

# 'Don't throw stones... offer better ideas'

MG Chan urges young people to take charge of their own destiny at Young PAP dialogue



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## Rachel Chang

Major-General (NS) Chan Chun Sing, the youngest member of the Cabinet, yesterday urged young people to ask themselves whether their ideas can move the country forward, rather than just "throw stones, cast doubt and tear down institutions".

Some instances of youth energies being ill-utilised during the May General Election saddened him, said the 42-year-old Acting Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports.

"They were caught up in the heat of the moment, attacking the Government or attacking the opposition. I want to know... after you attack, do you have better ideas to bring the country forward?"

MG Chan's belief that such "politics for politics' sake" is poisonous to the country's future was a central theme in the two-hour-long dialogue organised by the ruling party's youth wing, the Young PAP. It was open to the public.

Surprising the hundred or so young people at the session, MG Chan asked for all their questions first and wrote down the queries - ranging from liberalising the rules on civil society to more transparency in the management of the national reserves - in point form on the whiteboard.

He then delivered a "Socratic-style" lecture which moved rapidly across a broad range of topics.

Although it sometimes took complicated detours which went over the heads of the youthful, restless audience, MG Chan mostly succeeded in holding them through the strength of his earnest, colloquial style.

He returned often to his conviction that young people must ask less what the Government can do for them, and more what they can do for themselves:

"Small problems or big problems, we always ask: What is the Government doing?" he lamented. "There is a certain mentality (that makes me) worry.

"We can do much more to take charge of the destiny of our life than to ask, what is Government doing?"

He said he would rather see young people telling the Government: I believe in this, give me some help and I will do it.

Using an analogy of litter on the ground, he delineated three attitudes.

The first, to pick up the litter and throw it away. The second, to write to a government agency and complain that

## Diversity vital for survival

"Diversity is a survival strategy. How do we know what is the industry or sector that will carry us forward into the future? When you cannot calibrate so precisely, you have to do one of two things. One is to have a portfolio of tools in society. People with different talents and skill sets ready to come forward to serve. The other is to equip your people with fungible skills, but that is very difficult.

Some people ask: Who is going to be the next PM? That is the wrong question to ask. The correct question is: Look at your leadership. Does it have the diversity (to throw up someone with the skills to meet any circumstance)? And when that skill set is called upon, that person must rally the rest of the people to come forward to serve....

Whatever the circumstance, we must have the diversity. Winston Churchill - he was a superb wartime leader, but a bad politician. Apply the correct talent to the correct time. At the end of the day, each of us is individually dispensable, but we must have resilience as a country."

MAJOR-GENERAL (NS) CHAN CHUN SING, on the fourth prime minister

the "foreign workers" are not doing their jobs. The third, to take a picture of the litter, post it on citizen journalism portal Stomp, and declare that "Singapore is a dirty place!"

The third option is to "tear down", the second to "outsource the problem" and the first to "take charge of your destiny, control your environment", he said.

It was the same take-charge attitude he recommended to a participant who asked about the tenor of social media discourse in Singapore.

He asked the audience how many of them were proud of the discussion which dominates local cyberspace. Two hands went up.

"Go and reclaim the space for reasoned discussion then," he said. "No point complaining that it's dominated by the lunatic fringe and we leave it as such. If you have a point of view, go forth and do something."

The high points of the dialogue came when MG Chan volleyed policy suggestions from participants.

In one exchange on why Singaporeans were not more free to do what they will with their Central Provident Fund

savings, he asked the audience if they would provide for someone who had squandered all his savings and so had nothing left for old age.

"Why can't we have a welfare system like in Australia?" one participant asked.

"We can. But are you willing to pay for it?" MG Chan replied, proceeding to point out the high income tax levels prevalent in more welfarist states.

"I did not want to give them my solutions," he told reporters later, "but work through solutions with them, so everybody understands the choices, the consequences, the trade-offs.

"Even if they don't agree with a decision at a point in time, they will understand the considerations behind it. So in the future, when circumstances change, they are in a better position to make those new decisions."

For Singapore Management University law student Lea Woon Yee, 21, the session mostly achieved MG Chan's objectives. "I didn't get some of the tax stuff he was talking about, but generally his style forces you to reflect on your complaints," she said.

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