Speech by the Hon. Minister Alain Wong

Opening of Workshops on the theme “Readiness for the HRMIS

Wednesday 22 July 2015

Swami Vivekananda International Convention Centre

The Secretary for Home Affairs
Mr. Premhans Jhugroo, Senior Chief Executive
Supervising Officers in Charge of Ministries/Departments
Mr. Ashis Kumar Hoolass and Mr. Maubarak Boodhun, Permanent Secretaries
Mr. Kemraz Mohee, General Manager State Informatics Ltd
Members of the Steering Committee, HRMIS Project
Presidents and members of Federations of Unions of the Civil Service
Resources persons for this workshop
Chairpersons and Directors
Dear Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is a real pleasure to be with you this morning for the Opening Ceremony of this workshop which is being organised in the context of the implementation of the
Human Resource Management Information System (HRMIS) in the Civil Service.

As you know, the HRMIS is a major reform and modernization programme which goes in line with my Ministry’s vision of “A professional public service committed to excellence”. Reform in the Civil Service is an ongoing programme and over the years my Ministry has been continuously spearheading various reforms initiatives aimed at improving service delivery across the public service. These include among others, implementation of quality management systems like ISO, the Customer Charter, the Public Service Excellence Award and other modernization projects.

We can say that today, in this push button era, change is the only constant that can ensure the success of an organisation. New initiatives, including technology improvements, come together to drive ongoing changes. In fact, reforms are part of an ongoing process across the world in view of the daunting challenges in the global environment. We cannot be complacent and rest on our laurels. We have also to keep pace with developments. You all know that change needs to happen, but you don’t really know how to go about delivering it. Where do you start? Whom do you involve? How do you see it through to the end? The answer to all these apparently difficult and terrifying questions is simple: Technology.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

You are certainly aware that countries that have successfully embraced technology in public administration are in a better position to serve their respective customers in a more efficient and effective manner. If we want to become like Singapore, Malaysia and other forward looking countries, we have to embrace new technologies. Meaningful and positive change, through technology should therefore be our priority.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our Government Programme 2015-2019 has emphasized on modernization for the transformation of our Civil Service. As Minister of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms, I expect the close cooperation of each and every civil servant so that no stone is left unturned to build up a responsible and responsive service. A transformational change of the Civil Service is therefore our main objective and this will not be possible unless we invest in actions like building the capacity of our people and streamlining of our work processes and procedures through optimization of Information and Communication Technologies. For this change to be possible, the contribution of each and every one is essential. Indeed John Kotter, the celebrated Professor Emeritus on leadership and change at Harvard University, has rightly pointed out that for change to be successful in any organization, at least 75 percent of its personnel needs to “buy into” the change.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Change cannot be brought about by one person, but through a coalition of all stakeholders involved. The full support of key departments and institutions is vital. This “change coalition” needs to work as a team and continue to build urgency and momentum around the need for change.

Allow me for the benefit of one and all highlight a few actions that have been initiated by my Ministry in recent months to accelerate the pace of change and reforms in the Civil Service. This will give you an idea of the magnitude of the transformation we want to bring about. I must also congratulate my close collaborators and their team.

- The Board of the Civil Service College has been constituted and preliminary works have started. We look forward to the College starting its training programmes in due course.
- A web-based e-Learning System is being developed with the support of UNDP and will soon become operational. This will facilitate the training of a larger number of our officers.
- The Reforms Steering Council is taking appropriate action for the formulation of a Civil Service Reforms Strategy, with technical support of the Commonwealth Secretariat.
• Reforms Cells, which have been set up in all Ministries/Departments since long will be revived and called upon to be more effective.
• Several E-Government initiatives relating, e.g. to Government e-mail coverage, Data Sharing and social-media policy are being formulated with a view to provide faster and quality services.
• The Performance Management System is in the process of being extended to all officers at top management level thus covering the whole Civil Service.
• In consultation with the State Law Office, a Public Service Bill is under preparation and has reached an advanced stage. It will contribute to consolidate accountability and transparency in the public service.

I have no doubt that the seeds being sowed today will greatly contribute to bring about the much needed transformation in the Civil Service.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Today people expect quality and timely services which they deserve. I can confidently say that there have been marked improvements in service delivery in several areas of the Public Service, e.g. Registrar General’s Department where several services were provided after many days. These are now available “online” and in real time. We have similar such examples like the Passport Office and the Companies Division.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
The HRMIS Project is an unprecedented major reform initiative in line with the vision of our Government to modernise and transform the Civil Service. The ultimate objective of this reform is to ensure an optimum utilisation of human resources for providing more efficient services for the benefit of customers at large. As you know, the implementation of this mega project has entailed a massive process re-engineering in the whole of Human Resource Management chain, starting from the date an employee joins the service up to his retirement. The full implementation of the HRMIS will cover the core functions of Human Resource Management as well as some important financial management operations related to the payroll. To be more precise, the HRMIS will comprise five Modules, namely HR, Payroll, Learning Management, Performance Management and Self-Service. I wish to inform you the Payroll System is planned to be operational in early 2016.

When fully operational, HRMIS is therefore set to considerably change the Civil Service landscape as it will:

(a) provide updated, accurate, timely, user friendly and complete information on all public officers that will significantly help address the administrative delays and inefficiencies of the existing HRM System;

(b) reduce paper work to a large extent, eliminate duplications and relieve senior officials from routine tasks who could then attend to more important ones;

(c) enable a judicious utilisation of human and financial resources;
(d) improve the communication lines both within and between Ministries/Departments;

(e) empower employees to get access to their basic details and communicate online with the HR and Finance Divisions, through the “Self-Service” application; and

(f) the HRMIS with its vast database can produce a series of management reports to facilitate decision making and ultimately, it will boost the use of ICT as an instrument of public sector reforms and E-Government.

Moreover, through the implementation of the HRMIS the principles of Accountability and Transparency, which are essential elements for a smarter public service in a modern world, will be strengthened. We will no doubt witness drastic changes in the way business is conducted in the Civil Service - A real Paradigm Shift. Needless to say that without change, the risk for our country to lose its competitive edge is high and I am sure none of you would like his country to be a loser. Fortunately, our past attempts at bringing changes through innovations have met with success, albeit not to the extent expected. With the implementation of the HRMIS, we can definitely claim that we are in the good direction to bring about the transformation we are looking for.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The world hates change, yet it is the only thing that has and will bring about progress. In fact, change is the law of life. Those who look only to the past or
present are certain to miss the future. As such, change that results from the adoption of new technology is common everywhere. At first, it might be perceived as disruptive, but once adopted, it becomes the closest friend of every user, as it will only facilitate matters. This will, in fact, be the case when the HRMIS becomes fully operational in the near future. The journey will be tedious, tough and loaded with obstacles. But where there is a will there is a way. Clearing and at times circumventing these obstacles will gradually pave the way for change and further empower us to succeed in our mission to build a modern Civil Service.

Dear participants,

You had to cope both with your daily routines and the exigencies of the system. Rest assured that your efforts will not go waste. This short term stress will pave the way for long term gains. Your contribution and support have indeed helped to move ahead this extremely complex project. By so doing, you have already demonstrated your strong willingness for the system to be operational at the earliest possible. I consider this as a very positive sign and also the right type of mindset required to facilitate the mobilisation of as many public officers in the change process. All of you are thus part of this "change coalition". Indeed, it is the first time that we are witnessing the mobilization of a large number of officers moving in the same direction. This augurs well and I seize this opportunity to congratulate you all for your efforts and hard work.
By the way we have no choice. We should all strive to do our level best, bearing in mind the following reality: Launching a new system is **good** but implementing it is **great**.

Here, I would like to direct my attention towards **Officers-in-Charge of HR and Finance Divisions**, who have a very important role to play for the success of the HRMIS.

As you know, my Ministry and the stakeholders concerned are striving hard to make things happen, in spite of the complexity of the project. This is why my Ministry has decided that implementation of the project should constitute a Key Task and a Key Result Area in the Work Plans of all officers concerned. Moreover, my Ministry is also communicating all developments and progress made to all of you by way of a monthly Newsletter.

My appeal to you is: accept and embrace the HRMIS as an indispensable HR Tool. Do not be scared of the changes and the associated challenges because it is now high time to acknowledge that we cannot continue “Business as Usual”. In fact, we have already created this positive culture of change in the Public Service. We have only to persevere and pursue our journey until the goal is reached. We have to succeed by all means and in a very collaborative and collective manner.
Dear Participants,

Today’s workshop is meant to build and create more confidence amongst you. The Workshop Programme has been framed on the basis of progress achieved so far and also taking into account the Change Management Strategy for the project. I urge you to take full benefit of this Workshop so that we can confidently move ahead with the project. Other workshops are also planned for the future. In fact, training will be imparted to all officers concerned on the basis of an established calendar. My Ministry has put in place a Core Team for the project to assist you all through in addressing any problem you may be encountering in the practical implementation of the project. The team may be contacted at any time. Your respective Supervising Officers have also been invited to provide you all the support that is required.

Last but not least, I would like to seize this opportunity to make a special appeal to all Supervising Officers of Ministries/Departments. As strategic leaders, you have an equally important role to play in making the HRMIS Project a reality. Consider the HRMIS as one of your priorities along with other sectoral reforms. This will indeed make a big difference for the whole Civil Service. It will further boost up the morale of as many officers.

To conclude, I would like to refer to Sir Winston Churchill who said:
“To improve is to change: to be perfect is to change often”.

Therefore, let us all work as a team to attain excellence in the public service. Let me also add that it is good to bring changes. But what do change? My expectation is that everyone in the civil service adopts the right attitude for change. We should go for the best.

To achieve excellence, a sportsman, for example, makes a lot of sacrifice. Likewise, we should make sacrifices for a better world. I make a humble plea to all civil servants to adopt this right attitude for change.

I wish you all a great day. I now have the pleasure to declare the Workshop on “Readiness for the HRMIS” officially open.

I thank you for your kind attention.