

## Young's DIY approach 'can propel Singapore's progress'

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THEIR forefathers helped Singapore make the leap from Third World to First World. Now, it is up to the younger generation to keep the momentum going over the next 50 years, said businessman Ho Kwon Ping.

He is, however, hopeful that young Singaporeans, with their boundless optimism, are up to the task. Their sense of self-agency - acting to bring about the change they want - sets them apart from his generation.

He said: "What unites them all is the immediacy of self-agency; not waiting around for somebody else to do something you think is needed, but doing it yourself."

Mr Ho made the point when he wrapped up his lecture as an S R Nathan fellow yesterday, passing the baton to the young while calling on them to help the country progress beyond economics.

The younger generation's "do-it-yourself" approach, he said, could spark the return of the "participatory democracy" that thrived in Singapore's early years before what he described as its surrender to a period of developmental authoritarianism.

When it comes to politics, the young are looking towards loftier ideals, like championing civil society causes, he said, pointing to the mass reading event staged this year to protest against the National Library Board's decision to remove a book with same-sex content. "Whereas in my generation, the Government and the PAP were always the reference point around which all discussion revolved, whether positive or critical, today's young people seem to be bored by too much purely political discussion," said Mr Ho. "They want to move on, to talk about: What next?"

The young, he added, are not content with a top-down approach, recognising that they have a role to play in building Singapore's future from the ground up. "They regard the Government and the PAP as a matter of fact - not a saviour, not a tyrant, but somewhat like a parent who is respected but who must be grown out of," said Mr Ho.

"And clearly, a paternalistic political culture is not going to excite, much less retain, the loyalty of younger Singaporeans."

As Singapore changes, politicians across party lines will find the country a greater challenge to govern. Mr Ho identified some key trends that would make it an uphill task, such as the struggle to hold the political centre together in the face of polarising extremes, and social media eroding the Government's ability to control information.

The diminishing status of political leaders will also pose a challenge, he said. "Future leaders simply cannot command sufficient respect and moral authority to decree what is acceptable and unacceptable criticism."

But he cautioned that political power being shared among competing groups could give rise to "non-constructive" politics.

A political culture of mutual respect must, therefore, be established to prevent political discourse from descending into "theatrical farces" seen in Hong Kong and Taiwan, he added.

In his lecture, Mr Ho also pointed out that the civil service - which has known only "one political master in 50 years" - would need to learn to stand on its own.

"With more electoral volatility in the future, it is imperative that the civil service work harder to develop its own sense of self, its own ethos and values," he said.