

'Good governance crucial' if S'pore is to last forever

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WHAT keeps Singapore leaders awake at night is not whether the People's Action Party (PAP) rules forever, but whether Singapore will last forever, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Chan Chun Sing said yesterday.

And at the heart of ensuring the country thrives and survives is good governance, he added.

This, in turn, requires Singapore's leaders to know when to change policies and themselves to keep up with the times.

Mr Chan, who is also the labour chief, made the point at a think-tank discussion on how to maintain good governance in an increasingly diverse society.

Panel moderator Warren Fernandez, The Straits Times editor, had asked Mr Chan to define good politics in the light of President Tony Tan Keng Yam's address on Friday. The latter had said the Government will study ways to improve the political system.

In his reply yesterday, Mr Chan said good governance is crucial if Singapore is to defy the odds of history as small states tend to be short-lived.

"Political parties are there to lead but political parties must evolve in order to make sure the higher goal of sustaining the country is achieved," he added.

This focus on improving Singapore lies at the core of the Government's approach to accommodating the growing diversity of voices in politics here, he said.

The discussion was among four held yesterday at the annual Institute of Policy Studies Singapore Perspectives conference, which examines the public policy challenges facing the country.

During the discussion, panellist and political commentator Eugene Tan asked Mr Chan for his views on the political system, which he saw as putting all its eggs in one basket. He asked: "In the event that the ruling party becomes incompetent or corrupt... how do we then prevent Singapore from going through a systemic collapse?"

Mr Chan replied that this was a concern of the PAP as well. "Institutionally, how do we bring in people from diverse perspectives?"

This was why the Government started the Nominated Member of Parliament and Non-Constituency Member of Parliament schemes, although it did not need to, he said.

Both schemes guarantee a minimum number of non-PAP MPs in Parliament, even if the PAP should win all 89 elected seats.