

DPM Tharman says it won't be him but...

Minority-race PM 'inevitable'

It is "inevitable" that Singapore will, at some point, get a prime minister from an ethnic minority, Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam said yesterday.

A person of Indian, Malay or Eurasian heritage – or some mixture – is "going to be a feature of the political landscape because we have meritocracy," he said. "It is an open system, it is just a matter of time."

Mr Tharman, who is also Finance Minister, was responding to a question from Washington Post columnist and CNN host Fareed Zakaria on whether Singapore could see an Indian prime minister, *The Straits Times* reported.

Mr Zakaria was chairing a lunchtime dialogue at the SG50+ Conference of the Institute of Policy Studies.

DPM Tharman started his answer candidly by stating that he need not leave the stage as he is not interested in the job, but added that it was inevitable that Singapore will have a minority prime minister.

"Singapore is evolving, the common space

that everyone is growing up in is much larger than pre-independence or even in our early decades," he said.

"It is a pretty strong common space, an education system where everyone is educated, first language English. You go through common experiences together, National Service, so it is a matter of time."

When probed by Mr Zakaria if he would not serve if he is selected, Mr Tharman drew a sporting analogy.

HALF-BACK

"Let me put it this way, we all have our preferences. And I was always, in sports, a centre-half rather than centre-forward. I enjoy playing half-back and making the long passes, but I am not the striker," he said.

"Unless I am forced to be, and I don't think I will be forced to it, because I think we have got choices..."

"I think we have a crop of people who are in the fray and entering the fray who will provide future leadership."



The responsibility of democracy producing good governance lies with the citizens and the political parties which contest to govern them. This is stating the obvious but what is not obvious is the difficulty of discharging this responsibility. This is the challenge of democracy – the most difficult political system to operate successfully.

– Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong

Keys to good governance

Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong spoke about good leaders and good government yesterday at the Institute of Policy Studies SG50 conference. We touch on some key points.

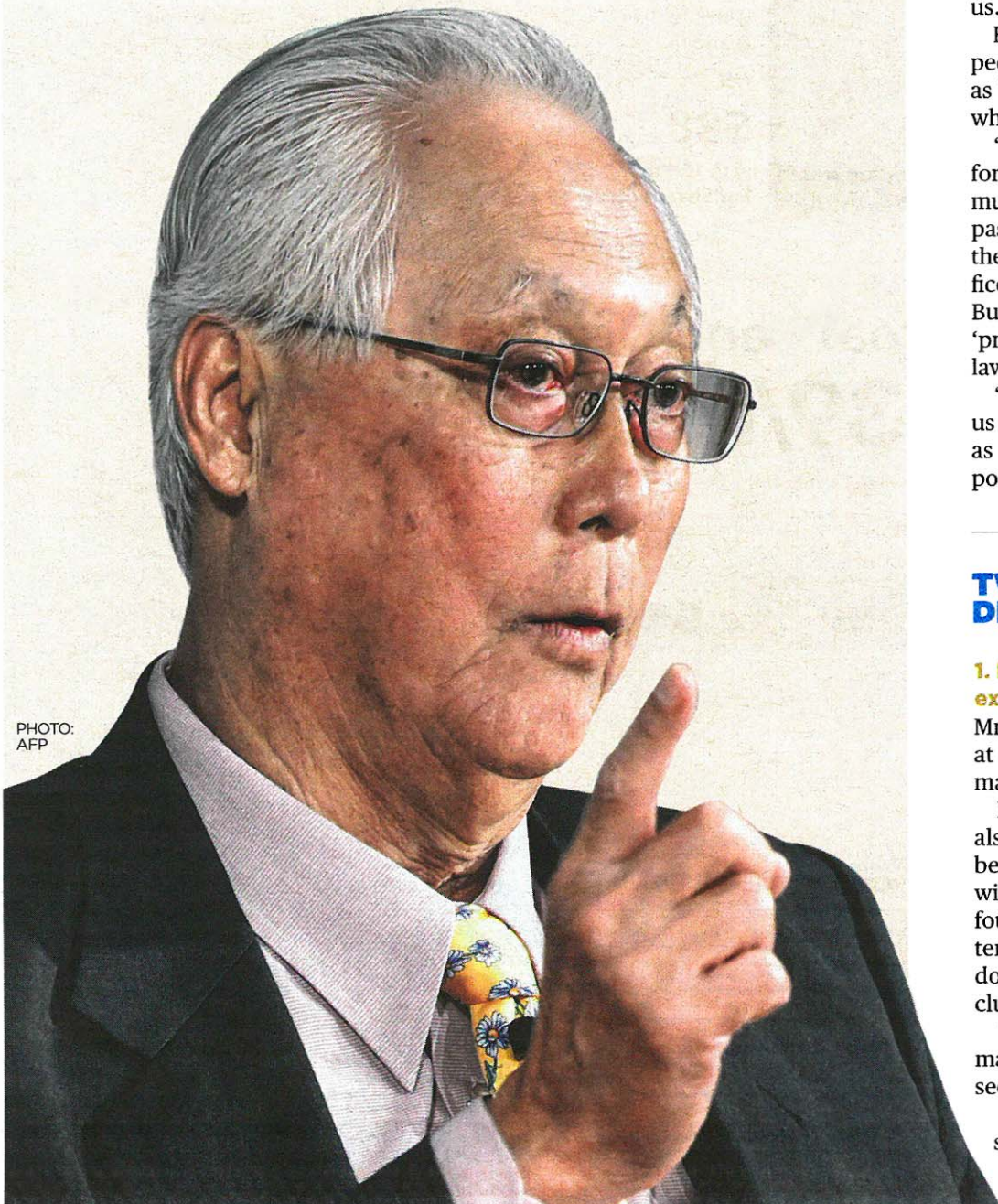


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WHAT MAKES A GOOD LEADER?

Integrity – honest, incorruptible and morally upright;
Competence – able, practical, innovative and effective;
Compassion – fair, just and looks after the weak, the poor and the vulnerable citizens;
Think ahead – anticipates challenges and strategises for the long term while attending to current problems;
Conviction – prepared to introduce necessary but painful measures out of conviction and eschews populist policies;
Selflessness – serves and not exploits power for personal and party (political) gain; and plans for leadership succession; and
Adaptability – adapts to changing political and social environments and is in tune with people's aspirations, especially the young and the new middle class

SO WHAT MAKES A GOOD GOVERNMENT?

Mr Goh said there are two basic conditions which he calls the "necessary condition" and the "sufficient condition".

1. Necessary condition

Those Singaporeans who can best run the office must step forward to run for office, said Mr Goh.

"The rest of us must be prepared to support them, because they represent our best hope for collective success. If they go down, Singapore goes down along with every one of us."

He said these candidates and the people must see political leadership as both a noble calling and a worthwhile profession, he said.

"It has to be a calling, first and foremost, because political leaders must have the conviction and the passion to work for the people and the country and be willing to sacrifice their time and lucrative careers. But it must also be a worthwhile 'profession' for them, like medicine, law and directors of corporations.

"Here, I certainly do not mean for us to have professional politicians, as that would be a disaster. I mean political service must be highly re-

spected as a profession and devotion," he said.

He said that if politics is just a calling, in good times, Singapore will see fewer and fewer people in their prime prepared to make the sacrifices.

"The task for all political parties then is to seek out and encourage good people who can govern to run for elections. Then, at the end of the day, whichever party wins, it would be in a position to form a Cabinet which is exceptional," he said.

2. Sufficient condition

Mr Goh said Singaporeans should not treat elections like circuses, auctions, beauty contests, or tikam tikam (traditional game in which players pick random numbered tickets to try to win prizes).

Said Mr Goh: "On the evidence of past GEs, Singaporean voters are astute in their collective vote, choosing when and how to calibrate between showing approval and unhappiness. May they remain rational and wise."

TWO FEATURES THE GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO DEAL WITH TO SUCCEED IN FUTURE

1. Higher and changing expectations of the citizenry

Mr Goh said our standard of living is at an all-time high, so it is only human to have higher expectations.

He added that expectations are also changing, saying: "...when I first became an MP, it was 1, 2, 3, 4 – one wife, two children, three-room flat, four wheels. For the generation after me, it was 5Cs – cash, car, condominium, credit card and country club.

"I do not know what the current mantra is but 'work-life balance' seems to be a priority."

The task for the Government, he said, is to encourage and help people meet these goals.

2. Impact of technology and social media

The Internet and social media is value-neutral, said Mr Goh.

"These technologies level the playing field and democratise information in the hands of the people..."

Social media allows leaders to get closer to people, he said. "It also enables leaders to consult with citizens in a more timely fashion, rather than communicating decisions only after they have been made."

But social media makes governing, a job which is already challenging, more complex. Said Mr Goh: "For example, the Government's voice is not as dominant as before. To get its messages heard, read or seen is a challenge."