

## **DPM Lawrence Wong: 'Ethos of accommodation and compromise' helps Singapore thrive in diversity**

**He also highlights three broad shifts that make the external environment less benign and hospitable for small states like Singapore**

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SINGAPORE — Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong believes that Singapore has developed an "ethos of accommodation and compromise" that has enabled the city-state to thrive despite being a society of great ethnical diversity.

DPM Wong added that while Singapore has managed in its 58 years of existence to build a sense of solidarity among its diverse population, some tensions among ethnicities still remain and the city-state remains a work in progress in forging a common bond among the citizens.

"There will always be tensions, but I think we have developed an ethos of accommodation and compromise among our society," he said on Monday (14 August).

"Accommodation and compromise are not seen as a bad words in Singapore. In a multi-ethnic society and a society of great diversity, if every group insists on their maximum entitlement and takes every compromise as a slight or an insult to their tribe, I think we will be in for huge trouble.

"But over the years, we have instead developed a sense that, while no group will get everything it wants, there is a sense that this is a (societal) system that works for all, and that's what we'll try to stay for as long as we can."

DPM Wong was speaking at a dialogue session for the "Reinventing Destiny" conference at the Sands Expo and Convention Centre, held to mark the 100th birth anniversary of the late founding prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew.

It was organised by the Singapore University of Technology and Design's Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities, the National University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, and the Institute of Policy Studies.

### **New challenges amid less benign, less hospitable climate**

During the dialogue session, which was chaired by CNN show host and Washington Post columnist Fareed Zakaria, DPM Wong said that while Singapore has defied the odds of history to thrive after independence, there are new challenges and uncertainties for the city-state in a "topsy-turvy" global climate ahead.

He highlighted three broad shifts: the evolving global multilateral trading system, with outlines of a new paradigm with more active state involvement in markets; a different pattern of globalisation, shaped not by economic logic but by geopolitical alignment and security; and the big shift in the nature of the relationship between the United States and China from strategic engagement to strategic competition.

"These big changes mean that we will be operating in an external environment that will be less benign and less hospitable for small states like Singapore," he said.

"(But) we are starting off in a far stronger position today. We have more resources, we are better-equipped to deal with our vulnerabilities, we have a good system to put in place effective and long-term policies, and we have a solid reputation as a reliable and trusted hub for the region and the world. We can build on all of these competitive strengths to move forward."

### **Greatest contestation of ideas amid domestic politics**

On the domestic front, DPM Wong noted that the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) does not have the near-total dominance it once enjoyed, and the political environment in Singapore nowadays is that of a "greater contestation of ideas" for every new policy and decision that is made.

"It's harder and harder to have policies where everyone says is a wonderful thing to do. There will be some trade offs to make, balances to strike," he said.

"What's important, certainly for me as a leader of (the fourth-generation PAP) team, is to think about what makes sense, what's right for Singapore and Singaporeans now and in the long term, and convince people that this is the right thing, and that's what we'll continue to do."

Responding to a question by Dr Fareed on whether he will be able to clean up PAP's image after the recent spate of scandals, DPM Wong said that, beyond those incidents, he has learnt to have a "certain sense of equanimity" after the broader experience he has had in the government.

"When things go right, when people praise us and say 'we are No.1, we are the gold standard', don't let that go into our heads," he said.

"At the same time, when there are challenges and setbacks, we learn from the setbacks. we learn from the challenges. It's the mistakes and the failures where we find greater motivation to learn and be better. That's the attitude I take."