

## **S'pore voters are astute, says ESM Goh**

**Charissa Yong**

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Singaporean voters are astute in their collective vote and have chosen when and how to calibrate between showing approval and unhappiness towards the Government, Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong said yesterday.

Past general elections have shown this, he noted, adding: "May they remain rational and wise.

"Speaking at a conference themed "Singapore at 50: What Lies Ahead", Mr Goh said Singapore's good governance is owing to both citizens and political parties.

To sustain this, Singaporeans must vote for the party that they believe is best able to govern, and not treat elections like "circuses, auctions, beauty contests, or tikam tikam (Malay for select randomly)". As for political parties, Mr Goh said their task is to seek out and encourage good people who can govern to run for elections.

This is so that whichever party wins can form a Cabinet that is exceptional to run the country.

Also, those who can best run the country must see political leadership as a noble calling, and step forward to run for office, he said.

Mr Goh was speaking on a panel with former British prime minister John Major on effective governance in modern-day democracies.

Later, he added that persuading public servants in Singapore to join politics has not been difficult in his experience because they understand the stakes involved.

"If good people don't come in, then this place can't run as successfully as before."

The private sector is the difficulty," he said, referring to the challenge of persuading corporate titans to take the political plunge.

But democratic governance is now more complex and challenging in the face of changing and ever-rising expectations of citizens, and the rise of technology and social media, said Mr Goh.

"When I first became an MP, it was 1, 2, 3, 4 - one wife, two children, 3-room flat, four wheels.

"For the generation after me, it was 5Cs - cash, car, condominium, credit card and country club," he said.

Not only do the current generation of Singaporeans desire something different - work-life balance - but they are also diverse, with different groups wanting different things.

"The party that can capture all these wants and hold out hope that these wants can be realised - will be the party that can win the elections," he said.

His fellow panellist, Mr Major, said that while social media can help governments be more targeted in their programmes, it can also pressure them to shy away from tough but necessary policies.

Mr Goh observed that people are often more willing to listen to leaders talk about long-term challenges when in a time of crisis.

"In good times, I think very few people will have time to listen to what they call 'scaremongering just to win votes'," he said.

Summing up, Mr Major said the secret to Singapore's success is that the country has "always judged what is in its long-term interests and acted with determination to implement it".

He added: "Singapore looks to the future more rigorously than any other nation I know."