

# Status quo for Singapore – so what?

Singapore's achievements a result of the 'DNA' of its public policy formulation pioneered by old guard

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During an interview with the *Financial Times* on May 29, Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said: "I think the people of Singapore, like the people in Malaysia, must be tired of having the same government, the same party since independence".

It is perhaps in his character to express such a view.

Two key factors are critical for the successful development of any economy: An effective leadership supported by an efficient civil service; and a sustainable budgetary process that is capable of financing strategic economic policies and social development initiatives.

Singapore's achievements can be attributed to the "DNA" of its public policy formulation pioneered by the country's old

guard under the leadership of Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

This "DNA" can be summarised in five tenets:

### **Pragmatism in public policy formulation**

Pragmatism requires strong adherence to governing with integrity and principles. The affordability of the asset-enhancing public housing scheme as well as the uniqueness of the Central Provident Fund (CPF) contribution system are examples of how pragmatism in policy-making can lead to innovation in its formulation.

### **Reinforcing Singapore's location as a hub for international trade and services**

This was the top priority during the early nation-building days.

Positioning the country at the forefront of globalisation has

been a cornerstone of Singapore's public policy and it has allowed the country to become a regional hub for world-class financial, aviation, maritime, logistics and telecommunication and education services.

### **Zero tolerance for corruption**

The Singapore Government's unflinching stance against corruption – from financial rewards to exchanging power for favours – has consistently put the Republic among the least corrupt countries in the world.

### **Ensuring an inclusive society through promoting workfare instead of welfare**

This principle must not be compromised by populist ideas.

Programmes aimed at increasing the competitiveness and productivity of Singapore's workforce through skills training and

industrial internships as well as updating the education curriculum will be more sustainable than welfare spending for the unemployed.

### **Preserving the democratic system which allows for checks and balances**

This is core to the legitimacy of public policy formulation. For the last five decades, Singapore citizens have the right to periodically choose the government that would best serve them.

## CHALLENGES

In the post-Lee Kuan Yew era, communication and implementation of Singapore's policies have taken a more consultative approach – in national conversations and debates in language that resonate with people.

Surrounding the public policy discourse are three serious

social-economic challenges for the Government: Alleviating worsening income disparity; improving upward social mobility; and enhancing social integration by social classes, ethnicity, religion and cultural groups.

Singapore's international credibility and efficiency have been nurtured over decades by the Singapore Government under the People's Action Party (PAP).

Moving ahead, there will be new social, economic and political challenges. Will Singaporeans grow tired of the same ruling party? Only they can decide for themselves.

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