

Updating political system necessary, but will take time **Challenge is to find a system that will work for generations, says PM**

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THE most difficult challenge facing Singapore is finding a political system that works for generations to come, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said yesterday.

He foresees the search taking the longest time.

In the meantime, the system must evolve with the times, rather than be static or frozen, he said at a conference examining challenges facing Singapore organised by the Institute of Policy Studies.

He was responding to Ambassador-at-large Tommy Koh, who asked which of three challenges Mr Lee had highlighted was the most difficult.

In his speech, Mr Lee identified three key priorities: Restructuring the economy, addressing the population shortfall and updating the political system.

Explaining why the last was the most difficult, he said: 'You are talking about intangibles, not just about a few people whom you hope to identify for the next generation of leadership, but the ethos and the spirit of a whole generation of Singaporeans, and particularly the brightest and ablest who have the most options and highest ambitions, to feel that this is something worth doing.'

It will also take the longest time as the task is to 'make this system work for the next generation (in) 30, 40 years' time, in a totally different world with a very different Singapore society'.

That system must be one which young Singaporeans feel is worth their commitment and to which they feel a sense of belonging.

The young, despite being loyal and proud Singaporeans, have the world as their oyster, he noted.

'We want to make sure that enough feel passionately enough about Singapore, not just to participate in discussion and vote in elections, but to say, 'Let's make this place work. I'm going to be part of the team'.'

His responsibility, he said, is to put in place the next generation of leaders who will ensure Singapore's prosperity and vibrancy as a society.

In his speech, PM Lee reiterated that leadership renewal would be the most important issue in the next general election.

He noted that significant changes were being made to the political system, citing proposals to have more single-seat constituencies, smaller Group Representation Constituencies and more Non-Constituency MPs, as well as a 'cooling-off' period on the eve of polling.

The changes will, among other things, ensure a more diverse set of voices in Parliament, and encourage Singaporeans to engage in national issues, he said.

He added: 'A weak government or divisive national politics would be disastrous for Singapore.'

While a sound political system is essential, it is not enough to bring about good governance and political stability without the right people at the helm.

He said the PAP team at the next general election would contain the 'core' of the new generation of leaders.

Asked about reports of well-qualified Singaporeans joining the opposition, Mr Lee said every generation would have a spectrum of views.

It is also one way for societies to develop a breadth of perspectives and an ability to adapt to new situations, with people able to solve problems, he added.

Mr Lee stressed that anybody who enters politics should not just have ability, but also integrity and commitment.

As for the newcomers in the opposition, he said: 'We wish them well.'

'But we hope Singaporeans will judge individuals like that as rigorously as they judge individuals who join the PAP...

'In other words, not just what degree do you have, but what sort of person are you and what can you do for Singapore. And that is a matter which... in the PAP we scrutinise very hard before they come in.'

'I can tell you that we interview many, many scholars, each time we field a few of them... and we often field people who are not scholars,' he added.

'So, it is good to see it in perspective. For the opposition, it is a change. You have one scholar or two, and they can think, 'Wow, this is a luminous transformation'.

'It is a significant development... but finally, let's look at the person, not what degrees he has, but what he is able to do for Singapore.'