

ESM Goh calls on think-tanks to advance the special case study of Singapore

Yasmine Yahya

The Straits Times, 25 October 2018

SINGAPORE - As Singapore goes through rapid social and economic changes, the need for a strong policy research body becomes all the more pertinent, Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong said on Thursday (Oct 25).

Such an organisation will enable the country to harness all possible ideas and solutions to fix present and future problems, he added.

This was the underlying reason for the setting up of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), a think-tank ESM Goh established in 1988 when he was the deputy prime minister.

But even as it continues over the years to play a vital role as a platform for Singaporeans to contribute ideas and hold a mirror to the Government, ESM Goh is envisioning a new role for the institute.

Speaking at the IPS 30th anniversary dinner, he said he wants it to work in tandem with the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKYSPP) at the National University of Singapore to "advance the special case study of Singapore".

That is, they should combine their resources and insights in helping foreign students and officials understand what makes Singapore tick, how it has achieved so much in such a short period and how it is able to maintain good governance beyond its founding leaders, he added.

As the founding patron of IPS and chairman of the LKYSPP's governing board, ESM Goh said he hopes his suggestion would carry some weight, although it should still be deliberated.

His call comes 10 years after the IPS became a research centre of the LKYSPP in 2008.

While it was done then with the understanding that IPS would function "more or less independently", ESM Goh said there is "great potential" in combining their strengths.

LKYSPP has academic resources and research, teaching and global outreach, which IPS could complement with the strength and depth of its research and focus on Singapore-based issues of policy and governance, he said.

IPS analyses public policy, examines issues of national interest and studies the attitudes and aspirations of Singaporeans through surveys of public perception.

ESM Goh noted that it revamped its research programmes recently to delve into the management of diversities, income inequality and social mobility, the problems as well as opportunities of an ageing society, and the unique challenges of governing a city-state.

IPS is well-poised to dive deep into these issues, he added.

As Singapore heads into the future, Singapore's policy research framework should be dynamic, inclusive and integrated, he said.

"How do we manage these changes and better the well-being of Singaporeans? How do we anchor our citizens to their country, rally and commit them to Singapore?" ESM Goh said.

"No one will have all the answers to Singapore's internal and external challenges," he said.

While the Government recruits some of the best to serve in the political leadership and public service, there are also plenty of able people outside the Government.

He believed the Government would benefit from tapping their views and expertise.

Whether from academia or the business, corporate and social service sectors, they "would be able to contribute to good governance", he said.

That was the genesis of the IPS.

ESM Goh said: "Convergence and integration of the best ideas and policies, of academics and practitioners, of private and public sectors - is how IPS and LKYSPP can jointly serve the interests of Singapore and extend Singapore's mindshare outside."