

MM on traffic congestion, the A team

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TODAY, 2 February 2008

JUST two days after the policymakers unveiled the third and final part of a massive plan to overhaul private car usage and public transport in Singapore, the Minister Mentor has expressed scepticism over whether it would solve the problem of traffic congestion.

Speaking at a dialogue session at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) on Friday, Mr Lee Kuan Yew said the Government's prediction of consumer behaviour was "not quite right".

"Having paid so much for the car, you might as well pay the ERP and use it. Now we know that the person who bought the car will use it, no matter the price."

Mr Lee added: "So ding dong ding dong ... feedback from all courted. (Cap on vehicle growth rate) is now 1.5 per cent. If it goes on, six or seven years on, when your expansion of roads is less than 1 per cent, another gridlock. So, your ERP will become punitive."

Describing the Electronic Road Pricing (ERP) and the Certificate of Entitlement system as "hard policies", he said: "Singaporeans are first-class grumblers. Some people who want a car say that's all right, why must we travel at 45kmh? Bangkok still survives on 15kmh. But Singapore has to be different. If you do not have free-flowing traffic, you lose your competitive edge."

The need for Singapore to constantly stay ahead is why the country requires an "A team" of political leaders — a theme that Mr Lee said he will "come back again and again to".

Calling the Old Guard the "original A team", Mr Lee said he was fortunate to find a "more than equal" team of leaders to take over the mantle.

"If in these two elections, you don't see the silhouette of a fourth generation 'A' team, then you have reasons to worry."

Adding that the Public Service Commission tracks the top 300 students in Singapore, Mr Lee said he was told that half of these "are not applying for scholarships".

Which is why Mr Lee described the bleeding of Singapore-born and bred talents as the country's "major threat".

Said Mr Lee: "We need a central core of Singaporeans. They are the guarantors of the values, continuity and the sense of commitment that will not go away in any crisis."

Responding to IPS chairman Tommy Koh's question on how the "Singaporean system of democracy" could evolve, including the setting up of a commission on human rights or an ombudsman, Mr Lee said it was "a matter for the present generation to decide".

Still, he added: "The ultimate objective is clean, corruption-free, capable, effective, meritocratic, fair government. As long as we remove malpractices, I don't see the need for more political policing."

But Professor Koh said he would "respectfully disagree and point out that mature democracies like England, France and so on, they do have all these institutions, which act not as policemen but in order to help governance, fairness".