

27 April 2018

Dr Yaacob Ibrahim

Dear [Yaacob],

As you step down from Cabinet, I write to thank you and record your many contributions to Singapore.

You entered politics in 1997 as a Member of Parliament for Jalan Besar GRC. You have fought in five general elections, four of them in Jalan Besar GRC and one in Moulmein-Kallang GRC, but always for the same Kolam Ayer ward where you had lived and grown up. You were appointed Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology in 1998, and later promoted to Minister of State in the Ministry of Community Development and Sports.

In 2002, you became Acting Minister for Community Development and Sports, and concurrently Acting Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs. In the Ministry of Community Development and Sports, you implemented programmes to strengthen families, protect vulnerable individuals and care for seniors. You were a keen proponent of local sport, and oversaw the setting up of the Singapore Sports School, whose students and alumni have since done Singapore proud in many international events. During the SARS outbreak in 2003, you acted swiftly to put in measures at childcare centres to protect young children from the spread of the virus.

In 2004, you became Minister for the Environment and Water Resources. At MEWR, you were responsible for many projects under our Four National Taps strategy. These included building Singapore's first desalination plant; sharply expanding NEWater production capacity; and completing the Punggol, Serangoon and Marina Reservoirs, significantly increasing our total water catchment area. These projects diversified Singapore's water supply and reduced our reliance on imported water. You also initiated the ABC (Active, Beautiful, Clean) Waters Programme, transforming reservoirs, canals

and waterways from functional infrastructure into leisure and recreational facilities enjoyed by many Singaporeans, notably the beautiful Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park.

Tackling the haze was another major focus for MEWR. At your suggestion, ASEAN set up the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee on Transboundary Haze Pollution in 2006, for environment ministers in Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand to work together on haze issues.

You have been the Minister for Communications and Information (MCI) since 2011, at a time of disruptive but exciting changes for the telecommunications and media industries. You pushed for investment in infrastructure, so today Singapore has one of the highest broadband speeds and internet penetration rates in the world. We installed fibre optic cables nationwide, upgraded Wireless@SG to Wireless@SGx, and transited to the 4G mobile network. Total mobile data usage has more than tripled since 2011; a fourth telco has been licensed and will enter the market later this year.

You made sure that no one was left behind by the new technology. You implemented programmes to develop capabilities and promote the adoption of digital technologies especially among the small medium enterprises. You also launched programmes to teach digital skills to seniors, and to help low-income families receive digital TV and connect to the Internet. You developed the Libraries of the Future Masterplan to update our well-loved public libraries, shifting the focus online to keep up with the way users access content. You launched the National Reading Movement to encourage Singaporeans to read more. Today our libraries are community spaces for collaborative learning.

Anticipating concerns about data rights and privacy, you proposed and implemented the Personal Data Protection Act. In 2015, you took on an additional portfolio as the Minister-in-charge of Cyber Security, and established the Cyber Security Agency to enhance Singapore's cyber security

and protect critical information infrastructure. Singapore has also strengthened its partnership with ASEAN and other countries in this area.

As Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs, you looked after the religious needs of Singapore Muslims. In one of your first Parliamentary speeches as Acting Minister, you said that “one can be a good Muslim and a good citizen”. This set an important direction for Singapore Muslims. You have worked hard to lead the community to look forward, to integrate with non-Muslim Singaporeans, and to adapt and change with the times. You encouraged MUIS to articulate the Singapore Muslim Identity, a set of inclusive and adaptive values for the practice of Islam in a multiracial and multi-religious society. MUIS also set up the MUIS Academy and held the MUIS Lecture Series to invite distinguished religious scholars from abroad to present their perspectives and broaden our knowledge.

You made lasting contributions to the support structures for the Muslim community. The madrasahs were consolidated under the Joint Madrasah System to offer an integrated curriculum, raise standards, and provide different pathways for students. MUIS implemented an Asatizah Recognition Scheme to accredit qualified Islamic teachers and scholars, and set up the Asatizah Youth Network to offer religious guidance to young Muslims on social media. You pushed for an Islamic College in Singapore, so that we can train our own asatizahs. Your successors will follow up on this agenda, which in the long term will be important for developing the practice of Islam in our national context.

You launched the Mosque Upgrading Programme, which refreshed older mosques, expanded prayer spaces, and opened up barrier free access for congregants. One of the mosques which benefited was the iconic Masjid Sultan, a national monument and a focal point for Muslims from all over the island, which was enhanced to become more beautiful than ever. Every year, you have kept a close watch on the haj places allocated to Singapore, and the supply of Korban livestock, so that the Muslims could fulfil their religious obligations.

As a Malay Minister, you actively promoted the progress of Malay Singaporeans, and mobilised the Malay/Muslim community to tackle social problems and help those in need. You set up the Community Leaders Forum to bring together community leaders, policy makers and partners to address issues affecting the Malay/Muslim community.

As the Chairman of Yayasan Mendaki, you strongly supported education for Malay/Muslims, especially the less privileged. The Mendaki Education Trust Fund, which you set up, provided financial assistance to needy students from pre-school to secondary levels. You revised the income eligibility criteria for the Tertiary Tuition Fee Scheme to benefit more deserving students. You also founded Mendaki SENSE to support lifelong learning programmes for the community.

Your focus on education and training has paid off. Year by year more Malay students have made it to university and post-secondary institutions. In the workforce, the proportion doing professional, management, executive and technical jobs has risen. Malay Singaporeans take justifiable pride in their success, with government support but through their own efforts, under our meritocratic system.

On sensitive issues involving race and religion, I could rely on you to understand the national imperatives, present forthrightly the Malay/Muslim point of view, and advise me candidly on how best to move forward with the support of the community. I valued your views on the inclusion of Muslims under the Human Organ Transplant Act, the community's response to integrated resorts, and reserved Presidential Elections to ensure minority representation in the office of President.

At critical moments, such as after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, when the tudung issue got worked up, or when the government implemented compulsory education, you rallied the Malay/Muslim PAP MPs and the community, took the political heat, made the arguments with conviction, and held the ground. In doing so, you did great service to the Malay/Muslim community, and also to racial and religious harmony in Singapore.

You have been a key member of my team. Your contributions have been invaluable to the Cabinet. Even though you are retiring as a Minister, I am happy that you will continue to serve your residents and contribute to Singapore in other ways.

I wish you all the best in your future endeavours.

Yours sincerely,

LEE HSIEN LOONG