PM unveils plans to secure S’pore’s future

- More support for pre-school, tertiary fees
- Moves to raise retirement age, CPF rates
- Steps to defend against climate change

BUILDING SINGAPORE, GENERATION BY GENERATION

Over the years, I have talked about many major projects at National Day Rallies. These are all progressively taking shape. In 2013, I described Jewel at Changi Airport. At that time, Jewel was just a concept, an ambition. Now we have completed it, on time and within budget. Singapore has a spectacular new gateway to the world. Many of you have visited it, and we are all rightly very proud of it. What we talk about, this Government, we still deliver. In the same way, we are realising our other ambitions. ...All these will not be done in a decade, or even in one generation. There will be space for successive generations to fill with their hopes and dreams. Each new generation will have their mark on our city, as their predecessors have done.

PRIME MINISTER LEE HSIEN LOONG

Pre-school, tertiary education to be more affordable

Eight in 10 pre-school places will be government-supported in five to six years’ time, bringing it to the same ratio as public housing.

The monthly income ceiling to qualify for additional subsidies for pre-school education will be raised from $7,500 to $12,000 next year. The quantum of subsidies will also be increased.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said yesterday that these are part of the Government’s plan to make quality early years education more affordable and accessible.

He said that in the future, 60 per cent of pre-school places will be government-supported, up from the 50 per cent currently.

With 30,000 more households qualifying for additional subsidies, pre-school expenses should come down to the costs of primary school education.

“Teaching on tertiary education fees, PM Lee said the Singapore Institute of Technology and the Singapore University of Social Sciences will lower their yearly tuition fees next year — from $1,000 to $1,200 for general degree courses. Government bursaries for university, polytechnic, Institute of Technical Education, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Lasalle College of the Arts students will also be enhanced.

“Anyone who works hard will have a chance to succeed, regardless of starting point or family background,” PM Lee said.

Retirement age and CPF rates for older workers to go up

As Singaporeans are living longer and many want to work longer, the retirement age will be raised gradually from 62 to 65, and the re-employment age will go up from 67 to 70.

The process will start in 2022, and be completed by 2030, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong yesterday.

Central Provident Fund (CPF) contribution rates will also go up for workers aged 65 to 70, so that the full rate of 37 per cent is extended to those aged up to 60 before it tapers off.

This process will start in 2021 and take place gradually over 10 years or so, depending on economic conditions, said PM Lee at the National Day Rally.

He added that these recommendations had been made by a riparian group, and the Government accepted them, in full.

The Government will take the lead as a major employer to raise retirement and re-employment ages in the public service in 2022, a year ahead of schedule, he said.

Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat will announce a support package to help businesses adjust to these new arrangements in next year’s Budget, PM Lee added.

He also stressed that there are no changes to CPF withdrawal policies or withdrawal ages — CPF members can still withdraw some money at age 55 and start their monthly payouts from age 60.

Long-term battle to safeguard S’pore from rising sea levels

It may cost $100 billion or more over the long term to protect low-lying Singapore against rising sea levels, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong yesterday.

There are good engineering solutions to the problem which could include reclaiming offshore islands and connecting them with barriers. But they come at a cost.

“Just how much will it cost to protect ourselves against rising sea levels? My guess is probably $100 billion over 100 years, quite possibly more. If we only have 10 years to solve the problem, we won’t have the time or resources to do it,” PM Lee said in his National Day Rally speech.

PM Lee said that a 50- to 100-year problem, we can implement a 50- to 100-year solution. Climate change defences should be treated like the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) — with utmost seriousness, he added.

“Both the SAF and climate change defences are existential for Singaporeans. These are life and death matters. Everything else must bend at the knee to safeguard the existence of our island nation.”

NDR 2019: Eight things to know

**Grace Ho** sums up the highlights from PM Lee Hsien Loong’s speech

1. **More affordable pre-school education**
   - Monthly household income ceiling to qualify for pre-school means-tested assistance will be $5.6K up from $5.5K.

2. **Lower tertiary education fees, bigger bursaries**
   - Annual fees for Singapore Institute of Technology and Singapore Polytechnic of total course fees will be lowered to $15K (from $17K).
   - Bursaries to cover up to 75% of fees for general degree of local students.
   - Fees for local students will be capped at $5K per year.

3. **Retirement and re-employment ages to go up from 2022**
   - Retirement age to be raised from 62 to 65 in 2022.
   - Re-employment age to go up from 67 to 68 from 2022.

4. **Higher CPF contribution rates for older workers**
   - CPF rates for workers older than 55 to be raised from 2010.
   - By around 2030, these rates and schemes will be geared towards retirees.
   - Lower earnings before retirement for allowed CPF withdrawals.
   - No changes to CPF withdrawal policies on withdrawal ages.

5. **Government to help businesses and workers in downturn**
   - Current situation does not warrant immediate drastic measures.
   - If a pandemic occurs, the Government will respond with interventions to assist workers and firms.

6. **Greater Southern Waterfront to be a Panacea by the Bay**
   - 1,000 public and private homes to be built at the site of Jubilee Park.
   - New office, hotel, and entertainment district.
   - Cleared Southern Waterfront to be dug up with more green areas.
   - Downtown East expansion.

7. **New resort on Pulau Brani, attractions**
   - Post of Brani and Sentosa to be developed with new attractions.
   - Post of Pointe Brani to be dug up.
   - Upstream beach to be dug up.
   - ATV rides to be added.

8. **Measures to tackle climate change**
   - Renewable energy initiative to cost $30 billion or more.
   - Forests and green areas to be located.
   - 3 years of new shoreline cities to be introduced.
   - New top line hotels to be added.
   - Public transport and cycling.

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More help for needy tertiary students so they can pursue education without money worries

Sandra Ho
Senior Education Correspondent

Singapore’s two newest universities, the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) and Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS), will give a total of $10 million to students. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced on Thursday that the funds will go down soon next year from 9,000 to full-time general degree students.

The Ministry of Education will also significantly enhance government bursaries for families with low income, polytechnic, Institute of Technical Education (ITE) graduates and those going up to secondary school.

Students who have a strong background but are not destined for high-level universities because of money, PM Lee said. This is fundamental to make education a true meritocracy. PM Lee also said that government bursaries for students doing general degree at the National University of Singapore will increase from 16 to 20 percent of the cohort in 2022.

These changes will help us to make sure that our tertiary education system works, he said. The government is also considering other initiatives, such as scholarships for students who graduate from certain programs.

The MOE will also provide additional financial support to students who are facing difficulties in their studies. This includes providing additional counseling services and offering more flexible study hours.

The MOE also announced that some bursaries will be available to students who are not able to afford the cost of higher education. These bursaries will be available to students who are facing financial difficulties.

We want every Singaporean who is qualified to have the opportunity to make a good living and contribute to society, regardless of family background, PM Lee said. (Photo: AAP)