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How S'pore has differentiated itself amid Covid-19



The Singapore government worked with industry players and unions to implement a protocol to facilitate crew change for seafarers. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI



Toh Ting Wei

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SINGAPORE - Singapore knew that facilitating crew change for seafarers stuck at sea could bring about risks such as importing Covid-19 cases, but it decided to go ahead anyway, to do the right thing as a maritime nation, said Senior Minister of State for Transport and Foreign Affairs Chee Hong Tat on Wednesday (Nov 18).

The Republic saw the situation - in which hundreds of thousands of seafarers were turned away by ports globally in the past months - as a humanitarian crisis that also compromised navigational safety and threatened the flow of essential goods.

"We took the position that we must start by doing the right thing, and then work with partners to do things right by putting in place the necessary risk mitigation measures," said Mr Chee.

The Government thus worked with industry players and unions to implement a protocol to facilitate crew change. More than 57,000 crew members of different nationalities from over 3,500 ships have benefited from this since March, added Mr Chee.

This stance to do the right thing is the first of three areas in which the Republic has differentiated itself amid the Covid-19 pandemic, he told an audience of about 300 people at a virtual awards gala dinner organised by the Singapore International Chamber of Commerce.

This, along with standing by tripartite partners, is especially important in times of crisis, for others to retain trust in Singapore, Mr Chee added.

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"It is during a crisis that we can see clearly who our true friends are and which countries are reliable and can be counted upon.

"Conversely, it is also an opportunity to know who the fair-weather friends are."

Singapore has also differentiated itself in its commitment to planning long term and investing for the future "when others pursue initiatives for short-term gain", said Mr Chee.

Third, even as "others turn inwards and erect barriers in response to populist pressures", Singapore's goal is to stay open to talent and stay connected to the world. This has created openness and diversity in the society, he said.

"Innovation is most likely to happen at the intersection of different ideas and perspectives, when these come together to create something new," said Mr Chee.

He warned that the development of populist and xenophobic politics would lead to companies relocating to other countries, which would result in more Singaporeans losing their jobs.

Mr Chee also presented awards to winners in four categories yesterday. A wine-picking robot at Changi's DFS, which was the result of a collaboration between Changi Airport Group, Temasek Polytechnic and Softbank Telecom Singapore, was awarded the best technological collaboration.