

PM Lee's NDR speech a break from the past: analysts

By Elena Torrijos



Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day Rally Speech on Sunday was a refreshing change, said some analysts. (TV photo)

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day Rally Speech on Sunday impressed political analysts and observers as being more heart-felt and less technocratic than his speeches in previous years.

In talking about how the next chapter of Singapore's story should be about "hope, heart and home" in his two-hour speech, Lee also made it a point to express deep concern about growing xenophobia in Singapore and how there was a need for Singaporeans to be less small-minded in dealing with foreigners.

"He also made us feel – some might say guilty and some might say reflective – about how we treat others," Nominated Member of Parliament Eugene Tan, who is also assistant law professor at the Singapore Management University (SMU), told Yahoo! Singapore.

"He sought to encourage, to inspire. He himself was visibly moved. It was quite clear that he spoke deep from his heart and with conviction," Tan, who also described the speech as

“having a little of something for everyone”.

In his speech, Lee had also unveiled a series of new measures to tackle education, population and healthcare challenges to ensure the city-state stay competitive and relevant over the next 20 years.

Sundaram Janakiraman, associate professor and head of programme for finance at UniSIM's School of Business, echoed Tan's sentiments.

“Overall, I felt that this was the most impressive National Day Rally speech as the prime minister touched upon all important aspects of having a good home as Singapore,” Sundaram said.

“He was willing to appreciate all those who have contributed and asked the rest to take them as role models so that the rest also can contribute. At the same time, he did not hesitate to criticise the bad habits of Singaporeans which can hurt the image of Singapore in the world,” he noted.

Bridget Welsh, associate Professor in Political Science at SMU, acknowledged that Lee's speech was more “big picture” and “future-oriented” and less focused on technocratic solutions.

It also showed “that there is a growing understanding of some of the reasons for angst in Singapore, as ‘anxiety, lack of empathy and displacement’ have been pronounced and growing”, she said.

However, she said it continued a pattern of failing to address the systemic reasons for growing unease and, in some places, anger.

“It revealed the unwillingness to engage in a fundamental paradigm shift, harking back to old standby images of family, education, good behavior and the need to sacrifice,” she said.

“Not enough attention highlighted the challenges of raising incomes, reducing cost of living and addressing inequalities,” she noted. “More attention could have been spent on how to promote stronger social cohesion and integration.”