

**SPEECH BY MR TAN CHUAN-JIN  
SPEAKER OF THE PARLIAMENT OF SINGAPORE  
AT THE END OF THE COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY DEBATES  
SINGAPORE PARLIAMENT HOUSE  
6 MARCH 2020**

A year ago, we had an extensive conversation about cows. And a particular sacred cow, to be precise. We debated till the cows came home; we milked the issue to death; and we slayed the creature good and proper. And you would have thought that that was done.

2 But guess what? I don't know whether you noticed but the cow is back again this year. This time, it sneaked into the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources' (MEWR) Committee of Supply in the guise of a 'fake cow'. Minister Masagos brought it in. We learnt from him - Minister Masagos, not the cow - about how critical it is to have food sustainability amidst climate change and why novel foods may play a big part in this effort. Last year's cow was called 'PSLE Streaming'. This time it is called 'Impossible Meat' and we even sampled it in the form of *satay* and *gyoza* which were really quite delicious. But did we stop at cows? Nooo. We had the whole Mandai Zoo, River Safari and Jurong Bird Park here as well. MEWR introduced us to cell-cultured shrimps from the local startup, 'Shiok Meats'. We learnt about Barramundis from 'Barramundi Asia', Singapore's first and only deep-sea fish farm. But could all these be our future source of protein?

3 MEWR then talked about mosquitoes with names like Aedes and Wolbachia, as we are reminded to stay vigilant in our war against dengue. Then came the cats, and the pet birds, and dogs, during the Ministry of National Development's (MND) Committee of Supply. And then the Ministry of Transport (MOT) came on board as well, addressing the concerns about the Raffles' Banded Langurs. Not just any monkeys, but langurs named Leonardo, Michelangelo, Donatello and Raphael. So, in an indirect way, turtles of the 'Ninja' genus were also dragged into the conversation as well.

4 Now all these creatures were not raised for any trivial reasons. Some revolved around our survival in a time of possible food disruption. Some were about disease management, and its sometimes fatal impact on our people. Some were discussed in terms of our common space with pets, and how we treat animals in our society. And some were discussed in the context of how we must try to be sensitive to our environment and nature amidst development. Now langurs may not mean very much to many Singaporeans - perhaps it should - but it means a great deal to Dr Andie Ang and her team who are working closely with the Land Transport Authority (LTA) on the local habitat concerned.

5 Now all these are just small slivers of a bigger whole. So very much goes on without many of us realising it. I think an opportunity to debate and discuss this in Parliament reminds us of how much goes on out there every day. Nothing is too trivial not to be addressed. My Deputy Speakers and I had the privilege of *enduring* all your speeches in the last few weeks. I make no apologies for the use of that term. Why? Because it can be substantive and heavy, and it represents an even larger body of work that exists out there in the Ministries and agencies as they seek to make life better for all of us.

6 Now people often ask me to view this video clip or other from other Parliaments. Some are the fighting ones, which are very exciting and you can go watch it but don't get ideas. Others are most eloquent, humorous, sharply satirical. Impressive. But I then ask myself after watching it: So...therefore...and what is next? So what then do we do? You see, words can flow like honey, music to the ears, but they must be real. They need to set in motion that journey from words to deeds. For that to happen, we need processes, specific initiatives, mechanisms, effective delivery for good to take place. It is really quite some distance to travel from ideas and rhetoric to reality. Today, we are often seized by form and style. But how to get things done is way less exciting, much less glamorous.

7 So it is challenging to sit through all these, but it is the least that we can do to honour that effort and hard work put in by so many. The Budget is the blueprint from

which we build our future. To be honest, many don't actually watch the clips of every speaker here, read their speeches and the responses. But we are definitely very quick to comment! So do give it a shot because they can be quite educational and give us a sense of how we intend to address the concerns that are out there. They also show us how we can realise our vision of the kind of Singapore we want to build together. It's true, perhaps we could do with a little more flair, a little bit more panache, but never, never give up the way we do business here in Singapore. Solid down-to-earth ideas, plans and execution; and not just creating beautiful castles in the air.

### **COVID-19 and Budget 2020**

8 Now for obvious reasons, the COVID-19 situation featured significantly. Let me use it to illustrate some themes that are relevant to what we need to think about during our annual Budgets.

9 We read of some Singaporeans shunning our nurses. Rather than cheering them on and honouring them as many have done, these Singaporeans are concerned about themselves. Why is there a rush for masks or groceries or toilet paper? Individuals are anxious for their own well-being. That's logical. But these actions impact society's common good. In many countries, and we read of this today, this is severely affecting their frontline healthcare workers who face problems being properly equipped. Ultimately, our individual actions affect society and it comes back round. The Tragedy of the Commons is happening right before our eyes. Can we in Singapore rise above ourselves and be different from others? And as Leader said, can we be better versions of ourselves?

10 In our annual Budget as well, do we not also grapple with the issues of individual and society? As I had shared in previous years' summations, this is what we need to trade off: 'Me' versus 'We', 'Today' versus 'Tomorrow'. We cannot always have the cake and eat it because that's real life. If we as a people are prepared to think about the collective and the future, ah, we can sit down, we can discuss business and talk

about what to do. But if it is just about me and myself, today and now, then there honestly will not be much of a Singapore or future to aspire towards.

11 From the COVID situation, we also realise how inter-connected we are. Both within Singapore and also with the world. We are part of a common humanity and we cannot turn our backs on that. You can see how easy it is to infect each other. You can see how easy it is to blame each other. But are we also not sometimes guilty here in Singapore as we blame others as well? Now do we not also realise that in other people's eyes, we are 'the others'. And sadly, we just read recently of one of our young Singaporeans being beaten up by YOBS in England simply because he is Asian, because he is Chinese. Simply put, they're racists.

12 We see these tensions amidst globalisation. There is a good that comes with globalisation, but there are also disamenities and we know that. Some politicians use it to stir a visceral anger that comes from the nationalism that's within all of us. Sometimes it will be about race and religion. We see it in our discourse here in Singapore sometimes. We need to remain plugged in so that Singaporeans can benefit. We maximise the positive outcomes while mitigating the negatives.

13 Our present abilities to manage COVID-19 is totally reflective of Lifelong Learning. Because of SARS, we resolved to make sure that the 33 who lost their lives did not do so in vain. We learnt. We learnt from others; we practised; we learnt again during H1N1. And all this allowed us to put up a good solid response today. And our team is still learning and adjusting even as we speak. And the real payoffs are in the lives saved. And this did not happen by chance.

14 And we did not just learn; we spent and invested for the future. We stockpiled masks. We kept replenishing them, refreshing our stocks. We have also been doing so for food for the longest time. When we spend for the future in any Budget, we have less to spend on the present. No average person is seized by these long-term issues that may or may not happen. And we all know the common complaint that Singaporeans may have. Why do you not care for me today? I've got problems today.

15 But see, the truth is, we do. Suddenly, yesterday's tomorrow just became our today. That is why we are able to do what we are able to do during this crisis. With our prudence and savings, we are able to fund and deal with this event that just dropped on our laps. We did the same in all the major crises that came by our way in the past. The economic impact will affect more people detrimentally than those who may be infected. That is why the economy is important. That is why we pay attention to the economy. We budget for the present but we continue to budget for future uncertainties as well. Imagine if we were short-term in outlook. I think many countries are guilty of that. Imagine if we decided to spend more, save less. It is far easier to be popular than to be prepared.

### **#SGTogether**

16 But I am grateful to this Parliament, to all of us here, both Government and opposition, for supporting these moves. When you look past all the political bluster, there is actually strong unity in approach. Not only for this Budget, but for the Budgets past. Parliament is able to do this only because the people of Singapore are prepared to support it. Yet, I know every one of us will still grumble about why we did not get more of this or did not get more of that. But our people's support allows Parliament to have the courage to take the more difficult, but yet perhaps the more correct path.

17 This support will not exist and does not exist if there is no sense of unity and no sense of togetherness. Which is why the idea of Singapore Together is really, really so precious. It is not just a slogan. Something that we just mouth off in Parliament. There are actually things that we can do. SG Cares, for example, helps us outreach, volunteer and connect with others. It allows us to practise our empathy and compassion and to bring out the innate good that is in all of us. Our community efforts on the ground bring neighbours together to forge bonds that can bind. Our emphasis on family seeks to help strengthen family bonds because that is where it all starts. Even our NS journey allows many to come together despite the differences in backgrounds. We all can do our part.

18 It now leaves me to thank all Singaporeans - everyone here, those at the frontline, all those behind the scenes who made this all possible:

*Passing Budget 2020 is only the first step.*

*Let us go forth and translate these words into deeds.*

*Because this is what our Democracy is all about.*

*Because this is Singapore.*

*And because we are Singapore.*

Thank you.