

National conversation on Our Singapore "must engage silent majority"

By S Ramesh | Posted: 06 September 2012 2101 hrs



Logo for the "OurSGConversation" Facebook page.

SINGAPORE: The national conversation on Our Singapore, first announced by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in his National Day Message and elaborated upon during the National Day Rally, is gathering momentum in social media.

The official "OurSGConversation" Facebook page has garnered close to a hundred responses since it was launched less than a week ago by Minister for Education Heng Swee Keat, who is fronting the national conversation effort.

One contributor hopes that the Facebook page will help facilitate an authentic conversation for the benefit of Singaporeans.

A working mother of two shared her challenges and said she was "tense" about whether her children could excel in school and succeed in life. She added that working takes up time and energy, leaving little of her time for her children.

There were also calls for the conversation to have multi-language platforms for all Singaporeans, and not just focus on the English-speaking group.

Veteran Member of Parliament Seah Kian Peng said the national conversation would be all-encompassing.

"We have to give it a go, and I also ask people to give it a go. It cannot do us any harm, it can only do us good," Mr Seah said.

"All those sitting on the sidelines and not taking part, they are missing an opportunity where all of us want to shape the kind of Singapore we want."

"Everyone out there has a vision of the kind of Singapore we want. Be part of this, come join us, come create the Singapore we want for all of us and our children," he added.

Political watchers said that while social media is likely the people's preferred platform to express their views, it is important for the government to also reach out to the silent

majority.

Nominated MP Eugene Tan said: "This is where, again, the government needs to show that every view is taken seriously and where certain views cannot be accommodated, they try to be as comprehensive in explaining why, so that people will believe there is a serious effort to engage them.

"One certainly hopes that this conversation doesn't result in a divided and fractious society in which we see people being unable to disagree in a civil manner."

"There will be disagreements, and we should expect disagreements. The question is how do we deal with these differences," Assistant Professor Tan added.

Singaporeans also want to know what happens after the views are collected, he said.

"If you look at the previous consultations, like Singapore 21 and Remaking Singapore, the whole exercise ended with the publication of the report and little mention was made after that," said Assistant Professor Tan.

"We need to show that this is consultation for the purpose of making everyone feel that they belong. One certainly hopes that this whole exercise will not be a one-off consultation exercise, I certainly hope this will be an on-going conversation."

The Nominated MP hopes that the national conversation on Our Singapore will be the beginning of smaller conversations to enrich the Singapore story.

- CNA/wm