

PM Wong tells students to follow their talents, says 'no need to compare with others' when choosing careers

He urged youths in Singapore to focus on their own strengths and abilities.

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Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Lawrence Wong held a dialogue with students from Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) at the Singapore Management University (SMU) on Jul. 2.

In a speech at the event, PM Wong highlighted that the government is working towards refreshing Singapore's social compact and providing more opportunities for young people to pursue diverse careers.

Organised by SMU, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), and student-led inter-university initiative Varsity Voices, the dialogue aimed to engage IHL students on topics such as jobs and the economy.

Students were also invited to pose questions to PM Wong.

Refreshing social compact and providing more opportunities for diverse careers

PM Wong noted at the start of his speech that Singapore was very different 30 years ago, when he was around the current age of the students in the audience.

He highlighted changes such as an improved living environment with green spaces and a well-connected public transport system, a stronger economy, and a more vibrant Singapore with many recreational options.

"We didn't have the Esplanade, we didn't have Marina Bay, we didn't have Gardens by the Bay, we didn't have the Sports Hub. We had none of these things. So much has changed in the last 30 years."

Despite "ups and downs along the way", including challenges like the Asian Financial Crisis, SARS, and the global financial crisis, life has gotten better in Singapore, he said.

He then turned to the question of what to expect, looking ahead over the next 20 to 30 years.

He said it is "impossible to predict what will happen" but said that Singapore will undoubtedly face more challenges, including those arising from emerging trends such as Artificial Intelligence (AI).

He also highlighted challenges from the external environment such as the end of the era of globalisation and free trade being replaced by "a new era of competition".

"The world is becoming more dangerous. It's becoming more fragmented, and it will be increasingly difficult for countries to come together to solve global problems," he said, citing the pandemic and cutting carbon emissions as examples.

PM Wong shared that there are several strategies to take Singapore forward, including refreshing Singapore's social compact.

He spoke about the Forward Singapore exercise as one of the initiatives contributing to this.

PM Wong said that the Singapore government will do more to provide assurances for Singaporeans at every stage of life, so they can look forward to affordable and quality homes, a good healthcare system and an education system that nurtures diverse talents.

PM Wong said: "We will have stronger safety nets to help Singaporeans bounce back from setbacks, so that no one feels that they have to fend for themselves in an uncertain world."

However, PM Wong noted that this cannot be done by the government alone, and that everyone is expected to play their part.

He cited several examples of this, including being willing to pay more for certain services so that lower income workers can earn more.

"That's why we call it a social compact – it's about the roles we play, and the responsibilities we owe to each other."

Another strategy would be to create more opportunities for diverse career options, considering that the younger generation in Singapore now have different definitions of success.

PM Wong said that attitudes and mindsets in the workforce are shifting.

For example, many young people are becoming entrepreneurs or choosing less conventional jobs like being an athlete or digital content creator.

He said that although there are many paths to choose from, it may still be overwhelming for some.

On this, he urged youths in Singapore to "start from within" by focusing on their own strengths and abilities.

"There is no need to compare with others, to squeeze into boxes we were not meant to fit. Instead, follow your own talents and strive to reach your own full potential."

PM Wong also urged the students to continue learning after graduation and as they gain work experience, so as to "cultivate and nurture" their abilities and strengths.

"It's really a journey.

Along the way, you will very likely face some rejections and setbacks, but if you work hard to cultivate your own virtues and excel at what you do, you will see breakthroughs."

He said that the government is also working on supporting the workforce by investing in SkillsFuture, which workers can use to get a "fresh injection of skills" and secure more work opportunities.

Contributing to a better society

PM Wong highlighted that a majority of the people in Singapore want a more inclusive society, something that was reflected in the Forward Singapore exercise.

He highlighted the example of Singaporeans helping families in need and reaching out to isolated seniors during the pandemic.

He also noted the recent oil spill incident, where many stepped up to volunteer in beach patrols and clean ups.

He added that the government will be providing more opportunities for those in Singapore to come together for common causes.

Some initiatives include setting up the Singapore Government Partnerships Office for Singaporeans to partner with the government more easily.

He also highlighted youth panels, which have recently been established to engage young people on issues such as financial security and sustainability.

PM Wong said that some participants will also get to present their recommendations at an inaugural Youth Policy Forum in August 2024, and called for those in the audience to join in for subsequent editions of youth panels.

He concluded his speech by saying that "Singapore has been and will always be the underdog," and that Singaporeans have to fend for themselves.

"And that's why, whatever our differences, we must always stand together as one people," he said, calling for the audience to work together and take Singapore forward. He said:

"All of you are the authors of this next chapter of our Singapore Story."