

MM Lee says Singapore must find fourth generation of leaders soon

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Channel NewsAsia, 1 February 2008

SINGAPORE : Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew believes that Singapore needs to find its fourth generation political leadership by the next two elections or it will be in deep trouble.

Speaking at a conference on Friday on the future of Singapore as a global city, he also said he believes that the optimum size of Singapore's population should be between 5 million and 5.5 million. This compares with the target of 6.5 million set by the country's planners.

The audience heard Mr Lee's views on why Singapore should not become like Hong Kong but maintain a certain greenery and space and be unique.

Mr Lee said: "I have not quite been sold on the idea that we should have 6.5 million. I think there's an optimum size for the land that we have to preserve the open spaces and the sense of comfort."

The main theme though was on how talent in a globalised world is scarce and for Singapore, this talent pool is scarce.

MM Lee said: "Now we're confined to a Singapore team. It's one thing going to the South China Sea for deep sea fishing. It's another going to Sentosa lagoon. The size of the fish are different.

"But despite that, we have succeeded because I could sense that if we do not produce a team A, what the original team has done would peter away."

Even among his grandchildren, only one took up a scholarship and he is concerned the rest may not return after their overseas study.

Mr Lee stressed several times that Singapore is losing its top talents abroad. And he is extremely worried that the country will not have enough people to produce a good team of leaders to come up with the best solutions to see Singapore through into the future.

He said that a core of "A" team Singaporeans, born and bred here, has to be found to lead Singapore in the next two elections.

Mr Lee added: "They are the guarantors of the values, the continuity, the sense of commitment that cannot waver in any crisis. I see that as our major threat. Not so much the attraction of talent coming in, but the loss of talent attracted out.

"If in this two elections, you don't see the silhouette of a fourth generation A team, then you have reasons to worry."

Mr Lee noted that many talented Singaporeans are drawn to big financial and legal institutions overseas. So the country has set up organisations like Contact Singapore to try and attract them back home with the opportunities available here.

If Singapore wins the challenge of retaining at least two-thirds of the nation's top talents here, then the country will have a strong central core.

And it is these leaders who have to manage expectations of a population which will increasingly see income disparity. - CNA/ch