

## **10 million population in S'pore 'not really a ridiculous number' to plan for: Liu Thai Ker**

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Ten million is "not really a ridiculous number" to plan for the population of the city-state of Singapore, former master planner Liu Thai Ker said on Tuesday, Jan. 11.

Liu, who was speaking at a panel discussion held by the Institute of Policy Studies at its annual flagship conference, Singapore Perspectives, was responding to a question from a member of the online audience, who asked whether Singapore is becoming "too overcrowded".

### **Population growth needed for country to retain economic progress: Liu**

He explained his reasoning by saying that in light of the fast economic growth that is taking place in the countries surrounding Singapore, the country "must be prepared for possibly faster economic growth to stand tall among them".

"And to do so, we must accept population growth," the former chief architect at the Housing and Development Board (HDB) said.

Liu further elaborated by using Singapore's population growth as an example.

He said that in 1960, the country had a 1.6 million population, which then grew to around 5.8 million in recent years -- Ambassador-at-Large Chan Heng Chee, who was moderating the panel, pointed out that the number has shrunk by around 200,000 to 5.45 million due to the pandemic as of June 2021.

Liu noted that the increase in population in 55 years was around 4.2 million.

He said,

"What is 10 million? 10 million is just another 4.2 (million). How long would you want Singapore to stay as a sovereign state?"

If the growth rate is half of what it used to be, it will last for a hundred years (...) It's not excessive. But if we plan now, we can then make sure we can at least accommodate 10 million people."

Liu, who has done city planning for about 50 cities, including many Chinese cities, also used China as an example.

He said that even with the hukou registration system in China, which was introduced in 1958 to help regulate population distribution in the country, the cities of Shanghai and Beijing are growing bigger.

That's because "if the economy is thriving, you need people to move in," he said.

### **Made the suggestion with "a crisis mentality"**

Liu added that he had made the suggestion with "a crisis mentality", and that despite him having made the suggestion several years ago, he said he still has not received a response to him on the issue from the government.

Nevertheless, he said that he no longer wished to raise the issue as he had already "said his piece".

"I'm no longer with the government, I'm no longer responsible for the future of Singapore," he added.

Liu had first floated the idea of a 10 million population almost a decade ago in 2013, and had not wavered in his position since then, having repeated his stance multiple times.

The controversial proposal has sparked public outcry over the years, with the matter being debated both among social media users and between politicians from the ruling party and the opposition.

In a statement issued on July 1, 2020, the government clarified that they have not planned nor targeted for Singapore to increase its population to 10 million.

### **Singapore should plan for more population: George Yeo**

Former foreign minister George Yeo, who was on the same panel as well, then said he has "some sympathy" for Liu's view that Singapore should "plan for more rather than for fewer".

He said:

"If you plan for more, and we don't reach that number, then Singapore will be very spacious.

Whereas if we plan for fewer and because of the nature of things -- not everything is within our control (and) the population grows more than we anticipated -- then it will be very crowded."

He added that he has long been in favour of underground car parks in HDB estates as multi-storey car parks affect the quality of life by taking up space which could be set aside for other purposes, such as soccer pitches, which he said are "few" in number in Singapore.

He explained that with modern day technology, underground car parks could be made much less uncomfortable.

"What can be sunken should be sunken," he said, and reiterated his belief that the country should "plan for more (population)" as this would allow for "more options in the future.

"We don't wish it, that's fine. We're giving future generations options, but we don't plan for it now, when the time comes and they have to retrofit, the costs would be prohibitive."