

S'poreans will be supported to pursue diverse aspirations, define their own success: PM Wong

Ng Wei Kai

ST, 2 Jul 2024

SINGAPORE – More opportunities will be provided for Singaporeans to chart their own paths and pursue their own definitions of success, said Prime Minister Lawrence Wong.

More ways for people to shape the character and tone of society will also be created, PM Wong told about 900 students from the universities, polytechnics and the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) during a dialogue on July 2, where he urged Singaporeans to contribute to the common good.

PM Wong outlined these plans as part of three strategies by which Singapore and its young can adapt and adjust to a more fragmented world on the cusp of another technological revolution.

Besides providing more opportunities and having Singaporeans play their part in shaping a better society, the Government is taking active steps to refresh Singapore's social compact, he said.

At his first dialogue with young people since becoming prime minister in May, PM Wong said today's students have access to far more opportunities than previous generations, with many more options and career paths.

Attitudes and mindsets are shifting, and more types of jobs are now respected. More people are opting to start their own business or take on less conventional careers, he said.

"The bottom line is that there are many more opportunities and possibilities for you to explore... We all have our own abilities and strengths. There is no need to compare with others, to squeeze into boxes we are not meant to fit," PM Wong said at the event at Singapore Management University (SMU).

Even then, one may face rejections and setbacks, and must be prepared for dry spells. By staying focused on working hard and striving for excellence, one's skills improve and, eventually, other doors will open, he told students at the event organised by SMU, the Institute of Policy Studies and student organisation Varsity Voices.

"I encourage all of you to embrace this attitude of learning and excelling at whatever you do. Not just when you are in school now, not just after you graduate, but throughout your lives," he said.

To this end, the Government will do more to support Singaporeans, he added.

"That is why we are investing significantly in SkillsFuture... As you get older, and even when you are in your 40s or when you are around my age in your 50s, you will be able to get a fresh injection of skills."

In February, PM Wong – who is also Finance Minister – announced at Budget 2024 that all Singaporeans aged 40 and above would get a \$4,000 top-up of SkillsFuture credits to encourage mid-career workers to refresh their skills and progress in their careers.

PM Wong cited some ways in which Singapore has changed since he was a student 30 years ago.

Then, about 55 per cent of each cohort went on to post-secondary education. Today, almost everyone progresses to university, polytechnic or ITE, while starting salaries have grown from \$3,000 to about \$5,000, he noted.

He acknowledged that powerful forces which Singapore does not have much control over, such as competition between major powers, are shaping the country's operating environment. The dawn of artificial intelligence is also likely to have a bigger impact than the advent of the internet.

But Singapore has adapted and found a way to thrive across its 60 years of nation building, and must continue to do so, said PM Wong.

He reiterated the Government's commitment as part of Singapore's refreshed social compact to give greater assurance to Singaporeans at every stage of life, such as through stronger safety nets that will help them bounce back from setbacks.

Singaporeans must also do their part, such as to embrace skills upgrading and be prepared to pay more for services delivered by fellow citizens, said PM Wong.

He noted that many Singaporeans had said during the Forward Singapore exercise that they do not want a society where everyone is out for themselves, but one where benefits are shared by all.

That is why the authorities started the Singapore Government Partnerships Office, to make it easier for those who want to step forward to work with other citizens, community groups and businesses to tackle issues of the day.

Four youth panels have also been set up so far to deliberate over issues of concern to young people, such as financial security and sustainability. PM Wong said the young people involved in them are putting in their time and effort, and will present their recommendations at an inaugural Youth Policy Forum in August.

"You may not have had the chance to participate in this round of youth panels, but there will be subsequent editions, and we welcome more of you to join in," he said.