LEADERSHIP RENEWAL

MM: Let the younger politicians step up

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SINGAPORE – A system where younger politicians are allowed to take office can create better results for the country, said Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew.

Mr Lee was speaking at a dialogue organised by the Singapore Chamber of Commerce and Industry on its 40th anniversary yesterday. Noting that the economic and political system in Japan is still based on seniority, he said leaders there could learn from China, which requires its political leaders to step down when they turn 65. This allows a younger, more dynamic generation of leaders to step up.

"The Chinese watch other countries including us, and now they have an age rule: In the centre, in Beijing, at 65, you retire. Whether you're good or no good, 65 is the cut-off date... They still use you as adviser in the back row, that is in the centre," observed Mr Lee.

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Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew

However, in the provinces and small towns, the leaders are younger, he said. Mayors, for instance, are in their 40s, and many come armed with PhDs.

Mr Lee said this was what Singapore practised: "We also have a rule - I'm the exception to the rule. I'm 86. But I'm not doing the work, I'm just forecasting."

Prof Thio sets out the role of S'pore's justice system

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SINGAPORE – Some Singaporeans oppose the death penalty, but some support it. And the Republic still keeps it as part of the system, for example.

While the law means a lot of different things to different people, legal academic Thio Li-ann believes that in the context of Singapore, formal rule of law doesn't provide any criteria by which you can assess whether something is or is not good law, you can only assess if it's valid law.

The relationship between the rule of law and other indicators of constitutional government and good governance, such as human rights and democracy, were among the topics Professor Thio spoke on yesterday at a seminar for lawyers and academics which was organised by The Law Society of Singapore.

While she did not go into what was good or bad about the rule of law in Singapore, Prof Thio set out, for example, the role of Singapore's justice system.

While it works to ensure the rule of law here, the Constitution also permits instances where the State is beyond law and judicial control, as in the case of emergency powers and preventative detention laws, where the needs of the State comes first and foremost.

She noted: "The courts do have a role in these areas. They are not a huge role. The courts cannot inquire if the detention reasons are good... (but) it must be based on national security concerns."

Her comments come two months after Law Minister K Shanmugam spoke at a dialogue and addressed criticisms over Singapore's strict criminal laws and of the judiciary's independence.

Yesterday, Prof Thio said the courts here do have independence. However, she was of the view that judges are unlikely to change any laws "because they do not see themselves on the vanguard of social reform."

But this also raised some questions to think about, she added.

"What about Singapore... when there are questions of moral controversy, do you go to the courts or do you go to Parliament?"