

It's not a target, not all will lose PR status

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His comments have sparked a wide range of reactions, which Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong acknowledged and welcomed.

But lest the figure he cited on Monday — that “hopefully maybe, 50,000”, or 10 per cent, of the 500,000 permanent residents here will be asked to take up citizenship — be taken as a target, Mr Goh’s press secretary Ho Tong Yen said yesterday that it was “only for illustrative purposes”.

In reply to media queries, the press statement from the Prime Minister’s Office said that Mr Goh was making a “general observation” to show that the Government would be managing the inflow of PRs and that some would be encouraged to become citizens.

Mr Goh was at a dialogue session at Marine Parade when he commented on the “possible change in policy” regarding PRs, said Mr Ho. This included how those who may be approached to take up citizenship would not have their PR status renewed if they said no.

But that will not be the outcome for all PRs rejecting the offer of citizenship, the statement said, although it did not specify how this will be decided.

“The Government will continue to review and refine its policies to ensure that those who have PR status are an asset to our society, and that those who are given citizenship are, in addition, assessed to be committed in their allegiance to Singapore,” said Mr Ho.

Jurong GRC MP Halimah Yacob welcomed the latest comments, but felt the important point was that PRs should eventually make up their minds if they want to take up citizenship.

She told MediaCorp: “Otherwise, we would have a situation where they would stay here just to have the best of both worlds.”

The message yesterday, according to Singapore Management University law lecturer Eugene Tan, is that PRs should feel assured they are not living in a “harsh regime”.

At the same time, Singaporeans are guaranteed that PR and citizenship status are not given out liberally, Assistant Professor Tan said. “We’ll continue to be an immigrant society, so whatever policy we adopt will also be competitive to what other countries are offering,” he added.

Institute of Policy Studies research fellow Leong Chan Hoong agreed that there have been PRs “who have been anxious about the matter” after it was raised on Monday.

While there was a sense of relief for some after the clarification, others whom MediaCorp spoke to said the Government could also shed more light on the considerations in awarding citizenship.

Mrs Jennifer Tan, 60, said her Canadian husband, who has been a PR for “nearly 10 years”, had applied for Singapore citizenship in March.

But he is “still waiting for his application to be processed”. Said Mrs Tan: “He has continuously worked for the same employer and has been a taxpayer ... so why the onerous process and the long wait? It seems contrary to the Government’s objective.”