



PM Lee Hsien Loong, speaking at the annual Ho Rih Hwa Leadership in Asia lecture last night, said that for policies to succeed, Singaporeans must have a strong sense of identity and nationhood, a sense that being Singaporean is something to be proud of.
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PM paints stark reality of challenges in 3 critical areas

S'poreans must pull together to tackle issues of economy, population and identity, he says

Charissa Yong

For more than an hour last night, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong laid out the stark reality of the challenges Singapore faces in three critical areas: the economy, population and identity.

Warning that these challenges concern Singapore's survival, he said the country will face "profound problems" if Singaporeans do not pull together to meet them.

In a wide-ranging speech, he described how Singapore needs to maintain economic growth to improve lives in the short term, raise its total fertility rate in the medium term and forge a common identity in the long run.

The Government, for its part, is tackling these challenges through a raft of policies, PM Lee said at the annual Ho Rih Hwa Leadership in Asia lecture organised by the Singa-

pore Management University.

To maintain growth, it is encouraging productivity growth and rolling out the SkillsFuture scheme, which helps individuals master skills needed at the workplace.

And to boost population growth and cope with a rapidly ageing society, the Government is managing immigration, promoting active ageing and encouraging marriage and parenthood. "But the Government cannot solve these problems just by policies, because it requires all of us to change our norms, our culture, to become a more family-friendly country," PM Lee said.

All Singaporeans, not just the Government, have a role to play in tackling the challenges as this will decide whether the country will thrive and survive, he said.

"The fundamental reason we have succeeded over the last 50 years is not just that we've had good policies... the policies have

worked because the population has supported these policies, which could therefore be implemented," he said to an audience of 3,500, mostly students, at the Suntec convention centre.

For policies to succeed, Singaporeans must also have a strong sense of identity and nationhood, a sense that being Singaporean is something to be proud of, he said.

"It's a spirit which is not manufactured by the Government... it's a spirit which is embraced, created and owned by Singaporeans.

"To keep Singapore special... to feel a duty and a responsibility not only to your fellow citizens today but also to the next generation, to feel as one united people and not warring clans - I think in the very long term, that is our most fundamental challenge," he said.

Without this glue holding the country together, Singaporeans may become too comfortably cosmopolitan and no longer consider Singapore their home.

PM Lee said Singaporeans may also run the risk of being divided along the faultlines of race, religion

or values, a point he addressed later in a dialogue with the audience.

He acknowledged that the challenges are difficult and some of these policies are not easy. Raising productivity, for instance, is a "hard slog" requiring a transformation of society, he said. But Singapore has no other option.

The economy would otherwise stagnate and this would lead to social problems such as youth unemployment and a lack of hope for the future.

And if the population continued to shrink and age, "the whole tone of the society, instead of being young and forward-looking, would be pessimistic, oriented to the status quo or even looking towards a glorious past", he said.

Concluding, PM Lee said Singapore needs committed and responsible leaders who can win the support of Singaporeans, rally the country together and work to "give our next generation not only good lives, but also a brighter future".

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