

Release No: 10/MAY

05-1/90/05/07

**SPEECH BY MR GOH CHOK TONG, FIRST DEPUTY PRIME  
MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT THE CITY EAST  
DISTRICT AWARDS PRESENTATION CEREMONY, AT NTUC PASIR  
RIS RESORT, 1 PASIR RIS CLOSE ON  
MONDAY, 7 MAY 1990 AT 7.30 PM**

**PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY**

In the last one or two years, I have often been asked about my style of government and how it will compare with PM's style. I think such a question is not quite the most important one to ask.

To me, the real question is: where do we go from here and how do we get there? Put in another way, what will be the future of Singapore under the new leaders? What are our goals? What are the challenges and dangers ahead? How do we overcome them? I suppose these questions on substance do not attract a

greater interest than style because I have said so many times that I stand for continuity, not change.

Whatever the style of government, the end result must be a stronger Singapore and a happier people. Otherwise, the means is only cosmetic. To succeed in our task of building a stronger Singapore and increasing the happiness of our people, we must work hard to preserve the strong bond that has been developed between the people and the Government, and between the people and the Party. The strength of the bond must be increased by the style of government, not decreased. That is the acid test of the effectiveness of style.

The style of the next Government will have these three major components: participation, accommodation, consensus.

By participation, I mean involving as many Singaporeans as practicable in the political process. This does not mean involving them individually in consultation and participation. That is physically not possible. It means understanding their hopes and aspirations, their fears and tribulations, and helping them to realize their hopes and overcome their fears. To do this, we must give the people the opportunity to make their views known. Through channels like the Feedback Unit, dialogue sessions, Ministerial walkabouts, Government

White Papers, and Select Committee hearings, I have tried to widen the funnel for inputs.

More than just listening to their views, I also want to give the people more opportunity to choose and decide for themselves, instead of letting Government agencies make most of the decisions that often have to be applied uniformly. For example, the setting up of Town Councils allows the residents of HDB estates to decide what they want to do with their estates. On big issues, the Government will spell out the problem, detail the alternative solutions, discuss, and choose the one that benefits the most people and hurts the fewest.

There is another element to participation, and that is consultation. It is the other side of the same coin. When a problem has to be tackled, I like to consult knowledgeable people and expert groups so that when I make up my mind I know that I have the best advice and information. Consultation, however, must not slow down decision-making. Decision must always be timely. If taken too late, it defeats the purpose of consultation.

Next, let me talk about accommodation. By accommodation, I mean that alternative viewpoints to the Government's will be heard with an open mind, and changes made to accommodate valid views. An example of accommodation at work was the debate on the concept of Nominated MPs. The other is the discussion on the draft White Paper on the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill. I give my assurance that every good suggestion will be considered, regardless of whether you are for or against a policy or measure.

With participation and accommodation, I hope to build consensus between the Government and the people on the major issues that affect our lives and our future as a nation. Then we strengthen the bond between the Government and the people.

In the parliamentary system of democracy, there is actually no requirement for the people to participate in such an elaborate manner in national issues. It is impractical for every citizen to be involved in decision-making on every issue.

That is why they elect representatives into Parliament. The representatives are supposed to do the job for them. However, it is better that there is general understanding and broad agreement on the basic, and if possible also non-basic, issues. Hence, I prefer to practise a more participative style of government, a democracy that is participatory. With participatory democracy, there will be

greater political stability because the base of support is bigger. Singaporeans will feel a greater sense of belonging. They will be more fulfilled because they are active participants in our nation's destiny. Participatory democracy is both a means and an end, and that is, a stronger and happier nation.

Finally, let me thank the award recipients for their contribution to the Party and the country. They deserve to be publicly recognized. Congratulations!

MD/Mmay.07/Pgs.1-3

National Archives of Singapore