

## Reasons for not joining politics: Lack of privacy, political climate ...

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The search by the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) for new blood in its traditional hunting ground has not yielded the desired results. Despite more than 200 tea sessions held since the last General Election in 2006, its efforts to recruit private sector candidates have not been that successful, Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong said on Sunday.

While the paucity of private sector candidates are in part due to the lack of privacy and freedom — reasons often cited by potential candidates — other reasons also include the overall political climate and the effect of social media on the political landscape, political observer Derek da Cunha noted.

Said Dr da Cunha: "This complicates matters for anyone wanting to have a high profile political career as their private life would come in for scrutiny in cyberspace."

Despite spending four years volunteering in various roles — of which, two years were spent understudying Senior Minister S Jayakumar — UBS economist Nizam Idris felt that "politics was not a life" for him.

"There's a difference between politics and serving the community. You could do the latter in various capacities according to your own comfort levels. But to join politics, you have to have the passion for everything else that comes with life as a politician," he said.

PAP Member of Parliament Inderjit Singh revealed that while there were some private sector individuals who were keen to join, the party rejected them because the leadership was not "comfortable" having them.

Then, there have been high-level persons who wanted to join the party, but did not get their employers' approval, he added.

"The concern was that the individual could not focus on work as being an MP is (like) holding two full-time jobs," said Mr Singh. For backbenchers, it could compromise their careers, he added.

Dr da Cunha noted that senior officers in the public sector are already subjected to background checks.

Also, compared to their private sector counterparts, public service high flyers are probably more familiar with the challenges facing Singapore as articulated by the Government, said political risk consultant Azhar Ghani.

Mr Singh pointed out that a lack of diversity — especially in the Cabinet — could have an impact on policy-making. "Civil servants don't fully understand what's happening in the private sector and vice versa," he said.

Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh wondered whether the desired result could be achieved with feedback from the industry which is already being practised. Moreover, the Government would not be held "hostage" to any "particular interest", Dr Koh added.

Disagreeing, Mr Azhar said: "Policy decisions are not made based on a formula where different weightages are given to different components ... it still comes down to the policy-maker's judgement, and the lack of public or private sector background diversity could be a problem."