

# Govt policies won't please all: DPM Teo

Govt's job is to make decisions after taking in different feedback

BY THAM YUEN-C

IF EVERYBODY wants an MRT service, someone will have to suffer the dust and noise of a station being built, perhaps near his home.

And if roads are to be widened, people will have to accept that some trees may have to be cut down to make space.

Citing these examples of trade-offs that decision-makers have to make, Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean yesterday sought to show that not everyone will be happy with every decision made by the Government.

Nevertheless, it is the Government's job to make decisions, even when they are tough and unpopular, he said.

"After listening to everyone you have to decide... The responsibility of the Government is that you have to make a decision," he said.

He was speaking at the Fullerton-St Joseph's Institution (SJI) Leadership Lecture, which was attended by students and representatives from community groups, universities and professional associations, as well as Mr Teo's former classmates.

The event, which took place at SJI's library, was the last instalment of the lecture series organised by the school and sponsored by The Fullerton Hotel, with each lecture delivered by an SJI alumnus who has made an impact on Singapore and its people.

Taking questions from the floor after a speech on the interaction between institutions and leaders, and

the qualities that go into making a leader, Mr Teo, who is also Home Affairs Minister, touched on the dynamics of policymaking in government.

Since the last general election ended six months ago with the share of the national vote won by the dominant People's Action Party (PAP) sliding to a record low of 60.1 per cent, the challenge of reconnecting with voters has been an issue that has weighed on the minds of PAP leaders.

At the same time, the PAP has stressed that policies will involve trade-offs and must be decided rationally.

Mr Teo had his audience laughing yesterday with another example of just how tough pleasing the various groups of voters could be. He said: "It cannot be that everybody wants a bus service, but nobody wants a bus stop in front of his house. The bus will never stop anywhere then."

But for those who do not get their way on a particular issue, he had this to say: "Over many issues and over a period of time, when you accumulate all of that, everybody will come out net positive, because then you are able to make progress."

Turning to what makes a good leader, Mr Teo cited humility – an attribute he thought essential in a meritocratic system such as Singapore's.

He said those who rise to the top in such a system must understand and acknowledge that they are where they are not just through their individual effort, but also through the collective effort of others.

"Therefore, a person who is able to achieve success... in such a system needs to be humble and recognise that he is not the smartest guy around... and that he does not have a monopoly on wisdom and knowledge."

A good leader would also know how



Mr Teo mingling with students Jeremiah Lim (left) and James Stuart, both 15, as well as their peers from St Joseph's Institution after the Fullerton-SJI Leadership Lecture yesterday. His speech was on the interaction between institutions and leaders, and the qualities of a good leader. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

## DPM TEO ON MERITOCRACY

"The people who rise to the top in such a system on the basis of meritocracy have to understand and acknowledge that they have risen not just through their own individual effort, but also through the collective effort of others... Therefore, a person who is able to achieve success, however defined, in such a system, needs to be humble and recognise that he is not the smartest guy around because of himself."

## ON WHAT LEADERS SINGAPORE NEEDS

"I'm always a little worried, a bit suspicious, about people who are charismatic leaders, who are pure charisma, because I always try to look below the words they are saying... you need something beneath that, below that to have real substance."

## ON TAKING UP THE DPM POST

"You feel a sense of responsibility and you wonder whether you are up to it... so many people have put their faith in you. You hope that you can live up to that responsibility, and your greatest concern is that somehow you failed in trying to do your best."

to draw from the pool of talent available.

During the question-and-answer session, Mr Teo touched on the dangers of populist policies, illustrating his points by referring to Europe's debt problems. He said voters there had been "quite prepared" to elect gov-

ernments that made promises they could not keep.

He said that had these voters "done the sums", they would have known that the promises were not deliverable, and that they should not blame their governments when such promises were not kept.

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