

ESM Goh highlights long-term challenges

‘Social climate change’ looms

Singapore’s society is being shaped by three major shifts – in demography, technology and social expectations, Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong said yesterday.

He called this process of long-term transformation “social climate change”, which, like its environmental cousin, “takes place imperceptibly and you see the effects only long after it has become irreversible”.

More research needs to be done to help Singapore anticipate and meet these challenges, said Mr Goh, who was speaking at the launch of a new centre that will specialise in conducting research into social issues and social services.

The National University of Singapore Social Service Research Centre will also work with policymakers and social service agencies to develop and test social programmes and services.

“I can see an avalanche of social issues coming... The social challenges... in the next 50

years will be drastically different from those in the last 50,” Mr Goh said, adding that Singapore needs to think ahead of the curve.

Singapore, with its “an ageing and declining population”, has recently seen a big jump in cross-border marriages across different cultures and socioeconomic groups, said Mr Goh.

While he noted that transnational marriages make society more diverse, he also questioned what they would mean for the Singapore identity and social cohesiveness in the long run.

Another challenge is the rising use of technology such as mobile smart devices and social media, which will influence how people interact with each other.

In addition, many more Singaporeans now count themselves as members of the middle class, which may lead to changing social expectations, mid-life insecurities and fears over the kind of economic future they and their children will have, said Mr Goh.