



# SINGAPORE PERSPECTIVES2026



**Fraternity**

手足情誼 • Persaudaraan • நாம்

**Tuesday, 20 January 2026 | Monday, 26 January 2026**





## **About the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS)**

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) was established in 1988 as an independent think-tank to study and generate public policy ideas in Singapore. IPS became an autonomous research centre of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore in 2008. Today, IPS continues to analyse public policy, build bridges between thought leaders, and communicate its findings to a wide audience. The Institute examines issues of critical national interest across a variety of fields, and studies the attitudes and aspirations of Singaporeans through surveys of public perception. It adopts a multi-disciplinary approach in its analyses and takes the long-term view in its strategic deliberation and research.

For more information about IPS, please visit [www.lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips](http://www.lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/ips).



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**Zuellig Initiatives  
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**11**  
**Conference Concept**

**12 - 19**  
**Programme**

**20 - 40**  
**Biographical Notes**

## Conference Concept

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The theme for SP2026 will be “Fraternity”. As a compact urban city, Singapore’s social fabric has long been woven from dense everyday interactions in homes, schools, workplaces and shared public spaces. These social connections form the basis of the trust, norms and networks that bind our society together. In recent years, however, significant changes and disruptions — such as rapid digitalisation, demographic changes, social stratification and an unsettled global environment, among others — have heightened the complexity of our society and transformed how we connect with one another.

Against this backdrop, this year’s conference asks: How do we renew the ties that bind? How do we bridge diverse interests and backgrounds, to strengthen our shared belief and distinctive identity as Singaporeans?

Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Lawrence Wong and President Tharman Shanmugaratnam have both spoken about the critical need to nurture a “We First” society that emphasises the value of individuals taking initiative for collective ends. This conference will discuss how we can navigate challenges to social cohesion and help Singaporeans embrace a “We First” mindset.

## Programme (20 January 2026)

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9.00 am – 10.30 am

### **Session 1 – Tech and Ties: The Impact of Emerging Technologies on Social Cohesion**

This panel presents the findings from an IPS Survey that examines the relationships that Singaporeans form online and the quality of their digital interactions, compared with traditional ties established offline. How do Singaporeans navigate these different forms of interactions, and what do they value in them? How do experiences vary across different demographic groups? How are emerging technologies shaping social connections, and what is the impact on social cohesion, civic engagement and mutual trust among Singaporeans? Panellists will discuss insights from this study and policy implications.

#### **Moderator**

Dr Clara Lee  
Research Fellow  
Social Lab  
Institute of Policy Studies

#### **Speakers**

Dr Mathew Mathews  
Principal Research Fellow &  
Head, Social Lab  
Institute of Policy Studies

Associate Professor Kokil Jaidka  
Department of Communications and New Media  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
National University of Singapore

Ms Grace Ann Chua

Co-founder

Friendzone

### **Question-and-Answer Session**

**11.30 am – 1.00 pm**

### **Session 2 – New Ways to Talk Through Tough Topics: Testing Different Modalities of Citizen Engagement**

This panel draws on IPS Policy Lab’s work to explore how different modalities of engagement can be harnessed to facilitate thoughtful exchanges among Singaporeans, especially on contentious issues.

What methods and tools can we use to create spaces for meaningful conversations on sensitive or difficult topics, even if we disagree significantly? What are the sensitivities and considerations that should be taken into account? How can we promote greater understanding between Singaporeans — even if consensus is difficult?

### **Moderator**

Dr Justin Lee

Senior Research Fellow &

Head, Policy Lab

Institute of Policy Studies

### **Speakers**

Ms Dawn Yip

Organisation Development and Public Participation

Practitioner

Mr Tan Kiat How  
Senior Minister of State  
Ministry of Digital Development and Information &  
Ministry of Health and  
Chairman, REACH

Mr Nicholas Thomas  
Research Fellow  
Policy Lab  
Institute of Policy Studies

**Question-and-Answer Session**

## Programme (26 January 2026)

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**8.00 am – 8.45 am**

**Registration**

**8.45 am – 9.00 am**

**Opening Address**

Mr Janadas Devan

Director

Institute of Policy Studies

**9.00 am – 10.30 am**

**Panel 1 – Rethinking Social Capital in a Smart Nation**

The compact size of Singapore and its urban landscape used to be arguably an advantage in building social capital — fostering opportunities for interactions and chance encounters critical for building trust and bonds. But increasingly, how we make friends, interact with one another, seek information and even social support is moving online. As our society becomes increasingly digitally connected but physically disconnected, what are the implications on Singaporeans' capacity to connect and bond with one another? How will these changes reshape the fabric of our society? What is the broader impact on Singapore as a nation and how does this affect policymaking now and into the future?

**Moderator**

Dr Chew Han Ei

Senior Research Fellow &

Head, Governance and Economy

Institute of Policy Studies

### **Speakers**

Ms Jasmin Lau

Minister of State

Ministry of Digital Development and Information &

Ministry of Education

Professor Lim Sun Sun

Vice President (Partnerships and Engagement) and

Lee Kong Chian Professor of Communication &

Technology

Singapore Management University

Mr Ang Jin Shaun

Founder

Stranger Conversations

### **Question-and-Answer Session**

**10.30 am – 11.00 am**

### **Break**

**11.00 am – 12.30 pm**

### **Panel 2 – Navigating Challenges to Social Cohesion**

Singapore society has become more complex and diverse over the last 60 years. Domestically, signs of social stratification have emerged amid significant shifts in our demographic profile, as our population ages and new immigrants from more varied origins and backgrounds make Singapore their new home. Externally, a more turbulent global environment fraught with fragmentation affects us even as Singaporeans become more exposed to international experiences and influences. How do we balance the flourishing of diverse interests while ensuring that our society is not pulled apart by differences?

How can we create more opportunities for Singaporeans from different backgrounds with different beliefs and aspirations to engage meaningfully with one another and promote mutual respect, trust and understanding?

**Moderator**

Associate Professor Razwana Begum  
Head, Global Security and Strategy Programme  
School of Humanities and Behavioural Sciences  
Singapore University of Social Sciences

**Speakers**

Mr Jeffrey Siow  
Acting Minister for Transport &  
Senior Minister of State for Finance

Professor Elaine Ho  
Provost's Chair Professor  
Department of Geography and  
Research Leader, Migration and Mobilities Cluster  
Asia Research Institute  
National University of Singapore

Ms Shahrany Hassan  
Founder and Director  
The Whitehatters

**Question-and-Answer Session**

**12.30 pm – 1.30 pm**

**Lunch**

**1.30 pm – 3.00 pm**

**Panel 3 – Building a More Inclusive and “We First” Society**

As our society evolves and new challenges to social cohesion arise, how can we strengthen the Singapore identity, moving beyond individual success to embrace a "We First" mindset? This panel discussion explores the pathways to building an inclusive society where every individual feels a sense of belonging and purpose, where there is shared vision driving collective action, yet different groups and individuals are celebrated for their unique aspirations and achievements.

**Moderator**

Dr Laurel Teo  
Senior Research Fellow &  
Head, Society and Culture  
Institute of Policy Studies

**Speakers**

Associate Professor Vincent Chua  
Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
National University of Singapore

Mr Tony Soh  
Chief Executive Officer  
National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre

Mr David Neo  
Acting Minister for Culture, Community and Youth &  
Senior Minister of State for Education

**Question-and-Answer Session**

**3.00 pm – 3.30 pm**

**Break**

**3.30 pm – 4.45 pm**

**DIALOGUE**

**with Mr Gan Kim Yong**

**Deputy Prime Minister and**

**Minister for Trade and Industry**

**Moderator**

Mr Janadas Devan

**Question-and-Answer Session**

**4.45 pm**

**End**

## Biographical Notes

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### Session 1 — Tech and Ties: The Impact of Emerging Technologies on Social Cohesion



**Grace Ann CHUA** is the Co-founder of Friendzone, a social enterprise dedicated to strengthening social capital among young Singaporeans through community-building conversations. Friendzone creates safe spaces for young people to engage in honest, vulnerable dialogue, fostering healthy relationships and communities where they can thrive.

Since its inception as a ground up initiative seven years ago, Friendzone has impacted thousands through facilitated gatherings and workshops, expanding from neighbourhood events to industry, interest, and gender-based events on a range of topics.

In 2025, Friendzone launched Friendship School, focusing on friendship education and developing relational and communication skills.

Ms Chua is also the founder of HTHT (heart-to-heart talks), a relationship hub offering dating coaching, panel talks, and content to support individuals navigating singlehood, dating, and long-term relationships.



**KOKIL Jaidka** is an Associate Professor at the National University of Singapore (NUS) at the Department of Communications and New Media, with an affiliate position at the Institute of Data Science. Her research examines how digital platforms, AI systems and emerging technologies shape social interaction, political engagement and online community dynamics. She develops computational methods to study how people connect, communicate and form relationships in digital spaces, with a focus on the implications for trust, cohesion and social well-being. Her work appears in leading journals such as *PNAS*, *Nature Human Behaviour* and the *Journal of Communication*. Before joining NUS, she was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania, the Nanyang Presidential Postdoctoral Fellow at the Nanyang Technological University and had worked in industry R&D on large-scale AI technologies.



**Clara LEE** is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies. She obtained her PhD in Political Science from the University of Pennsylvania. Dr Lee's research in her current capacity extends across several domains, including the political economy of labour, social and economic mobility, youth aspirations, as well as the lived experiences of shared and green spaces. This builds upon her prior academic work on labour immigration within the broader international and comparative political economy contexts.

The role and influence of public opinion also underpin much of her research, where she explores how beliefs and perceptions of various social phenomena shape decision-making and behaviour. Her work employs diverse methodological approaches, engages broad segments of the population and leverages interdisciplinary tools to generate robust, relevant and accessible theoretical and empirical insights. In addition to her research, Dr Lee also teaches the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme and survey research at the National University of Singapore.



**Mathew MATHEWS** is Head of IPS Social Lab, a centre for social indicator research and a Principal Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore. To date, Dr Mathews has been involved in over seventy research projects, using a range of qualitative and quantitative methods addressing social policy issues.

Dr Mathews also studies the impact of social programmes and has been involved in a number of evaluations on the usefulness of various initiatives. He has taught courses on social policy and has published in a range of academic and media outlets.

Dr Mathews currently sits on various boards in the public and people sector including MoneySense Council, National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre and OnePeople.sg. He is also President of Alive Community Network, a social service agency.

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## Session 2 — New Ways to Talk Through Tough Topics: Testing Different Modalities of Citizen Engagement



**Justin LEE** is Senior Research Fellow and Head of Policy Lab at the Institute of Policy Studies. He is working with partners to implement participatory budgeting at a town council and hopes to start a special version of a citizens' assembly designed to bridge division. He hopes to test whether an inclusive incubator roving to different neighbourhoods can help kickstart community-owned enterprises that build community (instead of individual) wealth. He serves on the research committees of Singapore Children's Society and SINDA.



**TAN Kiat How** is the Senior Minister of State at the Ministry of Digital Development and Information (MDDI) and the Ministry of Health (MOH).

At MDDI, he focuses on strengthening Singapore's cybersecurity ecosystem and ensuring national digital infrastructure resilience. Mr Tan led the development of the Digital Economy Blueprint to empower business digital transformation in the age of Artificial Intelligence.

At MOH, Mr Tan drives technology adoption to support healthcare workforce through AI and automation, improving healthcare outcomes and efficiency. He also leads outreach efforts to seniors as part of enhanced community health initiatives.

Mr Tan chairs REACH, facilitating whole-of-government engagement with Singaporeans on national issues, and the National Translation Committee. He previously served in the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of National Development.

Prior to politics, Mr Tan spent nearly 20 years in public service in various technology leadership role, including establishing the Pioneer Generation Office and serving as Chief Executive Officer of the Infocomm and Media Development Authority.



**Nicholas THOMAS** is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, where he leads the research programme on deliberation and public participation. His research takes an interdisciplinary approach examining how deliberative processes build bonding, bridging and linking social capital among citizens and between citizens and institutions to improve public policy and programme design.

He has almost two decades of experience in government and civic engagement, including key roles in national exercises such as Forward Singapore, Emerging Stronger Conversations and Our Singapore Conversation. He previously served as Deputy Director at the Singapore Government Partnerships Office in the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and helped to establish the engagement unit at the Ministry of Health, contributing to initiatives in healthcare financing, ageing policy and caregiver support.

He is currently reading for a PhD in Communications and New Media at the National University of Singapore and serves as a member of the School Advisory Committee of Northland Secondary School.



**Dawn YIP** is a practitioner in the fields of organisation development, public participation and strategic foresight. She has been involved in numerous public engagement efforts, including Forward Singapore, Our Singapore Conversation and the Emerging Stronger Conversations. Ms Yip previously served as the Coordinating Director at the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, where she led the Singapore Government Partnerships Office. Between 1994 to 2007, Ms Yip also held various positions in the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Civil Service College, Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Health and Ministry of National Development.

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## Opening Remarks



**Janadas DEVAN** is Director of the Institute of Policy Studies. He was educated at the National University of Singapore and Cornell University in the United States. He was a journalist, writing for *The Straits Times* and broadcasting for Radio Singapore International before being appointed the government's Chief of Communications at the Ministry of Communications and Information (now the Ministry of Digital Development and Information, or MDDI) in 2012.

He relinquished his role as Chief of Communications in March 2023. He remains Deputy Secretary (Prime Minister's Office) and Senior Advisor (Government Communications) in MDDI. He was appointed Chairman of the Singapore International Foundation from April 2023.

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## Panel 1 — Rethinking Social Capital in a Smart Nation



**ANG Jin Shaun** is the Founder of Stranger Conversations, a social mixer series for individuals who wish to engage in more unconventional conversations. Stranger Conversations provides a “third place” for different perspectives to come together and cross-pollinate, by showcasing the paths taken by individuals of diverse backgrounds. Stranger Conversations has grown steadily since its inception in 2021, having organised more than 400 events as of end-2025. These include fireside chats, gatherings and workshops on topics ranging from travelling, healing relationships, and career breaks and burnout.



**CHEW Han Ei** is Head of the Governance & Economy cluster and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies. His work focuses on quantitative policy research, with a strong interest in online harms, digital trust and technology adoption.

He has served as Principal Investigator for multiple large-scale research grants and collaborates closely with public agencies to inform decision-making and policy development. His approach is empirically grounded and hands-on — from designing social science research projects to leading data analyses that shape real-world outcomes.

Outside of IPS, Dr Chew serves on the board of SG Her Empowerment and is a pro bono Research Consultant to UNESCO. Some of his key international projects for UNESCO include *Reading in the Mobile Era: A Study of Mobile Reading in Developing Countries* and *I'd Blush If I Could — Closing Gender Divides in Digital Skills through Education*.

Dr Chew earned his PhD in Media and Information Studies from Michigan State University. He also writes *The Chart Doctor Has Issues* — a Substack newsletter on data storytelling, visual best practices and the occasional chart takedown.



**Jasmin LAU** is the Minister of State in the Ministry of Digital Development and Information and the Ministry of Education, as well as the Minister-in-charge of GovTech. She is also a Member of Parliament for Ang Mo Kio GRC, overseeing the Seletar-Serangoon Division. Ms Lau is the Vice-Chairperson of the Ang Mo Kio Town Council.

Before entering politics, Ms Lau spent nearly 20 years in the public service. She served as Deputy Secretary (Policy) at the Ministry of Health, and Executive Director of the Singapore Global Network at the Economic Development Board. She also held key positions at the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Manpower, and Prime Minister's Office.

Ms Lau holds a Master's in Technology and Policy from MIT and a Bachelor's in Bioengineering and Economics from the University of Pennsylvania.



**Sun Sun LIM** is Vice President, Partnerships & Engagement and Lee Kong Chian Professor of Communication and Technology at Singapore Management University. She has extensively researched the social impact of technology, focusing on technology domestication by families, future of work and AI ethics. She has over 100 academic publications including *Transcendent Parenting: Raising Children in the Digital Age* (Oxford University Press, 2020) and articles in top journals including *Nature* and *Big Data & Society*. Her latest book is *Humanising Technology: Reflections on Design, Ethics and Inclusion* (World Scientific, 2026). From 2018–2020, she was a Nominated Member of the 13th Parliament of Singapore. She won the inaugural Top 50 Asia Women Tech Leaders Award 2024 and is Fellow of the International Communication Association and the Singapore Computer Society. She writes a monthly technology column in *The Straits Times*. See [www.sunsunlim.com](http://www.sunsunlim.com)

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## Panel 2 – Navigating Challenges to Social Cohesion



**Elaine HO** is Provost’s Chair Professor at the Department of Geography and the Research Leader of the Migration and Mobilities Cluster at the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore. Her research focuses on immigration and transnationalism, diaspora engagement and diplomacy, and ageing and care in the Asia Pacific.



**RAZWANA Begum** is Associate Professor and Head of the Master of Global Security and Strategy Programme at the Singapore University of Social Sciences. Her research interests include restorative justice, technology-enabled harm, ethical leadership, and the safety and resilience of children, young people and families.

With over two decades of experience across frontline offender management, policy and academia, she led the development of Singapore’s first undergraduate degree in Public Safety and Security and the flagship postgraduate programme in Global Security and Strategy.

She serves on the boards of charity organisations, notably as President of PPIS, a non-profit organisation delivering family and social services, and as a member of LPKM and Yayasan MENDAKI. She is also an Adjunct Principal Scientist with the Centre for Advanced Technologies in Online Safety, and served as a Nominated Member of the 14th Parliament of Singapore, where she raised issues on education equity and women’s empowerment.



**SHAHRANY Hassan** is the Founder and Director of The Whitehatters, a non-profit organisation that advocates building a socially cohesive society that transcends racial, religious and social barriers. Her work has earned mentions in Parliament and been featured numerous times in the media.

Ms Shahrany is also currently serving her third term as the Chairperson of Casa Raudha, a crisis shelter for women and children who are victims and survivors of domestic violence. She is also a board member with the National Council of Social Services

Ms Shahrany was previously a member of MSF Alliances for Action to strengthen marriages and family relationships, and MCCY IRCC Refresh Workgroup to develop recommendations to strengthen the IRCC's capabilities and to build more cohesive networks within the community.



**Jeffrey SIOW** was appointed Acting Minister for Transport and Senior Minister of State for Finance on 23 May 2025. He was elected as a Member of Parliament for the Chua Chu Kang Group Representation Constituency in 2025.

Before taking office, Mr Siow was Second Permanent Secretary at both the Ministry of Manpower and the Ministry of Trade and Industry, where he led national efforts to grow Singapore's economy, and to develop a productive workforce and progressive workplaces to benefit Singaporeans.

From 2021 to 2023, Mr Siow was the first Managing Director and Chief Operating Officer of Enterprise Singapore, where he was responsible for growing and transforming local businesses and industries. He was the Principal Private Secretary to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong from 2017 to 2021. Prior to that, Mr Siow held key government appointments at the Ministries of Transport, Education, and Manpower.

Mr Siow graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with an MBA. He also holds a BA in Economics & Government and a BSc in Urban & Regional Studies from Cornell University.

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## Panel 3 – Building a More Inclusive and “We First” Society



**Vincent CHUA** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, and Co-Director of the Centre for Family and Population Research at the National University of Singapore. His research interests are in social stratification, with a focus on how social networks have extended durable inequalities in labour markets, education/schools, neighbourhoods, and along categorical lines such as gender, race and class.

Associate Professor Chua’s works include “Categorical Sources of Varieties of Network Inequalities”, “Unequal Returns to Social Capital: The Study of Malays in Singapore through a Network Lens”, “Social Capital in Singapore: Gender Differences, Ethnic Hierarchies, and their Intersection”, “Getting Ahead in Singapore: How Neighbourhoods, Gender and Ethnicity affect Enrolment into Elite Schools”, and *Social Capital in Singapore: The Power of Network Diversity*.

He received his PhD in Sociology from the University of Toronto in 2010.



**David NEO** was appointed Acting Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, and Senior Minister of State for Education on 23 May 2025.

As the Acting Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, he chairs the National Integration Council, the Singapore Cares Steering Committee, the National Youth Council and the National Steering Committee on Racial and Religious Harmony, driving efforts to build a caring, cohesive and confident society in Singapore.

At the Ministry of Education, he focuses on the development of our students beyond the classroom, to provide them with a balanced and well-rounded education, and develop them to their full potential as lifelong learners and good citizens.

Before taking office, Mr Neo served for almost 30 years in public service, where he was Deputy Secretary (Technology) in MINDEF, founding Group Chief of the Silver Generation Office, and the first Commando Officer to be appointed as Chief of Army.

Mr Neo obtained a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering (Honours), Bachelor of Arts (Distinction) from University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and a Master's in Operations Research from Stanford University. He was also awarded the Lee Kuan Yew Postgraduate Scholarship and holds a Master's in Business Administration from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he graduated as a Sloan Fellow.



**Tony SOH** is the Chief Executive Officer at the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC), the national agency promoting volunteerism and philanthropy in Singapore. NVPC's purpose is to nurture the Heart of Singapore and aspires to build a "City of Good" where individuals, communities, organisations and leaders give their best toward building a more caring, inclusive and compassionate society.

Mr Soh believes purpose can be embedded and activated in every organisation meaningfully and impactfully for the good of society. He is passionate about reimagining community and business systems to create a society that inspires and enables human flourishing.

In his career spanning more than three decades, Mr Soh has held leadership and senior management roles in government ministries, a statutory board and a listed real estate company, with both regional and global responsibilities.

Mr Soh also serves in a voluntary capacity as president and board member in youth and community service non-profit organisations.



**Laurel TEO** is Head of the Society and Culture department and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies.

Dr Teo studies how people think, feel and behave in organisational settings, using quantitative and qualitative methods. Her research interests focus on the future of work, how workers can be future-ready, which specific groups may be particularly at-risk and what interventions can help them to overcome their vulnerabilities, especially in reskilling/upskilling.

In her prior careers, Dr Teo has worked in journalism, consulting and financial regulatory engagement in Singapore, Indonesia and Hong Kong. These experiences have helped to shape her research interests.

Dr Teo is also a Chartered Financial Analyst and currently volunteers on the board of CFA Society Singapore. She has a BA in Anthropology from Yale University and earned her PhD in Business (Organisational Behaviour & Human Resources) from Singapore Management University.

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## Dialogue with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Industry, Mr Gan Kim Yong



**GAN Kim Yong** is Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Industry. He is also the Chairman of the Monetary Authority of Singapore and is responsible for the Strategy Group in the Prime Minister's Office. In addition, Mr Gan is a member of the Research, Innovation and Enterprise Council and the National Research Foundation Board. Mr Gan entered politics in 2001 and has held positions in the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Manpower and Ministry of Health. He started his career in the Singapore Civil Service at the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Home Affairs. In 1989, he joined the private sector and joined NatSteel Ltd. He became the Chief Executive Officer and President of NatSteel in 2005. Mr Gan holds a Bachelor's degree (Honours) and Master's degree in Engineering, both obtained from University of Cambridge.



## Singapore Perspectives 2026: Fraternity

This conference is organised by Dr Laurel Teo, Ms Ann Mak, Ms Grace Kwang and the administration team of the Institute of Policy Studies.

