

Pre-school, tertiary education to be more affordable: PM Lee

Other hot topics: Retirement age to go up, new housing and commercial precinct, tackling climate change

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She spends more than \$2,000 a month on her two young children, of which about half is taken up by pre-school fees.

As a result, Mrs Claudia Low, 38, a customer service officer, finds it difficult to consider having a third child.

But that might soon change, after Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced in his National Day Rally speech last night that pre-school subsidies will be enhanced and extended to 30,000 more households.

Mrs Low told The New Paper that she is looking forward to the changes, which will help her have more savings.

"With two kids, the main burden is school fees, which is tough on the family," said Mrs Low, who pays \$1,120 a month for her sons aged five and two.

PM Lee said the income ceilings for pre-school subsidies will be raised to \$12,000 a month from \$7,500 a month.

Mrs Low's family will now be eligible for the subsidy, which will cut their pre-school expenses by a third.

She said: "I hope to spend the money saved on enrichment courses for my children. I may also consider having a third child, but I'll have to discuss it with my husband first."

PM Lee also said government spending on early childhood education will be more than double the current \$1 billion a year over the next few years.

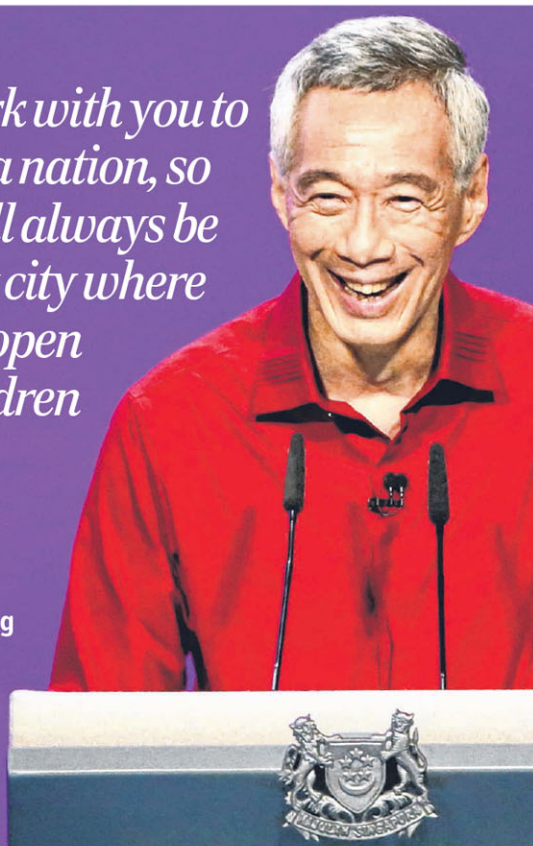
The KidStart programme piloted three years ago to give extra help to 1,000 less privileged children will be expanded to another 5,000 children over the next three years.

Help will also be available to post-secondary students.

The annual fees for full-time general degree programmes in the Singapore Institute of Technology and the Singapore University of Social Sciences will be lowered from about \$8,000 to

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— Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong



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\$7,500.

The Ministry of Education will enhance government bursaries from up to 50 per cent of general degree fees to up to 75 per cent.

Bursaries for polytechnic diploma programmes will rise to 95 per cent from 80 per cent.

Students in government-funded diploma and degree programmes at the Institute of Technical Education, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and Lasalle College of the Arts will also be covered.

There will be a greater enhancement to bursaries for medical schools, which together with other bursaries, will allow lower-income students to pay at most \$5,000 a year, compared to the current \$29,000 to \$35,000 a year after government subsidies.

These adjustments will apply to existing and new students from the next academic year.

On the workforce front, PM Lee said changes will be made by 2030 to expand the Central Provident Fund (CPF) contributions for older workers.

The retirement age will be raised from 62 to 65, and the re-employment age from 67 to 70.

This will be done gradually, with the retirement and re-employment ages to be raised to 63 and 68, respectively, in 2021 for the public service and a year later for the private sector.

CPF contributions will also be increased for those above 55.

The rates now taper off after 55, but when the changes are fully implemented by about 2030, they will taper off only after 60.

NO CHANGES

He said no changes are being made to CPF withdrawal policies and withdrawal ages.

The third main topic covered in PM Lee's English speech was climate change, which he described as serious.

He estimated Singapore would require about \$100 billion or more to protect itself against rising sea levels, which are expected to be higher by a metre in about 80 years or less because of global warming.

It is a problem that will be

tackled with a 50 to 100-year solution, PM Lee added.

He also spoke about the Greater Southern Waterfront (GSW), which will comprise 30km of the southern coastline of the island from the Gardens by the Bay East area to Pasir Panjang.

He said the GSW has 2,000ha of land – six times the size of Marina Bay and double the size of Punggol. The waterfront will be developed with housing, commercial and recreation areas.

One of the first GSW developments is expected to be at the Keppel Club area, with its lease expiring in about two years.

The PM said there is enough land on that plot alone to build 9,000 public and private housing units.

PM Lee's Mandarin speech touched on the growing tensions between the United States and China, which he said will have implications for Singapore's diplomatic and economic relations.

His Malay speech highlighted the Malay and Muslim communities as a well-regarded model for other communities because of Singapore's success in building harmonious racial and religious relations.

He said Singapore hopes to develop a model for its own Islamic college that will one day train a new generation of Islamic teachers.

PM Lee also said that as Singapore commemorates its history and progress this bicentennial year, it will commit itself to building a better future.

"My team will work with you to build this jewel of a nation, so that Singapore will always be a vibrant, thriving city where opportunities are open to all, and our children and their children will have a bright future," he said.

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