Seizing the opportunity to move Singapore forward

Building on previous national conversations, Forward SG has the potential to create significant value through both process and content.

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For The Straits Times

It was never a question of whether or not a national conversation was necessary. The][multiple factors that contributed to it, including the leadership of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and the Singapore Together: Forging Stronger Conversations campaign, which combined national unity with the need for change and renewal, made it inevitable. The vision of Singapore as a city-state that can adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world was a driving force behind this initiative.

However, it would be shortsighted to assume that Forward SG alone will create significant value. The process matters too. As Parti Liyana Zain, a senior fellow at the National University of Singapore, noted, "a leadership-driven process can create value, but it needs to be embedded in the right institutional framework and culture." This requires that-forward SG" is not just a mouthy slogan, but a genuine effort to involve all stakeholders in the process, including civil society, businesses, and the broader public.

Threats to progress are real, and the risk of backsliding is present. Singaporeans, as citizens, must remain vigilant and engaged to ensure that the conversation remains meaningful and relevant. The collective effort required to move forward should not be underestimated. Only through a sustained commitment to dialogue and collaboration can we achieve the desired outcomes.

Renewal must extend beyond the social compact to include Singapore's economic model as well. Changing technology and business models, with the reconfiguration of trade flows and supply chains, means that the existing economic blueprint is no guarantee of future success. It is therefore appropriate that the economy and jobs, along with education and lifelong learning, are among the pillars of Forward SG.

As Christopher Says, a director at the National University of Singapore, noted, "we need to be nimble and adaptable to stay ahead in the global economy." Singapore's success, he argues, relies on its ability to "think big, dream big, and act big." This requires a willingness to push the boundaries and embrace innovation, as well as a commitment to the values of inclusion, diversity, and sustainability.

The reflections that emerged from past national conversations have informed this discussion. For instance, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong emphasized the importance of "letting the people have their say." This approach, he argued, helps to ensure that the policies and solutions are reflective of the people's needs and aspirations.

Overall, the discussions are not yet over, and the journey of progress continues. Singaporeans, as citizens, must remain committed to the process, ensuring that the conversations are meaningful, inclusive, and transformative. Only then can the potential of Forward SG be fully realized.

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