

Collaborations across fields will remain key: DPM

S'pore's gains in pandemic battle a result of researchers, firms and agencies joining hands, he says

Clara Chong and Cheryl Tan

Singapore will build on its key strengths as a global research and innovation hub, at the top of which is its ability to be open to new ideas and engage in collaborations across different fields and countries, Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat said yesterday.

Covid-19 has shown that some of the hardest problems facing human-

ity are interconnected, and Singapore has made breakthroughs in fighting the pandemic because its researchers, companies and public agencies have worked closely together, he noted in his opening address at the Singaporean Researchers Global Summit held at Nanyang Technological University.

To shore up the country's future as it emerges from the shadow of the pandemic, the Government has committed \$25 billion to a five-year Research, Innovation and Enterprise plan, or RIE2025, Mr Heng noted in his speech to researchers based in Singapore as well as abroad.

"The resources committed under RIE2025 are significant in terms of our national budget, but



To shore up Singapore's future as it emerges from the shadow of the pandemic, the Government has committed \$25 billion to a five-year Research, Innovation and Enterprise plan, said Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat at the Singaporean Researchers Global Summit yesterday. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

small relative to global investments in R&D (research and development)," he said.

"We have been able to punch above our weight, because of the strengths of our partnerships – across academia, the private sector and the Government; within Singapore, and beyond our shores. This spirit of collaboration is a strength of our system, and a quality that we must continue to nurture."

In one project, the Agency for Sci-

ence, Technology and Research and Tan Tock Seng Hospital collaborated to develop the Fortitude 2.0 polymerase chain reaction test kit. It was the first "ready-made" hospital lab diagnostic test kit to receive provisional approval from the Health Sciences Authority for clinical use. Currently, the kit is being used in 45 countries.

Singapore's scientists also played a useful role in setting up and maintaining the genomic database for

Covid-19 in GISAID, a global initiative on sharing genetic data of all influenza viruses. This has enabled researchers to track the coronavirus as it evolved.

"The key ingredient that Singapore has going, as a global node for research and innovation, is in the depth of our collaboration and our openness to new ideas," Mr Heng said.

Researchers are also breaking new frontiers in areas like additive manufacturing, he noted, citing how Singapore companies 3D-printed Covid-19 nasal swabs locally when there was a shortfall.

"Covid-19 has shown how interconnected issues are," he said, adding that a shift towards greater interdisciplinary research will be critical.

The summit, in its second edition, brings together researchers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, as well as the social sciences and humanities, to exchange ideas and knowledge.

Added Mr Heng: "To tackle some of the hardest problems facing humanity, we must gather the best minds in Singapore and beyond. We must collaborate extensively to make new breakthroughs that can make an impact on the world and on people's lives."

chongcjy@sph.com.sg
tansuwen@sph.com.sg