

Scenarios of S'pore's future - in an interactive play **IPS distils three scenarios on how people want nation to be governed**

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A local think-tank is aiming to get Singaporeans to think about how their country should be governed 10 years from now, by coming up with three possible scenarios that will be presented in a play at the theatre.

Crafted following discussions with nearly 140 people, the Institute of Policy Studies' (IPS) scenarios revolve around three key factors: how much people trust the Government, how society values success, and how much in terms of resources is given to the elite and the broader population.

The three options are what the IPS has dubbed "SingaStore.com", "SingaGives.gov" and "WikiCity.sg".

The first scenario envisions a Singapore that is pro-growth and pro-business, where people trust the Government to provide jobs for them.

In the second, the country settles for lower growth but enjoys greater welfare and more subsidies.

In the third, citizens largely rely on community self-help in the absence of a strong government.

To turn these scenarios into a form that Singaporeans can relate to, the IPS is getting local theatre group Drama Box to weave them into an interactive play next month.

When the play is performed, the audience can join in the action on stage as they imagine the future, pen their thoughts and take part in a survey that will get them to mull over their choices.

The findings from these activities will then get an airing at an IPS conference on governance in January that will include a dialogue with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

The exercise is part of the IPS' Prism project, which aims to explore how Singapore will govern itself in 2022.

IPS senior research fellow Gillian Koh said using scenarios makes it easier to engage the public. "This is just a thinking tool in order to question our assumptions, to have a discussion, son to father, granddaughter to grandmother, doctor to patient, politician to citizen," she said.

IPS came up with the exercise after last year's general and presidential elections, which saw Singaporeans embracing a more diverse range of political views and ideas on what the country's future should be.

"We just wanted to, as a think-tank that is not Government, create a process that is non-partisan, to help people pause and ponder," Dr Koh told the media last week.

As for the innovative approach, she explained: "We actually had to go beyond ourselves and say, we'll go into the arts medium and make these scenarios accessible."

IPS' exercise also comes amid the national-level Our Singapore Conversation on the country's future.

Dr Koh said IPS had conceived its exercise earlier, but hopes it will supplement the larger national conversation.

IPS director Janadas Devan said scenario planning is usually carried out by military planners and civil servants, but rarely used to engage the public on a country's governance.

The discussions had involved 137 people from various sectors, from businessmen to civil society leaders.

Over a month, they came up with 61 sets of scenarios, but whittled them down to three sets.

These were then put to a vote, to choose the final set of three scenarios that will be presented to the public from Nov 8 to 14 at the National Library building in Victoria Street.

Said one participant, Dr Jeremy Lim, 39, chief executive of Fortis Colorectal Hospital: "What we sought to do was to try to craft scenarios that were plausible... but at the same time, we wanted them to be somewhat provoking."

Mr Devan, who is also the chief of government communications, hopes that at least 3,000 members of the public will participate in the IPS' exercise, which can also be viewed online.

For more information on IPS' exercise and the full list of scenarios, visit www.ips.sg/prism or www.facebook.com/ipsprism.

Background Story

The three scenarios from IPS are based on three key factors: people's trust in the Government, how success is valued, and resources given to the elite and others.

Scenario 1: SingaStore.com

In a nutshell: Singapore is "the store and more" - pro-growth and pro-business

Trust level: High

The public trusts the government, which puts economic growth as a high priority to ensure there are better-paying jobs for Singaporeans.

Government control: Some

The government organises businesses and community groups, and gives huge incentives for scientific, business, creative and sporting efforts that contribute to economic growth.

Business sentiments: Good

Multinational corporations and businesses operate actively in emerging technologies, boosting growth.

Fiscal position: Strong

Income taxes are progressive and tax revenues remain healthy.

Social cohesion: Uncertain

There are people with great wealth but income inequality is also high. The working poor receive state vouchers and enjoy surplus-sharing schemes, while cases of poor people who make good keep the Singapore Dream alive.

Critics say: How socially sustainable is this model? And how do you keep people hopeful that their lives will improve?

Scenario 2: SingaGives.gov

In a nutshell: Low but inclusive growth through greater welfarism

Trust level: High

The public trusts a government that gives all citizens an equal right to cheap and heavily subsidised health care, education and housing.

Government control: Strong

Providers of public goods are nationalised, so prices can be controlled

Business sentiments: Wary

Shaken by political changes, foreign businesses adopt a wait-and-see attitude about making more investments.

Fiscal position: Weaker

A larger slice of investment returns on national reserves is used to fund public services and social support.

Social cohesion: Strong

Services are made world-class and highly subsidised for locals, while strong social safety nets for unemployment and retirement remain accessible to both the rich the poor.

Critics say: What if new social investments do not bring quality growth? How will it be fiscally sustainable? And what risks will the erosion of reserves open the country to?

Scenario 3: WikiCity.sg

In a nutshell: Like online encyclopaedia Wikipedia, which has no one editor and is managed by the community, Singaporeans enjoy the full expression of their identities and potential without a strong central government.

Trust level: Low

A coalition government runs the country after years of corrupt and incompetent governance, but it is mired in political gridlock.

Government control: Weak in most areas

Citizens believe the state should take care of only foreign and trade relations, defence, and law and order, and leave the rest to the community.

Business sentiments: Mixed

Multinational corporations left Singapore during the political transition, but top Singaporeans abroad return home to invest in promising enterprises.

Fiscal position: Changed

Tax burdens and regulations are kept light.

Social cohesion: Changed

Citizens rely heavily on community self-help, forming communities around businesses, professions and other social causes that set up organisations - such as hospitals and schools - to meet the needs of their members and the public.

Critics say: How politically sustainable is this model? Will it be plagued by mediocrity and infighting, or result in further innovation?