

PAP must continue to work with S'poreans to take country forward: PM

He says party faces new challenges amid generational change for its leaders, voters

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The People's Action Party (PAP) is once again at a turning point as it navigates an ongoing leadership transition and a new generation of voters, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Drawing parallels between now and 1985 when the party was passing the baton to its second-generation leaders, PM Lee said there are many questions about the future, including how the PAP and its fourth-generation team will deal with new challenges, and whether they have what it takes to bring Singapore forward.

In a speech yesterday at the launch of a book that chronicles the PAP's history since 1985, held at the National University of Singapore, he said the next 35 years will be quite different from the last.

"Most fundamentally, our task is not to foretell the future, but to create it. The PAP continues to carry a heavy responsibility for Singapore's security, stability and success," said PM Lee, who is PAP secretary-general.

"It must always work closely

with Singaporeans to take the country forward."

The book, titled *A History Of The People's Action Party: 1985-2021*, recounts the party's activities and events during that period. It was written by Dr Shashi Jayakumar, a senior fellow and head of the Centre of Excellence for National Security at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies and published by NUS Press.

PM Lee noted that the PAP is now in the midst of a leadership transition from the 3G to the 4G team, just like in 1985 when its second generation of leaders was taking over from the pioneer generation. At the time, only founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, Mr S. Rajaratnam and Mr E.W. Barker remained in the new Cabinet.

The PAP's vote share fell sharply by 12.9 percentage points to 64.8 per cent in the 1984 General Election, which also heralded a generational change in the electorate, said PM Lee. For the first time since independence, the PAP received less than 70 per cent of the overall votes.

At the post-election conference, Mr Lee Kuan Yew had said

the older generation of voters who stuck with the PAP through Singapore's earlier years were beginning to fade away, and were replaced with a younger generation that was better educated and more demanding of their leaders.

"It seemed like the PAP was losing its political dominance," said PM Lee yesterday. "It was a moment for introspection, perhaps even concern. What did the future hold for the party, and for Singapore?"

Today, PM Lee is the only one of the 1984 batch of PAP MPs still in politics, and the pioneer generation of voters who began to leave the scene in 1985 are mostly gone.

About 60 per cent of today's voters were born after independence, he said. Growing up in a stable Singapore, they experienced steady progress and benefited from the nation's collective efforts to develop its economy as well as its identity.

"Their aspirations, hopes and expectations are different from the young voters in the 1984 General Election," he said.

PM Lee said that while the PAP won a strong mandate in last year's general election, the party's vote share fell by 8.6 percentage points to 61.2 per cent and it lost two group representation constituencies to the opposition for the first time.

He expressed hope that the new book will provide a sense of history and perspective to the PAP's journey over the past decades, and help its readers appreciate how Singapore has achieved what it has.

While Singaporeans who have lived through the past decades may not consider the country's stability, progress and success astonishing, PM Lee said all this was hardly predicted – much less foreordained.

"It did not happen by itself, nor has it happened in very many other countries. And yet it happened in Singapore," he added. "How did Singapore manage to achieve this? The PAP is an important part of the explanation."

This is why the party's history from 1985 to 2021 is a story well worth telling and understanding, he said.

"I hope this book will... most importantly, inspire the next generation – party activists, party leaders and Singaporeans alike – to be equally committed, resourceful and resolute in pursuing a brighter future for Singapore."

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