

## **Renewing political system is toughest challenge: PM Lee**

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(SINGAPORE) Updating the political system, restructuring the economy and tackling the population shortage.

All are tough challenges, and big priorities for the government.

But the toughest of the three is renewing the political system, indicated Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong yesterday, because it involves intangibles over a long time frame -- between 30 and 40 years.

For economic restructuring, the time frame is shorter -- 10 years, perhaps -- and the government is 'reasonably confident' of getting it done, Mr Lee said at an Institute of Policy Studies conference yesterday.

It's largely a matter of having the right economic policies, investing in education and infrastructure and putting in place an effective tax system.

As for the population shortage, Mr Lee said that the government has tried many fixes, but the problem remains despite its best efforts. Many countries face the same problem, but has no right answers for it.

Mr Lee said that the population shortage has to be fixed in the next 20 years, or Singapore will be in deep trouble.

Relaxing immigration offers only a partial solution in topping up Singapore's population and talent pool. And it must be done in 'a measured and calibrated manner', because there are social fallouts and it requires sensitive adjustments.

But ultimately, Singapore still needs a good political system to tackle the economic, demographic or other big challenges, said Mr Lee.

A good political system must ensure stable and capable government, good leadership and an engaged electorate. 'The system cannot be static or frozen, but must evolve with the times.'

Mr Lee said that the move to increase the number of Non-Constituency Members of Parliament and single-member constituencies, while reducing the group representative constituencies, and to affirm the Nominated MP system will ensure more diverse voices in Parliament.

'We are making these changes in good time. There is a mini election fever in town.'

But Mr Lee said that a general election, which is due within the next two years, 'is not imminent'.

'We are putting the legislation in place now so that everything will be ready when the GE is called.'

On the former government scholars who joined an opposition party recently, Mr Lee said that voters should judge them as vigorously as they do for the ruling People's Action Party candidates, for their integrity and what they can do.

'Having a sound political system is essential, but that in itself is not enough to produce political stability or good government,' he said.

That still depends on having the right people in charge -- 'an able, committed team coming forward to lead the country and take responsibility for our future'.

So the PAP's key task remains to identify promising people to form the next team, Mr Lee said.

'We have been making good progress on this. We do not have a complete next team lined up in Cabinet yet. But I am confident that by the next GE, the PAP will field a team which will contain the core of the next generation leadership, who can in time take over from me and my colleagues, and assure the country's future for the next 10-20 years.'

Mr Lee said that this leadership renewal will be a major issue in the next general elections.