

# New immigrants help sustain, enrich S'porean way of life, says SM Goh

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SINGAPORE : Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong said new immigrants help sustain and enrich the quality of life of Singaporeans.

Speaking on the issue for the second time in three days, Mr Goh said without Permanent Residents (PRs) and new citizens, Singapore will soon go the way of the dinosaurs — as the population will begin to shrink in 2020.

Mr Goh said in the last 10 years, the number of people aged 65 and above has grown by about 100,000 while the number of children aged below 15 had shrunk by about 50,000.

This is an unsustainable demographic structure. Economic growth may also slow by 1 to 2 per cent.

A recent trip to his ancestral hometown in China's Fujian province provided SM Goh a chance to reflect on the subject of immigration and identity.

"The previous 16 generations, including my father, were all born in China. I was welcomed not as a Chinese national, but as a Singaporean. It is possible for one generation, for new immigrations to become loyal to Singapore, to Singaporean values, and to contribute to Singapore society," said SM Goh.

At a community event on Saturday, Mr Goh said he understood how some Singaporeans felt crowded out by new citizens and PRs, whether in housing, jobs or schools.

New immigrants were also perceived as "taking advantage" of better opportunities here, without giving back to the community or doing their share of National Service.

Mr Goh noted that the influx of new immigrants has become an emotive issue that goes into the heart of what it means to be Singaporean. And the challenge for the government is to convince the public that Singapore is better off with new immigrants.

Mr Goh said the question is whether they sustain and add to the quality of life here.

And he believes they do — by supporting population and economic growth, and by enriching the cultural scene.

But the government too, needs to address what the newcomers can do to integrate, and how it can help.

Mr Goh said "We will have to face up to the problems encountered by Singaporeans on the ground. Explaining in macro terms using overall statistics is not good enough. We have to deal with real situations faced by Singaporeans.

"This immigration issue is a critical one, and we must bring Singaporeans on board to understand and support what we are doing. They must feel that they have a stake in the intake of immigrants and migrant workers, and see that these people, by bolstering our economy and demographic structure, make their lives better and not worse.

"Singapore is at a threshold. If we turn away immigrants, it will have dire long—term consequences for Singapore. If we have them in the right numbers and quality, it will boost our economic vitality."

Mr Goh said such issues are now being deliberated by the national Economic Strategies Committee.

He stressed that his intention was not to open up another round of debate on new immigrants, but to reflect on their critical importance to the country's future. — CNA /ls