

We are not averse to change: Tan Chuan-Jin

By Neo Chai Chin



Mr Tan Chuan-Jin

SINGAPORE: Does Singapore's quest to stay ahead of the pack influence its leaders to stick to what works, instead of adopting radical solutions? In conducting a national conversation, would Singaporeans be given the necessary tools and space to participate?

These were some of the questions students from the Singapore Management University posed to Acting Manpower Minister and Senior Minister of State for National Development Tan Chuan-Jin at a REACH dialogue on Tuesday night.

"Are we averse to changing? I would say that my own sense and in my own conversations, no," said Mr Tan to the audience of about 100 students and alumni. Where tweaks are needed, they will be made, he said, citing the levelling up of standards at the pre-school level, for example.

While it would be silly not to tap collective awareness when making decisions, it is not easy to consult everyone on every major decision, Mr Tan said, noting that social media can help in engaging Singaporeans and sharing information.

When asked what the Government desires of its new generation of leaders, Mr Tan - seen by some as among Singapore's fourth-generation leadership - said while the aim is to bring in fresh blood at every election, experience is also important.

Some older ministers and Members of Parliament are also "very progressive" and the experience of senior civil servants is important to keep the system going, he said.

Several foreign students spoke about difficulties in finding jobs after graduation - they need to serve three-year bonds here and cannot work part-time, yet some companies are only hiring Singaporeans and Permanent Residents.

Mr Tan said he sympathised and added that while there is the issue of job fit, job openings in general remain. He added that he would look further into the matter.