

# SINGAPORE PERSPECTIVES 2010

*Home.Heart.Horizon.*

**Monday, 25 January 2010**

Raffles City Convention Centre

## **PRESS RELEASE**

(as at 7.30 pm, 25 January 2010)

Restructuring of the economy, dealing with population shortfall The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) at the Lee Kuan School of Public Policy held its annual flagship conference Singapore Perspectives 2010 today. It was attended by close to 900 participants from academia, business, civil society and government sectors.

Restructuring of the economy, dealing with population shortfall and updating the political system were listed as the three priorities for Singapore by **Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong** today. He added that the last one would be the most difficult to achieve. Lee made these points in his keynote speech at the annual conference of the Institute of Policy Studies entitled Singapore Perspectives

Economic restructuring was necessary to maximise Singapore's growth capacity and it has been made more urgent by the global crisis, he said. He added that the way forward lies in qualitative growth and that Singapore must improve its productivity growth from the current 1% to 2-3%.

Lee also cautioned that the 5% growth rate average over the past decade would be difficult to sustain in the future. He said the Economic Strategies Committee would recommend a more realistic growth rate next week and the government would respond to it in the forthcoming Budget.

Pointing out that despite the government's best efforts to boost birth rates the total fertility rate in Singapore has not improved, Lee said topping up the population with immigration is necessary. However, because immigration has become a sensitive issue to Singaporeans, the immigration would be done in a "measured and calibrated manner."

Lee stressed that the most important factor in managing all the changes that Singapore is undergoing is a good political system. Acknowledging that updating the political system would be the most difficult challenge, he said the government is making changes to the system in good time for the General Election which is due within the next two years. He added that the election is “not imminent”.

Referring to IPS’s contribution to the policy discussions in Singapore, Lee said informed debate among opinion leaders provide the essential backdrop to policy making. He encouraged the public sector to share more information with IPS for its research purposes.

The IPS conference also dealt with a number of critical issues under the theme “[Home.Heart.Horizon](#)”.

**Dr Daniel Goh**, an Assistant Professor from the National University of Singapore, noted that while multiculturalism has succeeded to some extent in Singapore, there seemed to be some erosion in trust among the communities. He argued that a more open dialogue would help build trust among communities.

**Ms Leong Ching**, PhD Candidate at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, stressed that a good narrative would be important to fuse a diverse society and build unity of purpose. She referred to the NEWater initiative as a recent example of a narrative which the government used to rally the different segments of society around a particular cause.

**Aaron Maniam**, President of MENDAKI Club, shared his life experiences as a person from a diverse multicultural family background. He explained that at an individual level, everyone had to juggle with multiple identities. Some of these identities were highlighted or pushed into the background depending on the context one was in. He argued that navigating diversity is an endless process in a multiracial society.

The second panel of speakers dealt with the issue of building a gracious society. **Dr Terence Chong**, a Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, said that the concept of graciousness has been rooted in a set of government-defined ideas like civility and courtesy. Dr Chong advocated less government involvement in the nurturing of a gracious Singapore as he felt government-driven campaigns would be prescriptive and alienate stakeholders.

**Braema Mathiapparanam**, a civil society activist, also argued for more space for other stakeholders -- apart from the government -- to drive any movement to instill graciousness in Singaporeans. She agreed that government-driven campaigns could be seen as prescriptive and may turn people off. She highlighted the distinction between ‘living graciously’ and gracious living.

**Dr Gan Su-lin**, an academic from Republic Polytechnic, suggested that the starting point for graciousness is oneself. She explained that knowing oneself and governing

oneself would lead to a broader understanding within the community as a whole. She stressed the importance of personal awareness and sense of responsibility in nurturing graciousness.

The last panel discussed the prospects of Singapore as global city. **Lee Kwok Cheong**, from the private sector, said that it is imperative that Singapore become an “iconic place” to win over mobile international talent. In this regard it was very important that Singapore develops “aspirational attractions” that would distinguish the city from pure material benefits.

**Nizam Idris**, a banker, defined his vision of a global city-state as an entity that is driven not only by economic motivation, but also by the welfare of its denizens. He demonstrated the difficulties of living in a global city, particularly for those who would retire from participation in the workforce. He argued for more resources to be allocated for social welfare. Nizam stated that Singapore could succeed as a global city by providing more options to overcome the limitations of life in a global city.

**Professor Henry Yeung**, from NUS, sketched how Singapore could move from being a global city to become a global innovation cluster. To achieve this, Singapore must continue to leverage on the economy of agglomeration in areas such as research and development. He also noted that the Singapore economy must become more dynamic and less managed from the top down in order to maximise opportunities and ensure future success.

For the full conference programme and details, please visit  
[http://www.spp.nus.edu.sg/ips/synopsis\\_p2010.aspx](http://www.spp.nus.edu.sg/ips/synopsis_p2010.aspx)

If you need assistance, please contact  
Natalie Tay  
Tel: 6516-8389  
Email: [natalie.tay@nus.edu.sg](mailto:natalie.tay@nus.edu.sg)

\*\*\*\*\*