

Welcome Speech by
PROFESSOR EUSTON QUAH
PRESIDENT, ECONOMIC SOCIETY OF SINGAPORE
Economic Society of Singapore Annual Dinner 2022
Hilton Hotel, Singapore
Wednesday, 17 August 2022

Our Distinguished Speaker and Guest of Honour

Mr Ravi Menon

Managing Director

Monetary Authority of Singapore

Emeritus Senior Minister, Mr Goh Chok Tong, and Mrs Goh

Your Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen

A very warm welcome to this year's Economic Society of Singapore Annual Dinner.

About the Economic Society of Singapore

This year marks the 66th year since the founding of the Economic Society of Singapore. As most of you would have known, the Economic Society of Singapore is a non-profit organisation of economists, professionals, academicians and policymakers with great interest in economics. Established since 1956, the Society's primary objective is to raise public awareness, and stimulate public interest and debate on economic issues. The Society had participated in providing important inputs for various Government initiatives such as the Forward Future Economy, White Paper on Population, The Economic Strategies Committee, the CPF Policy Changes Study; and Policy Options for the Singapore Economy. The Society had also provided a platform for discussions on the Annual Singapore Government Budget by organising a panel workshop post-budget annually.

The Society also publishes the academic journal, the Singapore Economic Review. It is one of the oldest economic journals in Asia, founded in 1956. SER is indexed in all major economic indices including the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI). In fact, SER is one of the only few journals based in Asia to be indexed in SSCI since 2009, and the journal is generally now regarded as the leading economics journal based in Asia and by journal impact factor. In addition to its quarterly publications, special issues on contemporary topics, the academic journal also organizes the biennial Singapore Economic Review Conference series. The 9th conference was just concluded early this month over 3 full days and was attended by some 200 participants from all over the world with 6 plenary sessions and 55 parallel sessions.

The Society also publishes an economics bulletin for the interested general public. Called the Economic Bulletin, it is thematic based with

this year's publication centering on Man and the Arts, a copy of which is provided to each of you at this dinner.

About Economics

Economics is the study of how society manages its scarce resources among competing demands. Such a definition places economics in both the realms of the social sciences and decision sciences. As such, economics is not just about investments, finance and banking. It is also about making everyday decisions such as purchasing groceries; major decisions like whether to buy a car , where to live, what to study, and jobs to consider; and important life decisions like when and who to marry, and how many children to produce. Likewise, firms need to decide what to produce, how much to produce, when and where to produce. Governments need to effectively allocate public funds to public infrastructures and services such as public safety, education, health, welfare, and pollution mitigation. In all these activities, it is necessary to involve the economic thinking of scarcity, choices, and trade-offs.

As an environmental economist, I was happy to hear Prime Minister Lee emphasizing the importance of green public spaces to Singapore in the long-term and not just expansion of residential and commercial areas. The Prime Minister was clearly cognizant of the necessary trade-offs and the need to place values where it matters. He spoke at the Gardens by the Bay which is celebrating its 10th Anniversary. It was my privilege to provide my economic expertise for this iconic project when it was still in the making by running a regular CBA clinic at the Ministry of National Development premises for the officers involved at the time. Society's preferences are dynamic and therefore we must have long-term outlook on what constitutes quality of life to make decisions in the present. All

stakeholders, government, academia, and wider populace need to be engaged to elicit these preferences. Intangible values of leisure, lowered stress, and good air quality, all of which could be evaluated by CBA techniques, and this will aid informed decision-making . PM Lee also remarked that “long-term plans are not just about physical infrastructures”, but also “economic progress and social resilience”. In our Post-pandemic world, there is an economic challenge: how to reallocate resources to meet the immediate demands and, after that, find ways to nurse the stricken national economy back to good health, one that is better able to cope with the pandemics and other crises to come. To make Singapore more resilient, we need to continue investing into our human capital. The productivity increases will also mitigate a high-inflationary environment.

ESS and Society

In actively promoting a series of activities and events, the Society has drawn economic players from students to members of the profession in academia, the government, and corporate sectors. A testament to this is the Society’s Singapore Economic Policy Forum (SEPF) that is held annually in October. A leading platform for economic policy discussions on Singapore, the Forum allows policymakers, scholars, business professionals, students, and interested members of the public to exchange views on contemporary economic issues facing Singapore and Asia. The three universities, NTU, NUS, SMU and the fourth arrival of SUSS take turns to co-organize this forum with the Society. Past forums have focused on economic and public policy issues to social issues including changing economic winds, aggregate employment, financial sector reforms, the Singapore economy, economic relations with ASEAN, China, and specifically also with Malaysia, and social safety nets.

Last year NUS organized the 13th Singapore Economic Policy Forum (SEPF) with the theme “Sustainability in the Time of Uncertainty”. There were eight sessions in total covering topics such as building a smart nation, electric vehicles, blockchain technology, green finance, and welfare. SUSS, in its inaugural participation with the society, will be co-hosting the upcoming SEPF on “Forward Future Singapore: Economics and Interdisciplinary Studies for Social Good” with Mr Lawrence Wong, Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister for Finance as GOH.

Earlier this year on February 18, our Feedback Policy Committee organized a webinar-cum-book launch titled “Covid-19 and the Structural Crises of Our Time”.

With Banque de France, we organized an online seminar on “Central Bank Digital currencies” on 16 March this year .

ESS Youth Wing

The Society's Young Professionals' Career Wing is now in its 9th year. This initiative aims to attract young economists to participate in the Society's activities and at the same time bring in fresh and new ideas to further develop and diversify the Society's mainstream activities into relevant and contemporary issues of the young. The activities of this group include informal gatherings and social interactions among themselves with guest speakers and invitees from seniors and well-known professionals in government and industry with the occasional appearances by distinguished academia. This past year saw the Youth Wing organising a major summit revolving around the themes of “The Future of Financial Services” and “The Paradigm Shift in Traditional World Economics”.

Our youth wing, ESS Young Professional (ESSYP) had three webinars, one partnership event, and an on-line talk with a bank's CIO. ESSYP partnered with SMU Economics Intelligence Club (SEIC) on Socia-Political Economic Exchange (SPEX) 2021 case competition held in September 2021. There will be an upcoming workshop on "101 on Carbon Emissions" targeted at young professionals and SMEs with Zenia Chang (ESG Consulting, KPMG Financial Services Advisory). The Society will keep engaging stakeholders and the public on the economic and policy issues of the day.

I welcome those of you in the audience tonight who are young professional economists to join us in this endeavour to further rejuvenate the Society. I have said this in past ESS Annual Dinners, but the same question continues to arise. That is, who can qualify to be a member of our Young Professionals' Career Wing? Well, he or she will be between ages 25 to 35. But let's not quibble about whether those in the age 35 group qualify or not as we can make exceptions for those slightly above age 35. However, we would draw the line at those who consider themselves young at heart.

ESS and Education

The Society continues to place a strong emphasis on education and nurturing young talents. The Society's education committee actively engages teachers and students of economics through the annual Junior College Seminar Series in which professional economists and university academicians participate as speakers on various contemporary economic issues. The Outstanding Economics Teacher Award (OETA), besides recognizing outstanding economics teachers, the awards also promote the sharing of best practices by these outstanding teachers and encourage all economics teachers to achieve professional excellence. I

would like to thank the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Planning and Development Division who have provided support, inputs, and the administrative details for the setting up of this award. I would also like to thank World Scientific Publishing, and Emeritus Professor Gunter Dufey, who has been sponsoring the cash award to be used for professional development. The recipients of this award are announced at the Singapore Economic Policy Forum every year in October.

Our Education Committee organized an inaugural seminar on "Economics in the News" in July this year . There were two sessions – Macro and Micro Session. Speakers for the Macro session were Mr Manu Bhaskaran (Centennial Asia), Associate Professor Jamus Lim (ESSEC) and Associate Professor Tan Swee Liang (SMU). Speakers for the Micro session are Associate Professor Walter Theseira (SUSS) and Mr Poh Lip Hang (Baker McKenzie Wong and Leow).

The Society also organises student essay competitions, with the original sponsorship which has continued to this day by the Monetary Authority of Singapore; Gold Medal Awards for outstanding graduates in Economics at tertiary institutions; and study tours. Through the essay competitions, the Society furthers its aim in encouraging members of the public and particularly the youth to learn about the role of economic thought and analysis in public policies in Singapore. In recent years, essay competitions which focus on non-traditional areas of economics were also launched; one was sponsored by the National Climate Change Secretariat (NCCS), and another was sponsored by the Competition and Consumer Commission of Singapore. The Society had also collaborated with another essay competition sponsor, Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore. To all our essay sponsors, a big thank you. The theme of the

MAS-ESS Essay Competition 2021 was “Economic Drivers in a Post-COVID World”.

ESS had also launched a new Applied Policy Economics Speakers Series with the collaboration of the Economist Service highlighting what economic analysis can do in understanding and dissecting public policies better .

Future Events

The Society looks forward to your continued support. There are many other activities organized by the Society throughout the year, and this can be found in the President’s Report each year. For those of you who wish to know more about the Society, please visit our website and we appreciate suggestions and constructive ideas to further strengthen and liven the Society’s mission and activities.

Endnote

The Singapore economy faces strong headwinds. We are in the closing chapter of the pandemic, but the world and its global economy are facing new challenges. Other issues emerge or persist such as disrupted supply chains, high inflation, and rising inequality, uncovering vulnerabilities of our interconnected world. These will test the ongoing structural socioeconomics developments of preparedness, resilience, and inclusiveness in Singapore. With the strong headwinds, the challenge is to ensure that these structural changes continue to take place while quickly mitigating possible downturn effects that affect large numbers of people. Again, the issue of scarcity, choices and trade-offs comes into play.

On June 28 this year, Deputy-Prime Minister Lawrence Wong launched the Forward Singapore exercise at NTUC Tripartite Dialogue. I have learnt a lot about this tripartism spirit that distinguishes Singapore as I was working on my book on life and contributions of Albert Winsemius. It is following his advice, that the National Wages Council was set up to enable wide cooperation between workers, businesses, and government. Just like in the past, Singapore is at a crossroads again. Population is ageing, income inequality is rising, anxieties over the future are mounting. DPM Wong stressed the importance of building a more socially resilient society. This will require the continuation of investing into human capital and adjusting policies to cater to the changing needs of the Singapore society . Economics must continue to be relevant to public life. That is the founding goal of the Economic Society of Singapore, and one that must be upheld in every event the Society engages in. This goal cannot be emphasized more amidst the current turbulent times.

Economic Society

Let me close by thanking the Society's members and sponsors for this evening's dinner, and everyone present for your generous support. I would also like to thank my predecessor-presidents of the Society, a few are here in tonight's dinner, Dr Khor Hoe Ee, Professor Basant Kapur and Professor Lim Chong Yah for their immensely important role in building up the Society at its various stages, supported by an able Council throughout with an efficient secretariat, headed by Ms Vivian Tan.

Finally, to Singapore, which celebrated the 57th year of independence, may we continue to achieve happiness, prosperity, and progress for our nation.

THANK YOU

SEPARATELY FOR INTRODUCING OUR GUEST OF Honour, MR RAVI MENON

As you all know, the Annual Dinner series is a very important one for the Society. Distinguished speakers in past Society events included Prime Minister Mr Lee Hsien Loong; former Prime Minister Mr Goh Chok Tong, former Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam; former Prime Minister and Minister Mentor, the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew; former President Mr Tony Tan Keng Yam; Mrs Lee- Ms Ho Ching, CEO of Temasek Holdings; Mr Timothy Geithner, former United States Secretary of Treasury; Professor Edward Lazear, former chairman of the US Presidential Council of Economic Advisors; Minister for Education, Mr Heng Swee Keat, and last year's speaker, the then Minister for Social and Family Development, Mr Chan Chun Seng, just to name a few. It is now my privilege and honour to introduce and say a few words on our Guest-of-Honour this year, Mr Ravi Menon.

Mr Ravi Menon was appointed Managing Director of the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) in 2011. He was previously Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Trade & Industry (MTI) and Deputy Secretary at the Ministry of Finance (MOF). Mr Menon began his career at MAS in 1987. During his 16 years in MAS, he was involved in monetary policy; econometric forecasting; organisational development; banking regulation and liberalisation; and integrated supervision of complex financial institutions. Mr Menon spent a year at the Bank for International Settlements in Basel, as a member of the secretariat to the Financial Stability Forum. A recipient of the Singapore Government's Meritorious Service Medal and Public Administration (Gold) Medal, Mr

Menon has served on a variety of boards in the public, private, and people sectors in Singapore. On the international front, Mr Menon serves as Chair of the Network of Central Banks and Supervisors for Greening the Financial System as well as Chair of the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero APAC Network Advisory Board. He is also a member of the Financial Stability Board (FSB) Steering Committee. Mr Menon holds a Master's in Public Administration from Harvard University and a Bachelor of Social Science (Honours) in Economics from the National University of Singapore. I might add that Mr Ravi Menon was also a very good student of mine during his time at NUS, and that he was also our Society's Honorary Secretary before. The Society is grateful of his support, proud of his achievements and significant contributions to Singapore.

May I now invite Mr Ravi Menon to speak.