PM Lee on building a Singapore of hope and heart

BY VICTORIA BARKER

As the world around us changes rapidly, Singaporeans must keep on improving, adapt to changes and exploit new opportunities to thrive, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said in his National Day Rally speech last evening.

In what is considered the biggest annual political address, Mr Lee stressed that the future—or the "next chapter in the Singapore Story"—is for Singaporeans to create, and a clear direction must be set to avoid drifting with the tide.

"Think seriously about our future, contribute your ideas and work together to make it happen," he said. "If we stand still, we are going to fall behind."

Speaking in Malay, Mandarino and English over 130 minutes, Mr Lee addressed many issues, including the country's declining birthrate as well as relations between Singaporeans and non-Singaporeans.

The Government "cannot give up" on getting Singaporeans to marry and have children, he stressed. A new package of measures will hopefully be worked out by the time the Government's White Paper on population is published in January, said Mr Lee. Among some of the ideas that have been raised is paternity leave.

"We've said no for a very long time, but I think it's time we changed...so please use your paternity leave for the purpose it is given," Mr Lee quipped.

"We should give some consideration to giving couples with young kids priority when they book HDB flats...it may encourage them to have a kid so that the flat will come faster."

On the topic of foreign talent, Mr Lee expressed concern about the double standards faced by foreigners here. When a foreigner says or does something wrong...very often, the behaviour is uncritcised. And when a foreigner does a good deed, very often it goes unnoticed," he noted.

Though it is "fair enough" to express concern or disagree with the Government's immigration policies, this one-sided response to cases of foreign misconduct "reflects badly on us", he said.

Mr Lee continued: "Singaporeans have to show a generosity of spirit to one another...new arrivals must also embrace our values, commit themselves to Singapore and integrate into our community."

He added: "We may be a small island, but we cannot be small-minded...we must be caring, generous, decent people."

As for education, Mr Lee said that the pre-school sector will not be nationalised, as having a mix of operators would offer diversity and choice for parents.

However, to raise the quality of pre-school education, a statutory board will be set up and pre-school teacher training will be upgraded.

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION
THE pre-school sector will not be nationalised because a mix of operators would offer diversity and choice for parents.

However, to raise the quality of pre-school education, a statutory board will be set up and pre-school teacher training will be upgraded.

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION
THERE will be more full-time places for applied degrees, with the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) and SIM University (UniSIM) becoming Singapore's fifth and sixth universities.

SIT will expand its places and award degrees in its own name. UniSIM will add full-time programmes and build on strong industry links while remaining a private university.

The change will raise the current full-time university intake by 3,000 students to 16,000 per year by 2020. More part-time places will also be available, and government bursaries and loans will also be extended to part-time UniSIM students.

Three Cabinet members also spoke at the Rally
SEE REPORTS ON HOME A4