THINK-TANKS ‘HELP FACILITATE CITIZEN-GOVT ENGAGEMENT’

IPS must continue innovating in social media space: ESM Goh

SINGAPORE — With the online media space increasingly the platform on which people voice their opinions on the challenges facing Singapore, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) must strive to carve a place for itself as a source of credible, incisive and even critical views on these issues, said Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, at the think-tank’s 25th anniversary celebration yesterday.

Otherwise, its mission to inform the public on issues of national interest will be incomplete, said Mr Goh, who established the think-tank to offer credible alternative views on government policies, help the Government avoid being “blindsided” by important areas it might have overlooked and provide a platform for Singaporeans to discuss the country’s challenges, options and direction.

While views expressed online “may not always be thoughtful but reflect knee-jerk and gut reactions”, Mr Goh said they reflect how a section of society feels, and thus should not be ignored.

There are also well-argued views online — both in agreement with and opposed to government policies — which the IPS should proactively engage more frequently, he added.

Citing IPS Commons, a Web-based discussion platform featuring opinion pieces on policies and issues of the day, as a good example of the think-tank’s online efforts, Mr Goh said: “I urge IPS to continue innovating in the social media space, to expand its reach and promote informed discussion on issues of common, national interest, and to distil ideas so that they can be readily accessible to policymakers and interested members of the public.”

Noting that think-tanks can play an important role in facilitating engagement between citizens and the Government, Mr Goh noted that such engagement can be invaluable in providing insights and alternative opinions to encourage informed discussions about key issues. This could require the creation of new platforms for Singaporeans to brainstorm and discuss challenges, policy ideas and solutions, he said.

Mr Goh also pointed out that the IPS is setting up a “Social Lab” unit, which will systematically collect and analyse data on Singapore’s key social challenges, including a flagship project which will be a longitudinal study on social and income dynamics of a representative group of Singaporeans over many years.

Analysis of such social norms, income dynamics, and political attitudes of individual groups and communities will help the Government make better policies, he added.