SINGAPORE: Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day Message this year has been described as positive, encouraging and well-tuned to the challenges facing Singapore.

The reactions came from Members of Parliament and a political analyst Channel NewsAsia spoke to.

MPs added that many residents are aware that the Singapore economy is doing well. But they are also concerned with the rising cost of living.

Singaporeans welcomed the better-than-expected economic growth numbers announced by PM Lee.

Singapore's economy grew 7.6% in the first half of this year, while the growth forecast for the whole year has been raised to between 7% and 8%.

Many were also happy to hear that the government will enhance the value of their HDB homes so as to address the challenge of widening income gaps.

But MPs stressed that progress must be felt across the board.

Zainudin Nordin, Mayor of Central Singapore CDC, said: "We need to bring on board everybody... We need to ensure that nobody is left behind... even though they are facing problems at the moment.

"They must be able to be brave enough to say, 'I know I have bills to pay, I know I have my family to feed, but if I don't upgrade myself, how can I seize the opportunity, how can I get the skills that benefit the growth sector'."

Denise Phua, MP for Jalan Besar GRC, said in an email response that she agreed that the government must manage effectively the challenge of widening income gaps.

"I propose that the government reconsider its position that services pertaining to low income families, elderly and the disabled be led by the people sector," she wrote.

Prime Minister Lee also spoke about how Singaporeans had been adapting well to changing global economic conditions.

Political watchers, however, said that there is also the danger of complacency setting in, especially when the going is good.

So they said that the message of life-long learning must be continuously emphasised.

"Good economic times are in a way a double-edged sword. There will be segments who feel that, 'I am doing well, is there really a need for me to upgrade?' This is something which the PM will try to address," said political analyst Eugene Tan.

Another challenge is the ageing population, and this calls for policies and initiatives that can successfully address the issue.

The government has been trying to face this issue head-on, said Mayor Zainudin Nordin.

"We want to make sure people are being helped in many ways, the 'many helping hands' approach is always the way we want to do it," he said.
“So we try to work with the people - the public and also from the private sector. If they are still useful, are economically viable, we need to train them, continue to upgrade (them), as long as they can deliver and do the job as best as they can. These are things we can do together with the people and the employers,” he added.

“Ageing population and income divide are concerns that are not exclusive to Singapore. They are phenomena which are affecting most developed countries around the world. The main cause for the ageing population is longer life expectancy and the main cause of the income divide is globalisation. This was pointed out by (the) PM during his message,” said Michael Palmer, MP for Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC, in an email response.

“But these are problems which are not going to go away and we have to face them. If we don't deal with them, the problems will just get worse,” he added.

“You can set the best policy frameworks and all, but if Singaporeans are not persuaded, Singaporeans are not convinced, then there is a limitation to what those policy measures can do. Ultimately, it is up to each Singaporean to seize the opportunities and prepare for the future challenges that lie ahead,” said Assistant Professor Eugene Tan. - CNA/ir