

# Mr Lee 'had key test for policies'

Heng Swee Keat lauds  
late PM's evidence-based  
approach at book launch

By CHARISSA YONG

THE late founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew had one key test for social and other policies, said Education Minister Heng Swee Keat yesterday.

It is: Does it work?

While there are different views, ultimately, every policy needs to pass that test, he said, adding: "We must be evidence-based, not doctrinal."

Mr Heng, who was Mr Lee's principal private secretary from 1997 to 2001, made the point at the launch of the book, 50 Years Of Social Issues In Singapore.

Elaborating, he said Singapore's social policies must aim to improve people's welfare, and build a fair and just society for all, as well as a home that everyone is proud to love and protect.

The best way to do it is to analyse issues based on evidence, while being rooted in values and looking to the future, he added.

Former chief planner and Housing Board chief executive Liu Thai Ker, who penned a chapter on the social dimension of urban planning, said Mr Lee was particularly able to foresee problems by observing Singapore and the world.

"He anticipated the problems and then started introducing policies and persuading people to think along those policy lines, and implemented the policies before problems or needs arose," Mr Liu said.

One bold policy was building high-rise, high-density housing for sale - not for rent - even though it went against global trends back then in the 1960s, he noted.

Doing so took courage, he said.

"Singaporeans fail to appreciate the fact that (Mr Lee) pre-empted the problem sometimes. Instead, they will complain about him being high-handed to introduce a (piece of) legislation with no rhyme or reason," he added.

The need to analyse social issues in this rigorous and principled manner is also put forth in the 50 Years book by its editor, Singapore Management University behavioural sciences professor David Chan, Mr Heng said at the book launch at SMU.

The book, published by World Scientific, is a compilation of 16 essays by 23 writers on topics such as marriage and parenthood, racial and religious harmony and civil society.

It is priced at \$35, inclusive of the goods and services tax (GST), and is available at major bookstores.

Another book launched at the event was People Matter, a series of essays by Professor Chan on local socio-economic and political issues. It costs \$36 (including GST).

Looking ahead, Mr Heng expressed the hope that in shaping the country, "we will also be guided by the spirit of resilience, resourcefulness, responsibility and service to Singapore that drove Mr Lee and that generation of pioneer leaders".

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