

## Govt 'needs to build trust with public to communicate well'

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THE Government needs to build up trust with the public in order to communicate with it effectively, academic Cherian George said yesterday.

'Even after better policies are formulated...a challenge remains: how to win over a sceptical, even cynical, public,' said Dr George, an associate professor at Nanyang Technological University's Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information.

### Background story

Dr George said that trust was important because even highly educated citizens who took an interest in public affairs 'can only take so much information about policies before their eyes glaze over'.

But this is easier said than done because the Government has not built up enough trust among the public.

'Despite the Government's enthusiasm for new media and its conviction that it must hold on to old media as tightly as before, this is going to lead to great disappointment and further disillusionment with the public if it thinks that it's communicating more with the public but the

public still doesn't get it.

'It would be a tragedy for Singapore because it'd be a failure to diagnose what the real core problem is... What is missing is trust, which can only be increased with greater accountability and transparency.'

Dr George was a panelist at the Singapore Perspectives 2012 conference yesterday organised by the Institute of Policy Studies. He is also an adjunct senior research fellow at the institute.

He noted that, over the decades, politicians from the ruling party had acknowledged that they had to meet the 'growing demands for information and explanation from a better-educated and sceptical population', a trend that was pushed further by the General Election last year.

However, 'increased communicativeness will be more persuasive only if the context - the communication environment - changes. The element...that is critically lacking, without which any additional communicativeness would be futile, is trust'.

Dr George said that trust was important because even highly educated citizens who took an interest in public affairs 'can only take so much information about policies before their eyes glaze over'.

'Some will demand facts and figures in great detail and, if the Government is on firm ground, it should have no compunctions about providing the data. For most, however, it will be about taking a leap of faith, and that is where trust gives you wings.'