Singapore Parliament reopens: Keep education pathway open, says President Tony Tan

By Rachel Au-Yong

Singapore’s education system will be continually improved to ensure a person’s future is not decided at any one point in his education journey.

This assurance was made in Parliament on Friday night in an address by President Tony Tan Keng Yam that sets out the priorities and goals of the Government in the second half of its term.

In making his point about second chances, Dr Tan referred to the keen competition in schools, especially at milestones like the Primary 1 registration and the Primary School Leaving Examination.

He said: "Singapore must remain a nation of opportunities for all. Those who do not succeed at first should have a second chance, indeed, must always have the chance to try again."

To achieve it, the Government will continue to improve the system, he added.

It will invest more in pre-school education, "to help those who are born with less to get to a good starting point."

Five new kindergartens run by the Education Ministry will open next year, while three private pre-school operators have been given "anchor operator" status under a scheme that requires them to keep fees affordable in return for government subsidies.

He also pointed to the ASPIRE committee, which is exploring ways to create more opportunities for ITE and polytechnic students.

The committee, chaired by Senior Minister of State for Education Indranee Rajah, will recommend, later this year, how to strengthen career paths for these students.

Also, more university places will be created, and there will also be new degree programmes in two upcoming universities - SIT and UniSim - with a stronger focus on practical application.

But education must go beyond the tertiary level, Dr Tan added.

"The Government will help our workers upgrade skills and develop expertise in every vocation, and stay abreast of changing industry demands.

"This is critical because jobs are changing faster, and knowledge is becoming obsolete more quickly," he said.

Pointing to two new Continuing Education and Training (CET) institutes - the Devan Nair Institute in Jurong and the Lifelong Learning Institute in Paya Lebar - the President said the Government will focus not only on low-income workers, but middle-income professionals, managers and executives, too.

All these efforts are aimed at building an ethos in which every Singaporean is respected regardless of his or her social status. "We want an open and inclusive society... where we interact informally with one another free of rigid social hierarchy," he said.