

Govt 'supporting unconventional career pathways'

While progress takes time, things are moving in the right direction, says Lawrence Wong

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SINGAPORE – Concerns about whether youths here can be confident enough to pursue unconventional career pathways of arts and sports in lieu of traditionally materially rewarding occupations dominated a forum yesterday.

However, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth and Second Minister for Communications and Information Lawrence Wong sounded a positive note, saying while this takes time, things are moving in the right direction.

Asked by a member of the audience during the National Conversations forum on how the Government can promote a pursuit of passion, given that the country is still very much "a tuition nation", Mr Wong acknowledged that Singapore is constrained by the size of its small market.

Unlike in big countries such as America, where people "can make a decent living" playing in pubs, in Singapore that is not as easy.

"That said, we ... are trying to make these options more viable."

He cited the existing high-performance sports system in which the Government provides monthly full-time allowances to high-performance athletes who wish to take time off work to engage in sports.

At the same time, the Government also gets companies to support athletes by providing jobs for them after their sporting career, Mr Wong said.

"As we make these pathways more viable, more attractive, both in the arts and sports, I think young people's perceptions will change and, most importantly, parents' perceptions will change," he said, adding that he had seen more young people taking up these pathways.

Mr Wong was speaking at the inaugural National Conversations forum organised by National University of Singapore's (NUS) Office of Alumni Relations.

About 120 young NUS alumni attended the session yesterday, which was themed Our Aspirations, Our Home.

Mr Wong said his ministry has also been ramping up efforts in marketing its athletes to attract more sponsorships.

For companies to sponsor athletes or entertainers, they have to see it as positive for their image and good for branding, noted Mr Wong.

He added that such tie-ups are successful in other countries because there is significant corporate value for companies, and they treat it as advertising.

On getting the message of the importance in inculcating a sporting

nation across to schools, Mr Wong said that while the Ministry of Education has been trying to send the message to principals, it also wants them to take ownership and lead the schools with as much autonomy as possible.

"Some may find it hard to change old mindsets. Principals are individu-

als, too," he said.

Asked by the moderator Soh Yi Da, president of NUS Students' Union Alumni, what his dream for Singapore is for the next 50 years, Mr Wong said he hopes the country can continue maintaining a fair and just society as an ideal, with a focus on so-

cial mobility, equal opportunity, and meritocracy.

He added: "If you're asking me for an advanced version of the (People's Action Party) manifesto, I think you'd have to wait a bit longer.

"Akan datang, but coming soon, I'm sure."



Regardless of differences in views, what we hold as core is still the same – we want to feel proud about who we are, and we want to have a sense of hope for a better future. There are certain values that bind us together, and this sense of Singapore identity has become stronger ... If we continue to have that spirit of unity... for the next 50 years, then whatever challenges may come along the way, we will be able to overcome them.

Mr Lawrence Wong
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