

Income inequality a key priority for new IPS head

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STUDYING the problem of income inequality would be a key priority for the new director of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Janadas Devan.

Mr Devan, who was unveiled as IPS' new director yesterday, told BT that he would want 'to look at income inequality and get a grip on the problem'.

'It is a challenge we face in the coming decade and it is a global phenomenon as the global workforce has doubled and added enormous pressure on wages everywhere,' he added.

Set to assume his role at IPS tomorrow, Mr Devan said that he was 'very excited by the appointment because it is an opportunity to do something' that he wanted but also pointed out that he had to step into 'oversized shoes'.

Mr Devan was referring to his predecessor, Ong Keng Yong, who was named by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs yesterday as the next High Commissioner to Malaysia with effect from July 18, 2011. Mr Devan commended Mr Ong and his predecessor, Tommy Koh, for the sterling role they played in building IPS to its current stature.

Prior to this appointment, Mr Devan was the review editor of The Straits Times, which he joined in 1997. He is now an associate editor of the newspaper on sabbatical.

'My roles at IPS and ST are complementary in the sense that IPS is a think tank within the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and the nature of the work is not that different from what journalists do in writing opinion or commentary pieces,' he explained.

Mr Devan sees three distinct roles that IPS will play. The first two are studying important pressing domestic concerns, such as income inequality, in a non-partisan fashion, and assessing 'over-the-horizon issues', which he defined as 'the challenges that Singapore faces in the next 10 to 15 years'.

'The third function of IPS would be to serve as a clearing house and honest broker among stakeholders, which include academia and civil society, as it would be useful to do more of that in the current political environment.'

Kishore Mahbubani, dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, elaborated: 'The role of IPS has become more important with a louder, stronger and more vociferous middle class and a stronger civil society in Singapore.' As such, Prof Mahbubani explained that one of the key roles of IPS would be to provide bridges between government and civil society where necessary.

Prof Mahbubani paid tribute to Mr Ong and also lauded the appointment of Mr Devan to IPS. 'I am truly delighted that he (Mr Devan) is joining us as it is very difficult to find a good director in Singapore for IPS. One of the key requirements is to find someone who can work with all three sectors of public, private and the people ... Keng Yong was brilliant as he had the network and connections here and so we had to find someone to step into big shoes and we searched high and low and we came to the

conclusion that Janadas was the best choice and we chose him for his quality of mind, very good understanding of Singapore and his ability to reach out to people at the top as well as the common man on the street.'

Prof Koh, also former director and now Special Adviser to the institute, praised the outgoing IPS director before lauding Mr Devan's appointment.

'Janadas Devan is a brilliant intellectual. He is very well read and thoughtful. He is an eloquent speaker and a polished writer. He (Janadas Devan) is deeply devoted to Singapore and, at the same time, to Singapore's good relations with the rest of the world, especially the United States of America,' said Prof Koh.

'As an excellent journalist, he understands the art of communication and will be able to help the researchers of IPS bring the results of their research to the attention of the Singapore public and the wider world.'