, to keep the system fair for all,” said Lee, who then visibly teared and choked up, but quickly composed himself.

PM Lee was emphasising the importance of meritocracy in Singapore’s education system, which he acknowledged needed more changes — for example, it can be more holistic and less competitive.

PSLE to undergo major changes

He also announced plans for the Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) to have its T-score system replaced with a more general letter grading.

This, together with a more open Direct Schools Admission policy that will allow students with outstanding character or leadership skills to gain pre-admission to top secondary schools. This goes hand-in-hand with the overall objective of shifting the education focus away from a purely academic approach.

Healthcare continued to be a chief focus of PM Lee’s speech as he introduced several major changes to existing schemes.

He revealed that feedback from the OSC (Our Singapore Conversation) participants was that many working adults felt the stress of caring for both children and their elderly parents, while those with chronic illnesses worried about piling and persistent medical bills.

Medishield revamped to Medishield Life

The Medishield scheme will now be renamed Medishield Life, covering Singaporeans for life and not just till 90 years of age.

“This will be universal for all Singaporeans, even those outside Medishield will be brought back in... for those who dropped out, it might cost a little more but it will be done,” said PM Lee.

“It is a major change, and public consultation to be done. Premiums will also be higher, (they) have to be,” he said, adding that time would be needed to design the scheme.

Additionally, the Community Health Assist Scheme, once open only to those above 40, will now be extended to include younger Singaporeans to relieve the burden on their families.

Lower- and middle-income patients who need to see doctors at Specialist Outpatient Clinics (SOCs) will also receive more subsidies. Currently, about 50 per cent of their bills are subsidised.

A “Pioneer Generation Package” will also be introduced to help elderly Singaporeans with their medical bills by paying for their premiums under Medishield Life.

“I think we owe it to them not to worry about health care in their old age,” said PM Lee.

More affordable homes for Singaporeans

Housing made up the third major thrust of PM Lee's rally speech, during which he promised that every working Singaporean family would be able to afford their home.

Jokingly referring to himself as a HDB "real estate agent", PM Lee gave an example of a detailed cost breakdown for hypothetical families buying three and four-room flats at Fernvale Riverwalk.

He walked Singaporeans through the new extra subsidies, including the Step Up Housing Grant of up to \$20,000 which was initially given only to low-income households but will now be extended to middle income families.

Noticeably absent from PM Lee's speech, however, were other hot button issues like transport, fertility issues, as well as Singapore's migrant worker policy.

Instead, PM Lee focused on introducing new mega-plans for Changi Airport, including an upcoming Terminal 5 to meet increasing demand and a new multi-use facility codenamed Project Jewel. Paya Lebar Air Base will also move to Changi East. There are also plans to open a new port in Tuas.

'Strategic move'

"I was very surprised that there was no mention of the White Paper, transport issues and the foreign worker policy," said Assistant Professor of Law at the Singapore Management University, Eugene Tan.

"It was a strategic move to focus on areas where the government thinks they can make significant inroads and aim to rebuild trust and confidence in Singaporeans."

Tan felt that PM Lee's speech, with its focus on reducing the income and social gap, set a good precedent.

"In the last two decades, globalisation has made Singapore less fair and less just, and I see today's speech as a landmark change. I hope that new policies will draw from PM Lee's speech the need to address these concerns," he said.

Daniel Lee, 54, a family physician who was in attendance said it was a "very good rally speech". He applauded the change in emphasis and turning point in nation-building which he said was a "move away from an inclusive society to a collaborative one, with cooperation between all players of society".

However, the father of two said he was slightly disappointed that PM Lee did not address fertility issues and how Singapore would solve what Lee Kuan Yew said "is the greatest challenge Singapore is facing".

He also said the definition of meritocracy is still not well defined and education was still about results.

"What is the purpose of meritocracy? Is it for self-worth or should it be about how we can



Publication: Yahoo! News

Date: 19 August 2013

Headline: PM Lee tears during emotional National Day Rally with 'heart'

use our own talents for the sake of nation-building," he said.

Another guest at the rally, ITE college student, Lim Yi-nyn, also applauded PM Lee's speech, highlighting the major changes in education and housing.

The 19-year-old said more financial schemes and assistance for needy families would help and that vocational institution students also deserved more recognition and progression opportunities to achieve their dream careers.

She said, however, that she was still concerned about how she would be able to afford housing in future, based on the average S\$1,200 salary of ITE students.