

Title : PE: More can be done to encourage social entrepreneurs, says Tony Tan
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SINGAPORE: Presidential candidate Tony Tan said if elected, one of his priorities will be social and community bonding. He also said more can be done to encourage social entrepreneurs as this will also benefit the people these enterprises are helping.

Dr Tan started his Saturday by meeting the breakfast crowd in the west of Singapore at Bukit Panjang Market and West Coast Road Market/Food Centre.

This was followed by a visit to the Buddhist Lodge. Dr Tan commended the lodge which provides free meals daily to anyone who turns up.

"In addition to this free food, they also give out bursaries every year for children who need help - more than S\$1 million a year. And I'm told that only 40 per cent of the recipients are Buddhist, so they don't discriminate," said Dr Tan.

He said that with Singapore being an open society, it is important to live in harmony.

He said: "This is why, if I'm elected as president, one of my priorities will be social harmony and community bonding. I think this is very important... the preservation of our unique multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-cultural society, where people of all faiths can live and work together with no problems."

Later on Saturday afternoon, Dr Tan had tea with social entrepreneurs. Dr Tan said he was encouraged by their enthusiasm, saying they are good examples of "active citizenry".

"People don't rely on the government to solve all issues all the time but take the initiative to bring up issues which they care about and take the initiative to try and do something about it. And I think we should encourage more of this," he said.

Asked what he hopes to focus on if elected, Dr Tan raised the example of the Professor Brawn Cafe, where the tea session was held. The cafe employs staff with special needs in order to help them look after themselves.

He said: "Half of his staff, I believe... have special needs. But with training, with the right environment, it doesn't mean that they have to be cared for, they can be helped to look after themselves.

"I think this is an example of what I might call an 'impactful' idea. If I'm elected president, I'll certainly try to look out for more of these, find some way to help some of these enterprises in such areas.

"The whole field of social enterprises, VWOs - there are the huge ones, the National Kidney Foundation, community hospitals, those are needed, homes for the aged (and) hospices, but there are also small ones for particular areas. Small interests (like) looking after animals which have been abandoned, I think those enrich our society."

To address Singaporeans, Dr Tan will hold a lunch-time rally on Wednesday at Boat Quay.

-CNA/ac

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