Why next GE will be a watershed
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by Hoe Yeen Nie

SINGAPORE - The coming General Election "must produce" Singapore's next - the fourth - Prime Minister, said Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong (picture).

The polls - which are due by February 2012 - must also produce a core team of younger ministers to take over from the present team.

Mr Goh was speaking to students at the Nanyang Technological University Students Union Ministerial Forum on Friday night. He said Singapore had adapted the United Kingdom's Westminster-style of democracy to suit the country's history, culture and population mix.

Mr Goh noted that there had been recent reforms to produce more robust debate in Parliament.

"By the next General Election, there will be at least nine Opposition members in Parliament, either as elected MPs, or as NCMPs, and a further nine NMPs, making a total of 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 had, 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 was for younger Singaporeans to keep that buzz from fizzling out.

Mr Goh said it would be a tragedy if our next generation was made up of what the Chinese called "plasticine" people.

Referring to the Guangzhou-based New Weekly Magazine, he said these people were well-educated, white-collar workers in booming China who no longer had any dreams, interests or ideals, and who did not feel joy or pain.

Mr Goh said: "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."

At the dialogue session that followed, some students said they did not feel a sense of belonging.

One participant said: "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."

Mr Goh said: "We have 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."

He ended the session by calling on the students to ask themselves what they wanted from 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 all this. No, it's not the Government's job all the time," Mr Goh said.