SINGAPORE: The coming general election will be a watershed for Singapore, according to Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong.

That is because this election "must produce" Singapore's next Prime Minister, as well as a core team of younger ministers to take over from the present team.

The next general election is due by February 2012.

Senior Minister Goh said Singapore has adapted the UK's Westminster-style of democracy to suit the country's history, culture and population mix.

He noted that there have been recent reforms to produce more robust debate in Parliament, including raising the number of non-People's Action Party seats to at least 18.

Mr Goh said: "I believe that what most people want is a political system which is fair, honest, accountable, and stable; which can elect the right leaders to serve the people's interests; which can produce an honest and effective government; and which can deliver the kind of buzz which Singaporeans want for their country. In other words, a system which works and is tailored to Singapore's needs."

Mr Goh outlined how Singapore has over the years created a buzz for itself, whether in the financial sector, the biomedical sciences, or culture and nightlife.

Now, he said, the challenge is for younger Singaporeans to keep that buzz from fizzling out.

Mr Goh said: "It will be a tragedy if our next generation is made up of what the Chinese call "plasticine" people. According to the Guangzhou-based New Weekly Magazine, these are well-educated, white-collar workers in booming China who no longer have any dreams, interests or ideals, who do not feel joy or pain.

"This is not the situation in Singapore and should never become the case. My hope is for you and those in your generation to continue to be engaged, to pursue your passion and your dreams, to challenge conventional wisdom, to do things and make Singapore better."

Mr Goh was speaking to undergraduates at the NTU's Ministerial Forum on Friday. But at the dialogue session that followed, some students said they did not feel a sense of belonging.

"I feel that there's a sense, there's a dilution of the Singapore spirit in the youth. We don't really feel ownership of our country, we don't really feel comfortable in our country anymore," said a student.

In reply, Mr Goh said: "We've got to find out the core reasons. It's a serious question. The minority will never feel they belong here, fair enough. But if the majority feels this place doesn't belong to them, they don't belong here, we've got a fundamental problem."

One student asked Mr Goh what he thinks are the qualities which make Singapore home.

In response, Mr Goh said it is a combination of family, memories and shared values.

He ended the session by calling on the students to ask themselves what they want out of Singapore.

"To criticise is easy, to look for things you're not comfortable with, that's easy. But don't just end there.....always go to the next step, ask what are the solutions, and not say, 'oh, it's the government's job to fix up all this'. No, it's not the government's job all the time," Mr Goh said.