**Greater role by Govt in pre-school education**

**REPORT: EKÖN MAG**

New anchor operators of pre-schools will be increased from 13,000 now to 16,000 by 2020. SIT and UniSIM will be Singapore’s fifth and sixth universities.

Mr Sim Kim Boock is heartened to know that the quality of pre-schools will be improved, and more support will be given to low- and middle-income families. This and other initiatives were announced by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in his National Day Rally speech. (See reports below.)

Mr Tan, 41, lives with his wife, Madam Emy Maryve- art, and four children in a three-room flat in Ang Mo Kio.

Their eldest child, Jared, 3, is Indonesian. The other three children are Singaporeans – Jared, four; Justin, two; and Jasmine, who is just week-old. They made the news when Madam Emy gave birth to Jasmine by the roadside last Tuesday.

More active role

Last night, Mr Lee said the Government would play a more active role in pre-school education and raise substantial resources to support it.

First, the Government will establish a new statutory board to oversee pre-school education.

Second, it will provide and upgrade pre-school teacher training in new ways.

Third, it will bring in new anchor operators and upgrade existing ones.

In addition, it will pilot a few Government-run pre-school centres to test new concepts in kindergarten education.

It will also give more support to low- and middle-income families, so that pre-school education enjoys equal footprint.

“But we will not nationalise the pre-school sector,” said Mr Lee.

“Having a mix of operators offers diversity and choice. We shouldn’t be in a fix because of that choice.

“We should raise the base, make sure that wherever you go, it’s affordable kindergarten education.”

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports will follow up on this new move.

Mr Lee said: “The transformation will take some time, but I’m confident that in five to seven years, we will be able to see results.”

Mr Sim, an air-con technician who makes about $2,000 a month, said: “I love my kids, I don’t want to rob children of their childhood.”

He has three children who are not yet in kindergarten.

“I sometimes worry how I will pay for my kids’ kindergarten fees in the future.”

– Mr Sim Kim Boock (above with his family), an air-con technician who makes about $2,000 a month.

“I hope they heard the Prime Minister’s reminder to us, that we have to work harder to make ends meet.

“Like former marketing agency boss Josephine Ng, I believe in fighting to achieve what one wants.”

But, as PM Lee said, the Government can’t write the narrative, this happy ending can be a reality, and not just in literature.

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What of the characters?

Though he did not get a proper education, his son is in Primary 1; already goes for Chinese tuition, which cost him $1,000 a month.

“For the next few years, my son will already be at a very diverse, I hope this announcement will close the gap between the various programmes and provide a level playing field for children.

“Happy for more chances”

Mr Lee said: “I don’t know if my children will one day to be able to go to university. It really depends on whether they can study or not.

“I’m happy that if there are more universities available, they will have more chances to go to.”

Associate Professor Pauline Strachan, who teaches sociology at the National University of Singapore, told The New Paper that the pre-school landscape is very diverse, I hope this announcement will close the gap between the various programmes and provide a level playing field for children.

“More hope that parents will not get overboard on the importance of pre-school and start competing even earlier.”

“I hope they heard the Prime Minister’s reminder not to rob children of their childhood.”