The best government that money alone cannot buy

BY ANTONIO L. RAPPA
FOR THE STRAITSTIMES

The big news about civil servants, politicians, ministers, and other public servants’ pay cuts. The new government under Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has already undertaken several radical moves as a direct result of the People’s Action Party’s (PAP) performance in the 2011 General Elections at UniSIM Business School and the Head of Management and Security Studies at UniSIM Business School and the Author of Globalization: Power, Legitimacy, Authority (Iseas Press, 2011).

But not everyone is happy. Some say the cuts are in the right direction but the formula is flawed. Some say not more, others say cut less, a few say don’t cut at all.

Some of the reactions stem from basic human behaviour: self-interest. This reaction is a release stress by utilising authority. The reason people have been up in arms about ministerial pay increases in all these many years is because the issue has not been explained effectively. That was how the problem eventually fell into PM Lee’s lap.

Second, it is human to compare. No people come in in the workplace at the same pay levels, even after the proposed cut – the formula is skewed. Views motivated by envy and sense of envy re-generates the seed of envy being nourished between the haves and the have-nots.

What is most perturbing is the growing gap between the merely rich and the ultra rich. Jealousy is not more dangerous than when held by the middle-class rich – the haves but not the richest rich and the ultra rich.

Singaporeans are already among the wealthiest people in history and are on this planet right now. Don’t begrudge what we have achieved. Why squander Singapore wealth with politics on the cheap?

Singaporeans have forgotten that the highest paid politicians in the world, highest paid means you qualify, you work hard, save, invest and get rich. “Richest” is a more comprehensive concept: You get money from multiple sources. Singaporeans have come to expect that the salaries from our ministers and MPs. This means that if a minister or MP has unaccounted money, he will be found out. Singaporeans are generally intolerant of corruption. It remains an important norm. All office bearers from the Speaker of the House to the Chief Butler must be above board in all their dealings all the time.

Over a decade ago a weak Singapore government would have given billions of dollars away in foreign aid to a friendly neighbour if we had weak ministers who were arrayed by selfish forces. Thankfully we had leaders who had made the right decision. This tells us that one has to pay a man what is right. Not more, but not less. Because that would be unethical. The best government that money alone cannot buy.


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