

Tharman Shanmugaratnam thanking supporters in Jurong. He takes over from President Halimah Yacob.



KEVIA TAN

Everyone deserves respect says Singapore's new President Tharman

President Tharman Shanmugaratnam has a vision for Singapore's future.

The President of the Republic of Singapore is someone to whom all citizens should show respect. At the National Day Parade, you can see how everyone, even the Prime Minister, stands when the President enters. Soldiers salute smartly. The President's photo is hung in your school. We show such respect because the President is the human symbol of the whole country.

But, Singapore's new President Tharman Shanmugaratnam is not demanding respect for himself. His message: "Respect For All".

He wants a "future of deeper respect for each other, regardless of backgrounds and educational achievements", he said after he was elected on 1 September.

Respect for all

Throughout history, it was common for humans to give respect only to those with power and wealth. In many societies today, poor people are still treated as if they do not matter. It is also common to admire people

who achieve success easily. We forget that those who struggle or fail before they achieve their targets may be even more admirable.

Mr Tharman said, "Respect those who start life with a disadvantage, those with special needs, and anyone who needs a second or third chance, and do our utmost to help them uplift themselves and make the most of life."

It is also common to respect those in highly-paid professions while looking down on those with humble jobs like cleaners. Mr Tharman's message: "Respect every skill and every job."

He also thinks about elderly Singaporeans. "Respect our senior citizens, and extend care and friendship to the growing number who live alone."

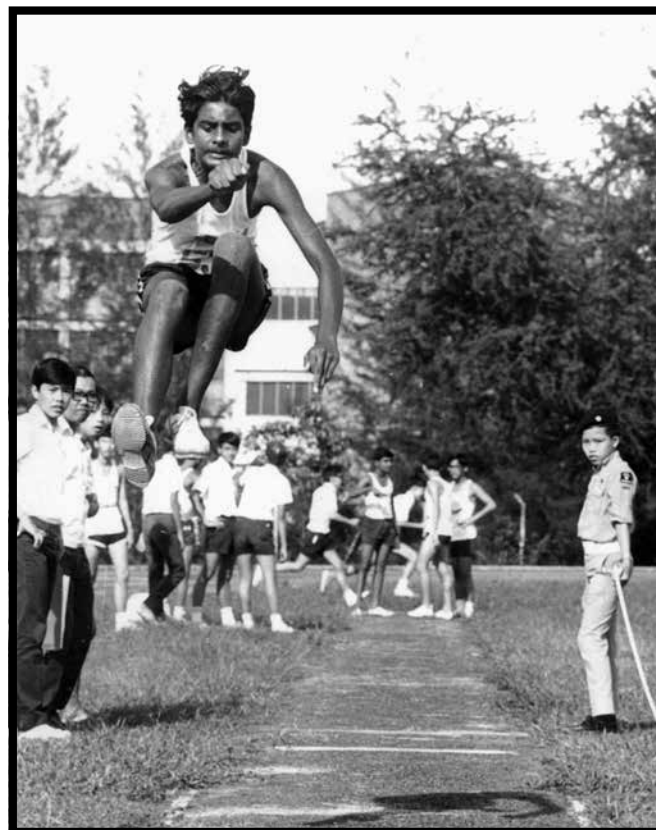
Out of around 2.5 million adult Singaporeans who took part in the election, more than 1.7 million voted for Mr Tharman. Mr Tharman expressed humility in his victory. He said Singaporeans were really supporting his vision for a future where we "progress together and support each other as Singaporeans".

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He wants people to have more chances and choices

President Tharman knows how it feels to fail. He wants Singaporeans to create a more caring society.



PICTURES: ROBIN; THARMAN SHANMUGARATNAM FACEBOOK

When Tharman Shanmugaratnam became the Minister for Education 20 years ago, he introduced changes that still benefit students today. He did not believe there should be only one way to succeed. He wanted students to have different paths they could follow.

Schooling in Singapore should not be like one big mountain for everyone to ascend. Instead, it should be a whole mountain range, “with different shapes and colours, inspiring all our young to follow their passions and climb as far as they can”, he said.

Mr Tharman’s own path through school was not a straight line. Although he became greatly respected for his intelligence as an adult, he was more passionate about sports than studies when he was in school. At Anglo-Chinese School, he took part in hockey, football, cricket, athletics, volleyball, sepak takraw and rugby.

His sporting dreams were dashed by illness when he was 17. He had anaemia, which meant his blood did not have enough red



↑ Mr Tharman with his wife, Jane Ittogi, a lawyer who leads various community projects.

blood cells. For four years, he had to take 25 pills a day. Giving up sports was the “biggest setback” of his life, he said.

It was then that he started reading more. He did well in his A-levels and then studied economics at the London School of Economics and at Cambridge University. When he graduated, he joined the Monetary Authority of Singapore. He joined politics

↑ It’s a bird... it’s a plane... it’s Thar-Man! In school, his superpower was on the sports field.

in 2001, becoming an admired Minister for Education and Minister for Finance.

As President, Mr Tharman hopes to help make Singapore a “fairer, more **compassionate** and **inclusive** society”. This is not just the government’s job, he says. “It is about all of us. It is about the respect and friendship we extend to each other. Regardless of our background and educational achievements. Regardless of race or religion, or any other differences.”

He hopes we will all do our part to “raise each other up”.

VOCAB BUILDER

compassionate (say “kom-pa-shun-et”; adjective) = caring.

inclusive (say “in-cloo-siv”; adjective) = letting everyone belong and not feel left out; not discriminating against people.

• These edited versions of articles from the September issue of *What’s Up* are being made freely available to mark the inauguration of the President on 14 September.