

Analysts weigh in on National Day Rally 2015: What's next for Singapore?

Channel NewsAsia, 21 August 2015

The Republic celebrated its 50th year of independence on Aug 9, 2015, marking a major milestone for the country. Two weeks on, the Prime Minister will address the nation on Sunday.

Analysts Channel NewsAsia spoke to expect the Prime Minister to use the speech to sketch out what he believes will be the key ingredients for a successful Singapore in the next 50 years.

Dr Gillian Koh, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, said: "This is really the SG50 edition of the National Day Rally speech. So I don't think we can expect that anyone will avoid talking about the PAP Government's 50-year track record." She expects an emphasis on "those enduring values that had shaped the nature of the PAP Government ... efficiency, integrity, planning long term for the future".

"On that theme of planning long-term, the PAP Government would want to thank Singaporeans for going on that journey with them all these years, because it does take a voter to believe that what is promised today will come to fruition, 10, 15 years from now. This is also a message that will be good for SG50 and beyond," she added.

ADDRESSING PRESENT-DAY CONCERNS

Associate Professor Tan Khee Giap, Co-Director of the Asia Competitiveness Institute at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, expects to hear about what the Government has done since 2011 – on housing, public transport, healthcare, pre-school, and childcare.

"I think (PM Lee will touch on) how the Government's assistance, subsidies (has made an impact on) income disparity; (and) what the Government has done, in terms of congestion of public transport.

"I would expect the Government to paint a picture about the medium to longer economic perspective, and what kind of society in the longer run that the Prime Minister is expecting to see," said Assoc Prof Tan.

Analysts said PM Lee could address present-day challenges such as public transport, the cost of living and immigration issues.

Associate Professor Eugene Tan of the Singapore Management University's School of Law said: "This is a rally in the SG50 year, so I think there will be perhaps more emphasis on looking ahead. But I think the Prime Minister will have to be sensitive to some of the larger present-day concerns.

"Singaporeans will take the view that you can't look into the future with a lot of confidence, if the issues at present are not adequately dealt with. So the Prime Minister's challenge, given the diverse audience that will be paying attention to what he has to say, is to balance all these competing expectations and types of aspirations."

EYE ON THE GENERAL ELECTION?

With the General Election widely expected to be held in September 2015, analysts said this will inevitably be on the minds of Singaporeans and the Prime Minister during this year's National Day Rally. Can the SG50 message be separated from the fact that Singaporeans are likely to be headed to the polls soon?

"We cannot really separate them," said Assoc Prof Eugene Tan. "But certainly, one hopes that there will be a lot more emphasis on the SG50 dimension because I think the potential for the National Day Rally to get Singaporeans inspired, to get Singaporeans confident about what's going to come in the years ahead, particularly when we're at these very important crossroads, is an opportunity that shouldn't be missed.

"But given that we are very close to the next General Election, any Prime Minister would have an eye on that. The challenge is how you would blend the two, such that the messages that need to go out to the country doesn't come across as partisan electioneering."

One key theme that could emerge is the leadership required to take Singapore forward into the next 50 years.

Said Assoc Prof Eugene Tan: "I think the theme of leadership will be where the Prime Minister will spend a fair amount of time fleshing the issues out and trying to impress upon Singaporeans the need for a strong leadership. That's part of the whole process of trying to engage Singaporeans, trying to get them to appreciate, 'here's the Government's point of view'. I think that's where it will provide lots of food for thought."