

Singapore Perspectives 2010 Explores Key National Issues

TEXT | PREM KOMAN



Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Hsien Loong with Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, Director of the Institute of Policy Studies

“HOME. HEART. HORIZON.” were the three areas of focus of “Singapore Perspectives 2010”, the annual conference hosted on January 25 by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), which examined challenges facing the country. A cutting-edge policy research centre attached to the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, IPS initiates strategic deliberation and research in its analysis of critical national interest.

Leading personalities at the conference participated in discussions on the status of the city-state, its multi-ethnic societal mix, and how it relates to the rest of the world.

Delivering the keynote address, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong highlighted the efforts of the government to tackle the recent economic crisis. With a long-term view, the government had acted not only to restructure the economy, but also to address major priorities like the population shortfall and updating the existing political system. IPS could help the government in formulating better policies and the Singapore Perspectives Conference was very relevant to the issues currently concerning the government, he said.

Issues such as the recent public discussions on the national pledge and the increasing number of immigrants raise questions about the social fabric of the country. Assistant Professor Daniel Goh, Department of Sociology,

NUS, traced the trends in post-colonial multiculturalism in Singapore.

President of the Mendaki Club, Aaron Maniam, who is from a multicultural family, highlighted how multiple identities generated connections and that navigating through diversity was a challenging process. Leong Ching, PhD student at the LKY School, was also among the panellists in the session that examined Singapore’s development and nation-building in relation to its social cohesion. She suggested that on the issue of integration, the government could take a leaf from the recent efforts to rally people to adopt NeWater, Singapore’s reverse osmosis water.

The second panel discussed the steps needed to build a civil and gracious society. Terence Chong,

fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, said the government was defining and setting the agenda in campaigns that promote kindness and courtesy, and argued for less government involvement in these matters. Social activist Braema Mathiapparanam, was among those who shared the sentiment. She advocated for other stakeholders to drive such movements. Gan Su-lin, director of the Centre for Culture and Communication at the Republic Polytechnic, pointed out that matters of public civility eventually depend on the individual. She spoke of how these characteristics can be developed through self-realisation – through “knowing oneself” and “governing oneself”.

Singapore’s people and its location are the country’s biggest assets, according to Lee Kwok Cheong, chief executive officer of Singapore Institute of Management. Participating in the third panel, he said that in order to connect with the rest of the world and to get the best people, Singapore needs practical and aspirational attractions. To be a global city, Singapore will have to become an “iconic place” - a hub for ideas and imagination. Banker Nizam Idris argued that although Singapore is a good place to accumulate wealth, it would be more attractive if more resources were allocated to social welfare. NUS Professor Henry Yeung argued for Singapore to leverage on its strengths in research and development as it moves to become an innovative knowledge economy. Singapore should reduce its top-down management style to be more dynamic and see more opportunities in the future, he said. **gisa**

