

PM Lee spells out S'pore's challenges

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has highlighted three challenges Singapore will face in the next 50 years.

The challenges are maintaining economic growth to improve lives in the short term, raising total fertility rate in the medium term, and forging a common identity among Singaporeans in the long run.

These would concern Singapore's survival, Mr Lee said at the Ho Rih Hwa Leadership in Asia lecture, organised by the Singapore Management University. It was held at the Suntec Convention Centre yesterday.

In the next 10 years, Singapore needs to improve its productivity and maintain its economic growth. It is the only way Singaporeans can continue finding good jobs and having opportunities, he said.

Singapore's growth has been high, with its real gross domestic product soaring 40 times since Independence in 1965.

But this growth is slowing. Its GDP is forecast to grow by 2 to 4 per cent a year, and productivity must grow by 2 per cent, he said.

Looking at the next 25 years, Singapore must tackle its demographic challenge of an ageing population and declining birth rates.

Ultimately, the best and only solution is for Singaporeans to marry and have more children, Mr Lee said.

But the biggest of these three challenges is to maintain a sense of pride in being Singaporean – something that cannot be manufactured by the Government, he said.

“For the next 50 years, we will need good policies. But just like the past 50 years, for these policies to succeed, we need a strong sense of identity and nationhood. We need to be proud to be a Singaporean,” he said.

Otherwise, Singapore runs the danger of dissolving into disunity with people so comfortable with living abroad that “we lose the sense that only Singapore is truly home...”