SINGAPORE

S’poreans are no longer sheep

Gillian Koh says dialogue between S’poreans and Govt reached new levels

MY 2008 IN SINGAPORE

KENNY CHEE

A country often criticised for the sheep-like mentality of its people, it may surprise some that dialogue and engagement on issues between the Government and Singaporeans this year reached new levels, according to a political analyst.

Asked yesterday what her highlight for 2008 was, Dr Gillian Koh noted that she felt state and society relations are maturing, and named three examples.

“There is a greater understanding between both parties on how to engage each other to discuss and negotiate different points of view and issues,” said the senior research fellow with the Institute of Policy Studies.

The first incident she cited was the escape of terrorist Mas Selamat Kastari in February. She cited how local netizens were quick to voice their opinions online on government accountability.

Dr Koh said the Prime Minister had explained in response to breast cancer three months ago.

Yet, when contacted for the highlights of his year, he still summed up this year as professionally “satisfying”.

He singled out the fact that the surplus was derived and how the Finance Minister explained and how the Finance Minister had taken pains to explain how the surplus was derived and why it was a boon to the country.

Another major debate which also began in February was over public service.

ENCOURAGED: Dr Gillian Koh is heartened by the greater understanding between citizens and the Government. (PHOTO: THE STRAITS TIMES)

Redress for investors a top concern for Case

DAWN TAY

IT HAS been a difficult year personally for Mr Seah Seng Choon (right). The executive director of the Consumers Association of Singapore (Case) had to cope with the loss of his wife last month, the National Assembly was on cusp of dream climb

Women’s Everest team on cusp of dream climb

RACHEL CHAN

EVEREST has never felt closer to the six-member Singapore Women’s Everest Team.

As the year ends, the team is savouring two high points – they have just finished their practice climbs and, more significantly, they are on their way to the world’s highest peak.

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Last month, the National Association of Travel Agents announced a title sponsorship for the first attempt by an all-woman Singaporean team to conquer Everest.

It has been a roller-coaster year for its members: student-development officer Jane Lee, 24 (pictured); training facilitator Sim Yihui, 26, pharmaceutical-product specialist Lee Lihui, 27; business owner Joanne Soo, 28; army officer Lee Peh Gee, 32; and copywriter Esther Tan, 26, whose hopes of climbing Everest this year were quashed by Singapore’s budget surplus. Dr Koh said it stood out because of the level of public displeasure and how the Finance Minister had taken pains to explain how the surplus was derived and why it was a boon to the country.

Dr Koh’s third example was the Serangoon Gardens debate on dormitories for foreign workers being built in the estate which flared up in September, in which a group of residents had mobilised to articulate their displeasure.

She noted how the Government and other stakeholders had tried to negotiate a settlement.

These examples, said Dr Koh, showed how citizens had learnt how to use many channels of communication to air their views, like online media such as blogs or organised groups.

“People are asking to be engaged and consulted (by the Government) as opposed to just being silent or complaining in coffee shops,” she said.

At the same time, she noted that the Government had progressed as well in being less aloof and not dismissing the people’s views.

“Each side is trying to find how best to put their points across to be heard and be taken seriously,” said Dr Koh.

HELPDESK

Surplus: 结余 jié yú

Boon: 利益 lì yì

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