

**Delivered Speech by Mr Edwin Tong,
Minister for Culture, Community and Youth
and Second Minister for Law at
NACLI's 60th Anniversary Conference
28 September 2024, 8.30am to 12.30pm**

1. Good morning to all of you.
2. Welcome to NACLI's 60th anniversary. It's not just a birthday or a milestone, but I think it gives us a platform to reflect on how far we have come, and more importantly, what the next steps should look like for us.
3. This morning, I'll share a little bit about why leadership, in particular, community leadership and youth leadership, has been so important for Singapore, and will continue to be really important as we navigate SG60 next year and beyond.
4. And also share with you some of our new initiatives, what we'll be doing, and how we're going to take youth and community leadership up another notch.
5. For the last six decades, and you know PA has been around since 1960, and NACLI since 1964, this institution has been at the forefront of nurturing capable and dedicated leaders for Singapore. Not just for the community, not just for PA, but for the broader society in Singapore.
6. In the early years of Singapore's nation building, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, our founding Prime Minister, underscore the importance of good, strong community leadership. Our founding Prime Minister said, *“A nation is not great by its size alone. It is the will, the cohesion, the stamina, the discipline of its people, and the quality of their leaders which ensure it an honourable place in history.”*
7. And I think that applies to Singapore very much. We are small in size, but I think we punch above our weight when it comes to global contributions on the world stage.
8. And we can only do this if we have good, strong leaders at every segment of society, not just in government, but perhaps equally important are the leaders that we have in our society and in our

community. Our people and our human resource in a small nation like Singapore has always been our most treasured resource. Effective leadership is critical to allow us to overcome our physical limitations.

9. Within this context, community and youth leadership play a vital role. It is essential as it forms the backbone of our social fabric, fostering social cohesion, facilitating ground-up initiatives, and addressing local, micro-specific needs of our community. Youth leadership is critical because our youths are the leaders of our next generation.
10. If you look back at Singapore, we've developed tremendously over 60 years. Today, our youths are at the forefront of many of our initiatives. People might say youths lack the experience. But I don't agree with that today, particularly in today's context.
11. Today, having less experience is not a disadvantage. You have a different lens, and you share with us, in society, a very different perspective in terms of how you shape the community, and your own role in how you see yourself as one of the active citizens in our society.
12. By developing these two aspects of leadership skills early, we will be able to create a strong pipeline of talent to take us through, not just in community leadership, but civic society, and more importantly, at national platforms.
13. NACLI has played an important role in both aspects of leadership over the years. In early Singapore, when we first started, going back to 1960, before we were independent, we were a nation which was struggling with race and racial tensions.
14. We had difficulties bringing the community together. Tensions within the community sometimes bubbled over, into real physical tensions, sometimes even leading to destruction of property and loss of lives. Back then, we were not the same Singapore as it was today.
15. But our early leaders had a vision, a vision of Singapore being Singapore for everyone, not for any particular race, not for a majority Chinese Singapore, not for a minority race, but for everyone.

16. And that was the founding pillars of how we built up Singapore. PA, set up in 1960, was instrumental in that.
17. Going door to door, very detailed in our social cohesion outreach, making sure that every last resident in every community, in every kampung, as it was then, and eventually in every block of HDB flats, were looked after in a very specific, targeted way, building relations on the ground, bit by bit, door to door, one by one.
18. And in the same context, NACLI was set up four years later, right here at this campus, 1964. So, if you think about it, that was the thought process of our early leaders.
19. How do we build a community? Once we've established PA, how do we build a strong pipeline of good, strong community leaders that can serve us? Thus, NACLI was set up in 1964 before we were even independent. Since then, thousands have come through NACLI's doors.
20. Now, we will see many leaders in our society, whether in the private sector or in the public service, would have come through the doors of NACLI at some point in time. One of our past trainees is Loh Wee Cheng. NACLI equipped Wee Cheng with skills for personal development, but also leadership character and a sense of resilience as she embarked on her career.
21. After seeing how much thought and effort had gone into education and preparing youths for the future, Wee Cheng then joined us at the inaugural Our Singapore Leadership Programme (OSLP).
22. Happy to share that after all these years, Wee Cheng remains connected to NACLI through OSLP in helping to pass it forward, pay it forward, to shape the next generation of leaders.
23. And that's what we're looking for. We're not only looking for leadership to come through NACLI, but always looking to pay it forward, to train, mentor, nurture the next generation of leaders.
24. NACLI's transformation over the years has reflected that. Because the Singapore that we have today, in 2024, is vastly different from the Singapore of the 60s, 70s, even the 80s and beyond. Society has evolved, our country has matured, we have developed, so we have to adapt quickly to the changing landscape.

25. The environment is different, disruptors are different, we've got to embrace that, we've got to overcome it, and to look at a new generation of leaders coming through NACLI. Which is why NACLI now offers a curriculum that integrates tech-enabled learning solutions to help to enrich the experiences of others. Just now you saw Mr Jita Singh, an experienced grassroots leader, also a very popular grassroots leader.
26. But what you might not have recalled about him, especially the younger generation, is that once upon a time, not that long ago, he was the coach of the Singapore Football National Team, and a very successful one.
27. I would say all of that experience as a football coach, dealing with competition, dealing with the different people in the national team, strategising, thinking how to win our next game, all of that are aspects of leadership that Jita has brought to his role today. And I think that is important.
28. That shows us that when you're a leader, it doesn't really matter what aspect of leadership you're in. If you demonstrate leadership in society, in community, in sports, in arts, in youths, even in religion, all aspects of Singaporean life today, that is the kind of leadership that we want to build.
29. And the stronger we have leaders in all of these aspects in Singapore, the stronger we will have as a Singaporean society, as a community moving forward into SG60 and beyond, we want strong leaders in every aspect of life in Singapore.
30. So, to make sure that we are evolving and thinking about how we can be relevant to leadership in a new Singapore, we will look at some changes and have some new causes to think about for our leaders.
31. Today, societal shifts, technology advancements and disruptions, global challenges that we face in the sense of how Singapore reacts in response to challenges around the rest of the world, geopolitical tensions, impact us as a small country.
32. All of these form the new landscape, the new paradigm against which we have to navigate our leadership community, how we

strengthen our leadership, how we look at nurturing the next generation of leaders.

33. We need to re-evaluate our approach, therefore, to community leadership to ensure that it remains relevant in the face of all these challenges.
34. Singapore's challenges today are very different from what it used to be in the 60s, 70s, 80s, we were building a country. Mr Lee Kuan Yew once said famously, mudflats to metropolis.
35. Today, we have achieved that metropolis vision that he had. But to stay there, to keep there, to remain competitive, to remain strong and vibrant as a community. In today's context, it is not always easy. And that's why we need leadership at all segments of our society.
36. So, we have three initiatives that I want to talk about today to navigate this and to bring on board a new bench of leaders. First, let me talk about our youth leadership. We are going to introduce a Youth Leaders Collective Programme.
37. This will be a refreshed youth leadership programme and we're going to call it the Youth Leaders Collective, or YLC in short. Over the years, NACLI has successfully run OSLP and leveraged on its experience, its reach, through the different community programmes to develop the YLC. And we know that our youths today are driven by a strong sense of purpose.
38. They want to make meaningful contributions to society. And earlier on in the video, you saw Megan. Megan was in the inaugural batch of OSLP and when I chatted with her earlier this morning, she said she's now studying Community Development at Ngee Ann Polytechnic.
39. And she's looking forward to doing public policy, public affairs subsequently. And it struck me that youths of today, unlike the emphasis that we had in the past, want to be engaged in society and wants to study something that makes them relevant to society.
40. To see your own place in society, how you can play a part, how you can pay it forward and use the skill sets that you have, the opportunities and the privileges that we have to pay it forward. And I

think that's fantastic. This is the kind of ethos and thinking we want to build on.

41. We are launching the YLC in March next year with an inaugural group of 50 youth leaders aged 17 to 19. They will be introduced to an immersive 10-week leadership programme. Not just about student leadership, but it's very much about nurturing community leadership, giving them a sense of empowerment to take on these leadership roles, to feel confident and engaged with our community.
42. As part of the learning, our youths will gain inspiration from many youth role models and experienced founders of ground-up initiatives to undertake community-driven projects. This YLC will also provide an opportunity for them to learn while overseas. Sometimes we have to see Singapore from outside in.
43. When you are in Singapore, when you operate in our environment, we're used to and accustomed to many things that we sometimes take for granted. But when you see Singapore from the outside in, that can help us shape that perspective and change the sense of what Singapore is like.
44. So, we want to send our youth leaders outside Singapore to have a different learning experience, to see global perspectives and also to shape cultural awareness.
45. We're also going to be launching something else for community and civic society leaders. NACLI will be launching the Leadership in Community Programme, or LCP.
46. This goes beyond impacting just grassroots leaders and volunteers. We want this to be extended to leaders in the community sector, including those from the grassroots and civic society, with the intention of fostering closer ties.
47. So, it's not just having a group come together to learn about leadership, but essentially to build ties between PA, NACLI, our community segment, civic societies, social service agencies and charities.
48. Every sector in Singapore plays a part in building Singapore up. And we want strong leaders engaged, plugged into the community at each of these sectors. I'm very pleased to share that, in fact,

some of our civic society leaders are right here with us in the audience today.

49. Thank you very much for joining us this morning at NACLI. And I want to welcome you to this weekend's programme.
50. And after today, we will be inviting many of our civic society leaders to come and sign up for the LCP. As part of the local programme segment, LCP participants will get to engage with distinguished speakers and thought leaders. And we thought it is important for us to engage with them.
51. And we will have speakers such as our ex-Ambassador Prof Kishore Mahbubani, we will have Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, right through to athletes like Yip Pin Xiu, Joseph Schooling, recognising that we have leadership across all segments of our society.
52. And what athletes like Pin Xiu brings to the table is very different from what someone like Kishore might bring to the table. But collectively, this gives a very strong perspective to both our youths, as well as our civic society leaders, allowing them to gain a broader perspective understanding that learning through a sense of sharing across different generations, different perspectives, and right through across a multicultural society.
53. There will also be an overseas study trip for the LCP. And we are thinking of bringing them to a different country from the youth leaders. Again, to ignite that sense of how Singapore should be viewed from the outside in lens.
54. In summary, these two programmes, YLC will be targeted at youths aged 17 to 19, 10-week programme, 50 participants in the inaugural course, 10 weeks, and we will have an opportunity for the top performers in the YLC to also go further and perhaps undertake a leadership course either in Oxford or in Harvard to broaden your horizon and to deepen that sense of leadership quality.
55. For the LCP, it will be for high potential leadership, community leaders, civil society leaders across a broader spectrum. We intend for this to start initially with 40 participants over a six-month course and we will also bring them overseas to have a sharing, to have a sense of perspective looking at Singapore from the outside in.

56. Connecting with mentors and trailblazers, thought leaders, people who understand the trade-offs for Singapore, is really going to be important and I think that sharing will be vital as a signature part of the programme. But more importantly, fundamentally, it's about recognising that leadership is not static.
57. It is always dynamic and we have to move with the changes, we have to evolve our own programmes, we have to bring in people and be open about how they play a role in community.
58. And as I said, and I want to emphasise this, every aspect of Singaporean community in every society, whether it's in sports, arts, youth, civic society, all of this plays an important role in part in bringing Singapore forward. We want to see strong leadership in all of this. The last initiative I want to talk about this morning is the launch of our new community gallery.
59. We thought that as we embark a new direction, a new focus and emphasis on leadership, it's also important to remember how far this journey has been for us, what the trials and tribulations and challenges of the previous journey has been.
60. The new community gallery will be right here, situated at the premises of the NACLI campus to commemorate SG60 next year and PA65.
61. NACLI is going to position itself as the centre of excellence for community leadership development and this gallery is opportunistic because it gives an opportunity for NACLI to share that experience and history and also impart foundational knowledge, helping us to create greater mindshare about the importance of the work that NACLI is doing, about the role it plays in community building and going beyond the PA network.
62. It will be an interactive and immersive experience and the gallery will be a tangible way of helping visitors understand our own journey as a nation towards building our Singapore and our Singapore beyond SG60.
63. It also serves as a reminder of the enduring values and principles that have brought us to where we are and so through this gallery,

we hope to inspire individuals to make positive contributions in their own communities.

64. By showcasing our journey from humble beginnings to our current achievements, this gallery aims to inspire, to invoke a call to action for future generations of leaders.
65. Here is a quick sneak peak of this gallery and it gives you a visual idea of how it will look like when it is completed. [Video] Let's take a pause and have a look at this short video clip.
66. This is the new home for leadership in Singapore, community leadership in Singapore, a place that is inspiring, a place that is inspiring, nurturing, and allows us a space away from the usual hustle and bustle of activity and life in Singapore to reflect on what leadership means and I think this becomes a very important centre for us as we navigate SG60 and beyond.
67. I wanted to take a moment to thank the students from Nanyang Poly and Temasek Poly. They helped to design this space. They embody the spirit of collaboration and innovation.
68. They used a mixture of design and user interface as well as tech skills to help us with this.
69. Thank you very much for working with us and playing a part in this. So as I close, I want to just underscore how important it is that we look at this seriously.
70. We are no longer a nation that is developing. We are a developed nation. We have matured in many ways but the challenges have evolved and are new and the stronger we equip ourselves with strong leadership across all segments of society, the more resilient our country will be and the stronger we will be in a position to navigate SG60 and the challenges that go beyond this.
71. NACLI, is one of the few, if not the only, centre of excellence that is dedicated to building strong community leadership training for the nation.
72. Its role is going to be important because if you remember what Prime Minister Lawrence Wong has said in our Forward SG exercise, it is important for leaders to adapt their styles to the

circumstances and the evolving needs of society in their respective era. What will make 4G work for Singapore will be very different from 3, 2 and 1 and all of that has got to do with a strong partnership with our community, with all of you, leaders in our community.

73. It's not possible for government alone to take Singapore forward. So that's why Forward SG, our new social compact, is strongly embedded in the thinking that this is really a collaboration and a partnership and it's got to be that way if we want to make Singapore work. My final message today is on NACLI's 60th anniversary.
74. I want to thank all of NACLI's staff, past and present, all the people who have been involved in NACLI, stakeholders, partners, people who have come to help volunteer their time, talent and treasures to make NACLI strong over the last 60 years. It has been a very important part of our nation-building.
75. Looking forward to SG60 and beyond, understanding the challenges that Singapore faces, I believe that the role that NACLI will play could even be more important as we navigate challenges beyond SG60 and how we bring Singapore from where we are today to beyond, sustaining Singapore and making sure that Singapore remains strong for the next generation, our children and their children.
76. And the foundation really starts with what we do here. Thank you very much to all of you for being here, for being part of our journey, for being so invested in NACLI and for many of you who are volunteering here in many ways to speak, to teach, to learn, to be examples. And to many of you who have opened up your businesses to places for internships for our young leaders.
77. Thank you very much to all of you for supporting NACLI and may we see NACLI grow stronger in the next 60 years and beyond than it has in the last 60 years. Happy birthday, happy anniversary, NACLI. Thank you very much.