

# SINGAPORE PERSPECTIVES2020

## Politics

Monday, 20 January 2020  
Sands Grand Ballroom (Level 5)  
Sands Expo and Convention Centre

### PROGRAMME

7.45 am – 8.30 am

#### Registration

8.30 am – 8.45 am

#### Opening Remarks

Mr Janadas Devan  
Director  
Institute of Policy Studies

8.45 am – 10.15 am

#### OPENING KEYNOTE

##### Chairperson

Mr Janadas Devan

##### Speaker

Mr Heng Swee Keat  
Deputy Prime Minister  
and  
Minister for Finance

#### Question-and-Answer Session

10.15 am – 10.45 am

#### Tea Break

10.45 am – 12.30 pm

#### PANEL I

##### Paths Taken

##### Chairperson

Professor Tan Tai Yong  
President  
Yale-NUS College

##### Speakers

Dr Lam Peng Er  
Senior Research Fellow  
East Asian Institute  
National University of Singapore

Ms Zuraidah Ibrahim  
Deputy Executive Editor  
*South China Morning Post*

Mr Bilahari Kausikan  
Chairman  
Middle East Institute  
National University of Singapore

**Question-and-Answer Session**

12.30 pm – 1.45 pm

**Lunch**

1.45 pm – 3.30 pm

**PANEL II  
New Forms and Movements**

**Chairperson**

Associate Professor Farish Ahmad-Noor  
Coordinator of PhD Programme  
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies

**Speakers**

Dr Crystal Abidin  
Senior Research Fellow  
Internet Studies  
Faculty of Humanities  
Curtin University

Mr Cai Yinzhou  
Director  
Citizen Adventures

Ms Carrie Tan  
Executive Director  
Daughters Of Tomorrow

Ms Nor Lastrina Hamid  
Co-founder  
Singapore Youth for Climate Action

**Question-and-Answer Session**

3.30 pm – 4.00 pm

**Tea Break**

4.00 pm – 5.15 pm

**DIALOGUE**

**with Mr Chan Chun Sing,  
Minister for Trade and Industry**

**Chairperson**

Ms Lee Huay Leng  
Head  
Chinese Media Group  
Singapore Press Holdings

**Question-and-Answer Session**

5.15 pm

**End**

## **PANEL I**

### **Paths Taken**

The objective of this panel is to discuss the political landscape of Singapore focusing on the paths taken by different political parties, as well as the impacts of geopolitics on Singapore. As *The Economist* states, Singapore is “the only one among the world’s richest countries never to have changed its ruling party”, an exception noted by political scientists. As the story goes, after the People’s Action Party (PAP) was elected to power in 1959, it has continued to dominate politics in Singapore, as the country moved from “third world to first world”, much to the astonishment of the international community. To better understand the nuances of this national narrative, this panel will address the following questions: Who are the PAP? How would we describe their legacy thus far? How did they get to where they are today? How do we explain their popularity during elections?

To only focus on the PAP, however, would be a disservice to the successes of other actors in Singapore’s political history; right from the beginning, the PAP had to compete in open elections against stringent opposition — from the likes of the Labour Front and other parties all jockeying for power. PAP leaders also had to deal with an internal split, which led to the formation of the formidable Barisan Sosialis around 1961. Who are these opposition parties? What were some of the challenges they faced? What factors led to some of their successes, e.g., 2015 General Election? What were the paths that led them to where they are today? What role might they play in the future?

On a broader scale, Singapore’s politics has been shaped by, and is in turn shaping its relations with other countries and its position in the region. How has Singapore’s politics been influenced by bilateral issues? In what ways has Singapore’s politics impacted Singapore’s relations with our immediate and distant neighbours? What are the emerging bilateral and multilateral challenges, and how will they impact Singapore’s politics?

## **PANEL II**

### **New Forms and Movements**

While politics is most instinctively associated with political parties, elections and state authority, political dynamics exist wherever there is social life. Local politics has always been affected by non-governmental actors, including corporations, social welfare groups, artists and religious institutions. Singapore has seen more space for these actors to influence society in recent years, as reflected in the government’s encouragement of more ownership and leadership from various sectors of society, to complement the role of the state. This panel explores how non-governmental actors make sense of and contribute to politics in Singapore, drawing on insights from the sectors of tech, community welfare and advocacy.

A multiplicity of voices from diverse actors in local society provides forms of mutual support, facilitates conversations and new ideas about pertinent issues, and influences social norms. In recent years, new trends and modes of engagement have taken shape, and with them norms have evolved around how citizens express their views and exercise political agency. Nationwide discussions about matters such as legislative changes, for example, have been propelled through vigorous informal debate on online networks. Strong single-issue

organisations have also emerged around specific interests, from LGBT+ rights to climate action.

The speakers will discuss where they see themselves in the political landscape of Singapore, in relation to the general public, other non-state actors and the government. While some broadly seek to facilitate or maintain a healthy democratic society, others have more specific goals of social change. Much of their work involves engaging the government to effect policy change or more gradual social shifts, through consultation and advocacy. How have organisations and actors with different aims worked together to support each other's objectives and negotiate political space? What are the challenges to and opportunities for political participation that they have come across? From their vantage point, what is good politics for Singapore?

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*Last modified on 14 January 2019*

