A 23-YEAR-OLD economics undergraduate inspired the PAP slogan Staying Together, Moving Ahead.

Explaining how this came about, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said Singapore Management University (SMU) student Jovine Loy took part in a Budget simulation debate organised by SMU and the Ministry of Finance earlier this year.

She had just returned from a semester in China where she saw first-hand what the competition was like.

She felt Singapore needed a Budget that ensures the country stays ahead and looks after those at risk of being left behind, Mr Lee told the rally.

She titled her proposal Staying Ahead, Staying Together, submitted it, made a speech and it was voted the best by her peers and professors.

Mr Lee said when he made his round-up speech in Parliament during the Budget, he quoted her and mentioned her title.

And when the PAP debated what slogan to use in the general election, it came up again.

"We tossed it around, turned it about, decided to change it a little bit to make it Staying Together, Moving Ahead," he said.

He added that it was good the slogan came from a young person as "it reflects how the young people think, what they want and how they express their views".

The PAP got Miss Loy's permission to use the slogan. She was invited to yesterday’s rally but could not make it as she had to prepare for exams.

Last night, she told The Straits Times she was "surprised" a slogan conceptualised for a student debate would be used for "something so big".

The middle of three children grew up in a middle-class family — she lives in a terrace house in Kovan. Her father works in a bank and her mother is a housewife.

She said her social conscience was sharpened when she was at Raffles Girls School by visits to the elderly who live alone in one-room flats.

As to whether a political future beckons, she said she has "no interest in politics".