

**SPEECH BY TAN CHUAN-JIN, SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT,
FOLLOWING THE ELECTION OF SPEAKER
ON 24 AUGUST 2020**

Honourable Members,

I would like to thank the Leader of the House, Ms Indranee Rajah, for proposing me as the Speaker and for your kind words, and Mr Sitoh Yih Pin for seconding the nomination. I am also grateful for the kind words of the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Pritam Singh, Mr Saktiandi Supaat, Ms Tin Pei Ling and Mr Vikram Nair.

2 I would like to express my gratitude to all of you for your support in re-electing me as Speaker. I am fully committed to being fair and impartial. But you also do know that I am fully committed to being firm. I have no intention of ejecting anyone from this Chamber, so please help me to help you. As Mr Saktiandi said (about my photography hobby), I also have no intention of photoshopping anyone out of the picture.

3 Ms Tin Pei Ling talked about me in her tribute, about me caring for those near me and those far. I suspect she is referring to herself because a couple of times in the last session, where she sat in that far corner and

did not quite catch my eye, I did not call her. I hear you and I will try to remember that!

4 I am also fully committed to, and I do need your support for this and I think many of you participate in this as well, continue to engage the public. Because it is imperative that we earn their trust, respect and confidence, in order for us to be able to do what we do here.

5 For the first time, we will be Opening Parliament from two locations, here in Parliament House and in The Arts House. As all of you know, The Arts House used to be our previous Parliament House. So, I think there is a special sense of nostalgia for many of the Members, those of you in The Arts House, to be there in the same Chamber, taking the oath as many of our predecessors did when they pledged to serve Singapore and Singaporeans honourably and faithfully. If I may be candid, I think many of us here would have wished that we were one of those that were designated to be there this evening!

6 The Oath of Allegiance is important, not because after you take this oath, you become Members of Parliament (MPs). In case there is any doubt, you became an MP the very night itself, when the Returning Officer declared you as victorious in your constituency. The Oath is important

because constitutionally, MPs cannot participate in Parliamentary proceedings until you have taken this oath. Hence, it is important that despite all the challenges that we face because of COVID-19, we need to make sure that we make the arrangements and provisions for all of us to take this Oath. And we do so in full accordance with the process, because we need to uphold our role in keeping the Government of the day accountable to citizens. And that is our role in Parliament.

7 But accountability also begins with every Member, where we represent the interests of our residents to the best of our abilities. Therefore, we must always keep our eyes and ears close to the ground to understand their concerns. I think all of us need to boldly state our positions, put forth your proposals, and seek clarity on matters and issues that matter to your residents. But to be able to do this, we need to participate in Parliamentary proceedings. And to participate in Parliamentary proceedings, you need to be here in Chamber. So I look forward to seeing all of you here at every sitting unless you have official duties or are on urgent leave.

8 Now, the Fourteenth Parliament will see 31 newly elected Members of Parliament, the largest number of Opposition Members in recent history, and a formally designated Leader of the Opposition. These

developments reflect a greater desire by Singaporeans to have more choices and voices in Parliament. We can expect, and I think we will expect, more contestation. This is a natural step forward. It is good for our country and our people if, and only if, contestation leads to better outcomes for our people and our nation; for the present, and for the future.

9 However, do beware that the wide and easy path towards polarisation and division is easy to embark on, the pathway to populism and short-termism. We are all now in a situation where there are no ten-year series answers to fall back on. There will be difficult and sometimes unpopular decisions to be made because there are very real and genuine trade-offs that need to be undertaken. Will we focus on solutioning? Or will we focus on politicking?

10 All of you, all of us, will determine what these possible outcomes would be. It is important for all of us to remember that regardless of whatever political stripes or colours, wherever we stand on issues, never forget that as Singapore Parliamentarians, we all serve a common purpose. We have been successful as a people and as a nation on many fronts because we have been exceptional, because we have been different.

11 So, my challenge to all of you, and to all of us here, is that in this House, can we be exceptional because we are able to transcend our political affiliations, our interests and our differences? So that even as we contest passionately, and sometimes vigorously, even as we robustly debate and scrutinise laws, policies and budgets, can we show Singaporeans, can we show the world that we need not be factious, we need not be fractious? Can we earn their trust and confidence as they look upon us as we carry out our business in this Chamber? It is not beyond us and I look to all of you, and especially to the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition, to help us realise this.

12 In closing, let me echo what the Leader of the House stated. We are opening our Fourteenth Parliament in extraordinary times. Extraordinary times call for extraordinary people and leaders. Let our politics drive us forward and not drive us apart. We are in a raging storm. The countries that are agile, adaptive, determined and, above all, united will be the ones that will be able to ride the waves of recovery. I am confident that we will eventually overcome COVID-19 and emerge stronger.

13 So, all hands on deck as we embark on this next lap of our journey together as Parliamentarians. I wish you God speed, fair winds and following seas as we seek safe harbour from this almighty storm that we

find ourselves in, and to ready ourselves for the many, many more exciting journeys ahead.

14 With that, thank you very much and all the best!
