

Lawrence Wong: Declining birth rate, ageing population mean Singapore will need to sustain the supply of migrant workers

Anna Maria Romero

Independent, 15 Aug 2023

SINGAPORE: At the Institute of Policy Studies' Reinventing Destiny conference on Monday (Aug 14), Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong underlined the importance of bringing in immigrants to work in the country, given current realities.

"If we are not able to bring in immigrants to top up the population, then we are in structural decline, and eventually the population will decline, the workforce will decline, and Singapore will decline," he is quoted by Bloomberg as saying.

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) held the conference on the occasion of founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's 100th birth anniversary.

IPS Director Mr Janadas Devan explained the conference's theme of the country's changing identity in the middle of global geopolitical uncertainty this way: "It is not to celebrate our past. It is in recognition of our fate: We are small so we can never be cocksure about our future. But we also know Singapore cannot exist without being defiant — not hubris, which means overweening pride, but let's say 'boldness'."

The Deputy Prime Minister spoke on the geopolitical shifts that Singapore is facing, along with global tensions and disruptions, as well as the "strategic competition" between the US and China, the two economic superpowers, even as he underlined that there are also silver linings for Singapore amid adversities.

Bloomberg reported that Mr Wong also touched on smaller birth rate numbers even as society ages, meaning migrant workers are needed.

However, this will not be a free-for-all, as the number of immigrants will be kept under control.

"At the end of the day, the numbers are constrained by how much we are able to integrate the new arrivals" and how they "embrace our values and way of life," he added.

"We will not have the ability to integrate all of them into our society. A small proportion will come in as permanent residents and it's gated, it's regulated. And we want to make sure that those who come in as permanent residents and eventually citizens are the ones who have the best chance to integrate into our society," DPM Wong said.