

Weathering the challenges ahead

In his National Day message on Aug 8, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong urged Singaporeans to be psychologically prepared that in the next decades, the region might not be as peaceful and stable as it has been. Insight asked observers for their thoughts on how Singaporeans can brace themselves for these challenges.

Inflation is also expected to remain high till the end of this year. We asked economists how this might play out for businesses and consumers, and how Singapore can ride out this period.



Education on security issues is key



Bilveer Singh

Geopolitical tensions have directly hit most states due to the dependence of South-east Asia and the world on imports of crude oil, natural gas and even basic necessities such as rice, wheat and eggs. The inflationary pressures caused by global conflicts have the effect of impoverishing societies and, in turn,

putting pressure on national governments to deliver basic goods at affordable prices to their populace. A failure to do so can prove fatal for governments, as was evident in Sri Lanka.

With rising costs all round, national governments, including in Singapore, have to grapple with proceeding with infrastructure projects at home as health and security issues become key priorities. The sum total of basic infrastructure projects being sacrificed, insecure supply chains, rising inflation, currency fluctuations and weakening demand have in-

creased unemployment and enhanced national public grievances.

The region also continues to suffer from uncertainties from the policies of the United States, which in the past was seen as the key security provider, leading other powers such as China and India to become more assertive regionally, partly to fill the growing power vacuum.

The mix of geopolitics with geoeconomics has hit the region dramatically as it has not seen such prolonged crises for a long time. As dependence on external great powers has become uncertain and untenable, at a time of economic

crunch, governments are also spending more on defence procurement to enhance national security. No state wants to be put under political and military pressure.

If one adds the rise of cyber threats to the security menu, then one can well imagine how much pressure security planners are under. At the same time, issues relating to religious extremism and terrorism, climate change, large-scale migration of people and dangers posed by diseases will continue to affect the security of states in the region.

The question is – what to do? Critically, Singaporeans must understand that while the going has been good for about five decades, this peace and prosperity cannot be taken for granted. Small states

such as Singapore are always in a precarious position and an existential threat can emanate from anywhere. It is not that not enough is being done by the authorities; rather, it is the rise of new challenges and issues as well as changing geopolitical considerations, in part due to the relative weakness of the US and rising power of China.

Political and community leaders as well as our educational institutions and media owe it to citizens to educate them on what these security issues mean for Singapore and its people. Probably, the best education about this can start with a conversation over the dinner table at home.

As no one owes Singapore a living and we cannot depend on others to provide our security, the

power of Singapore to survive depends on how much our citizens can do, together and with the authorities.

A key in this regard is the maintenance of social cohesion. We have done a great job and this should be enhanced due to new dangers arising from transnational extremist groups and the peddling of hate ideology through social media.

Singapore is not broken – yet, we must always assume that there are little tsunamis hitting us daily and, together as a society, we will overcome them and remain a model city-state.

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Global supply chain disruptions have not fully resolved, and rising energy and food prices have impacted resource security for many nations, including Singapore, says one observer.
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