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Headline: Singapore's 'key future challenges': Economy, population, identity

**GOOD LEADERSHIP, POLICIES 'PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE'**

# S'pore's 'key future challenges': Economy, population, identity

*S'poreans must do their part to avoid dangers of 'dissolving into globalisation', warns PM Lee*

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**SINGAPORE** – Singapore will face critical challenges in the next 50 years in keeping the economy strong, raising total fertility rate and strengthening national identity, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong yesterday.

To overcome these, good leadership and policies — many of have already been put in place, said Mr Lee — will play an important role, but for the longer-term challenges brought about by a rapidly ageing population and globalisation, the Government alone cannot resolve them and Singapore-

ans must also do their part, he added.

Speaking at the seventh instalment of the Ho Rih Hwa Leadership in Asia Public Lecture Series held at the Suntec Convention Centre yesterday evening, Mr Lee sketched out how each of these challenges will unfold over several time horizons.

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The most immediate challenge facing the Republic, in the next decade, will be raising productivity in order to grow an already-advanced economy, said Mr Lee. Over a longer time frame of 25 years, population challenges will come to the fore because of low birth rates, while the most profound and fundamental challenge in the next 50 years will be in strengthening the national identity.

"To keep Singapore special; to maintain a sense of 'I am a Singaporean. I am proud of it and I want to uphold it' ... I think in the very long term, that is our biggest challenge," said Mr Lee.

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Addressing about 3,500 participants, including diplomats, students, teachers and public officers, Mr Lee warned that Singapore runs the danger of "dissolving into globalisation", with no sense of a distinct identity as the country becomes more cosmopolitan and Singaporeans become increasingly well-travelled.

Citing that about 200,000 Singaporeans currently reside abroad for work and studies, he said: "It is good that our people are comfortable living over the world, but if we become so comfortable abroad that we lose the sense that only Singapore is truly home ... We will just melt away, be dissolved by globalisation."

The other danger is that Singaporeans could fracture into different groups, each with its own exclusive identities, said Mr Lee, who cited traditional fault lines such as race and religion, as well as newer ones such as LGBT issues.

External influences such as the Is-

lamic State can also create schisms in the Republic's multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, he said.

"How do we reinforce what makes us unique as Singaporeans ... How do we maintain this sense of nationhood and strengthen this identity and common purpose, so that our people will want to make Singapore a success and a shining light in the world?" he asked.

To bind society together, Mr Lee said Singaporeans must have a shared sense of what the country stands for and what they want to achieve together — things that the Government cannot create. It is forged when citizens live together, overcome crises together, help one another in times of need and celebrate successes, he added.

He cited instances this year in which such a spirit was shown, including the outpouring of grief over the death of founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in March, as well as the earthquake in Sabah that claimed the lives of nine Singaporeans, including seven



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**Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong**

Primary 6 students. "Life will teach us lessons. Difficult times will come, and through that, we will learn what it means to be a Singaporean," he said.

In happier times, such as during the recent SEA Games, the national pride on display was not only because of Team Singapore's record-breaking medal haul, he said. "We felt proud to be Singaporean ... (because of) the way our people conducted themselves. When the music stopped suddenly when it shouldn't, Singaporeans continued to sing Majulah Singapura with gusto and pride," Mr Lee said, drawing applause from the audience.

The Prime Minister also lauded marathoner Ashley Liew, who forewent his lead during the Games event to wait for competitors who had mistakenly taken the wrong path, for his embodiment of "class and sportsmanship".

"Such a spirit cannot be manufactured by the Government. These are spontaneous shows of pride and solidarity," he said. "(It's a) spirit that

is embraced, shaped and owned by Singaporeans, people who stand up for these values in their daily lives and actions, and make Singapore a distinct nation that we can all be proud of and want to belong to."

Outlining a raft of plans the Government has made to confront these challenges, Mr Lee reiterated that they must be founded on good leadership — "leaders with a sense of responsibility, wholly committed to Singaporeans and Singapore, leaders who can win your support and rally the country together, leaders who can work with us and make the next 50 years as glorious as the last 50 years", he said.

Mr Lee also paid tribute to pioneer leaders such as Mr Ho Rih Hwa, after whom the lecture series was named. The former businessman has served the country as Ambassador to Thailand, Belgium, the European Economic Community and the United Nations in Geneva, but has refused to accept any remuneration. "He saw this as national service, a duty he was so honoured to discharge," said Mr Lee.