

Budget aims to benefit all Singaporeans: ESM Goh



Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong with NUS chairman Hsieh Fu Hua at the award ceremony at the One Farrer Hotel and Spa last night. Mr Goh received the Distinguished Arts and Social Sciences Alumni Award (Lifetime Achievement) at the event. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

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Economy more complex now, but philosophy, goals of governance unchanged

Fabian Koh 

Nearly 40 years after delivering the Budget speech as a young trade minister, Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong said the philosophy and goals of Singapore's latest Budget have not changed.

It aims to transform the economy for the good of all Singaporeans - the same foundation which underpinned the Budget for a fledgling, developing Singapore, with the hope that "a rising economic tide would lift all boats".

In his acceptance speech last night, when Mr Goh was awarded the Distinguished Arts and Social Sciences Alumni Award (Lifetime Achievement) from the National University of Singapore's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS), he said: "The emphasis then (1979) was on building our economy, to ensure that we are able to feed, clothe and house ourselves.

"This required us to be pragmatic and realistic, to be practical and deliver results... but this did not mean we had no ideals.

"Our ideals were of a fair, meritocratic, equitable and caring society... Today, our economy and society have become more developed and complex. But our philosophy and goals of governance have not changed. (Finance) Minister Heng Swee Keat's Budget reaffirms this."

Describing the Budget as practical, prudent and forward-looking, he said he liked its emphasis on giving lower-income families a leg-up, not through a once-off handout, but "making real investment in the next generation". There is also "a strong tilt towards caring for the old, the less well-off and the vulnerable citizens", he added.

"As Minister Heng said in his Budget round-up speech, 'We cannot allow social stratification and inequality of opportunity to erode our precious social harmony.'"

NURTURING LEADERS

Is the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences a good place to produce leaders? Not just in politics, but also leaders in society, the public sector, business and philanthropy. I think so.

EMERITUS SENIOR MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG, in his acceptance speech last night when he was awarded the Distinguished Arts and Social Sciences Alumni Award (Lifetime Achievement) from the NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.



At the award ceremony held at the Grand Ballroom of One Farrer Hotel and Spa, six other alumni received the Distinguished Arts and Social Sciences Alumni Award, including local poet Lee Tzu Pheng, and Strategic Moves chief executive officer and former Nominated Member of Parliament Viswa Sadasivan.

The Distinguished Arts and Social Sciences Alumni Award was introduced in 2015 to recognise the contributions of alumni to the school and nation. The late Mr S R Nathan, Singapore's president from 1999 to 2011, was the only other person besides Mr Goh to be given the Lifetime Achievement award.

"But I like to think of it as an award for lifetime service rather than achievement," said Mr Goh, who graduated from the University of Singapore in 1964. He is now 76.

He shared that while most of his classmates chose to study medicine, he "followed my heart" to study subjects including literature and history before going on to major in economics.

"Looking back, my guiding principles for that (1979) Budget statement were shaped by my background in social sciences," he said.

He explained how the humanities teach one to look at communities and economies, how to anticipate trends and challenges, and think up solutions to make lives better for all. "Is the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences a good place to produce leaders? Not just in politics, but also leaders in society, the public sector, business and philanthropy. I think so."

Correction note: An earlier version of this story said that the FASS STARS awards were introduced in 2015. It is actually the Distinguished Arts and Social Sciences Alumni Award that was introduced in 2015. We are sorry for the error.

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