

Challenge for PAP to retain same dominance as in the past: Ho Kwon Ping

Sharon See

Channel NewsAsia, 21 October 2014

SINGAPORE: The People's Action Party will face a challenge to retain the same degree of control over Parliament as it has had in the past, said Mr Ho Kwon Ping in his first lecture as S R Nathan Fellow for the Study of Singapore.

Speaking at the University Cultural Centre, Mr Ho said history has not been encouraging to founding political parties after three or four generations. He said historical trends elsewhere point towards a possible election loss by the PAP in the second half of the next 50 years.

The most likely reason could be a freak election, followed by a split within the ruling party and a massive loss of political legitimacy, said Mr Ho.

"Ironically, however, an electoral loss often enables drastic internal reforms to occur and new reformers to gain control of the party," he added. "This new leadership, coupled with disillusionment with the opposition-turned-governing-party, brings the founding party back to power, and a dynamic equilibrium, comprising a multi-party pendulum, becomes the norm. The present ruling parties in Taiwan, Japan, Korea and Mexico, are all versions of this same story."

'SELF-AGENCY' IN SINGAPORE'S YOUNGER GENERATION

In the area of governance, Mr Ho said there are several trends that would affect governability. These include the Government's desire to control information and the perception of widening inequality. However, he remains hopeful about Singapore's younger generation.

"What impressed me was the overwhelming sense of what sociologists call 'self-agency' - the simple notion that I can change things; that I am in control of my life and my future," said Mr Ho.

"What unites them all is the immediacy of self-agency - not waiting around for somebody else to do something you think is needed, but doing it yourself. This kind of political DIY or Do-It-Yourself attitude has in the past decade encouraged a participatory democracy which resembles Singapore's early years, but which then surrendered to decades of developmental authoritarianism."

Mr Ho said young Singaporeans now are willing to express themselves - whether it is support for events like Pink Dot, or the reading event held in response to the National Library Board's initial decision to remove children's books because of their homosexual content. He said this sense of self-agency is much stronger now and he believes it spells hope for the future of Singapore.