

PM Lee on governing with S'pore's 'swing seat' Parliament

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Every parliamentary seat in Singapore is a "swing seat" because any swing in the votes in an election would have a nationwide effect, says Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

"Today, it can be very lopsided one way; tomorrow, it can be lopsided another way. That's a factor, in the very long term, for instability," he said yesterday during a dialogue session at the Singapore Perspectives conference, organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

To mitigate this problem, Mr Lee noted how, in the shorter term, there were new provisions introduced in 2011 to allow more nominated and non-constituency Members of Parliament.

The House has a total of 80 MPs from the ruling People's Action Party (PAP), seven elected opposition MPs, three non-constituency MPs and nine nominated MPs.

"I accept that, as we go forward, there will be more desire for plural voices in Parliament. That will happen," he said in response to a question on the "discrepancy" between the PAP's vote share and the actual number of MPs it had.

Mr Lee shed some light on the type of candidates that the PAP was on the lookout for to field in future elections.

He said that the government in power had the responsibility not only to win elections but to ensure that the country was governed in the best way possible.

The key to make things work, he added, was to attract people who were both committed to Singapore and had the ability to contribute to the country.

But beyond them just being successful professionally, it was also important that prospective candidates were able to connect with different segments of society, Mr Lee said.

"We need people who can identify and click with the ground - people who have ideas and want to do things together and work together to make things happen; individually, but more so as a team in the party; so that overall we represent the population," he added.

Mr Lee tackled a series of topics during the 90-minute dialogue which was moderated by IPS director Janadas Devan.

One topic was why there remained a need to moderate the social media.

The prime minister explained that the online community here had shown in the past that it was not moderating itself. This was not unique to Singapore as "it doesn't happen anywhere else in the world", he said.

"You have views going to extremes. And when people respond to the views, they may respond in an extreme way," he said. "And when people decide to disapprove of something which was inappropriate, the disapproval can also happen in an extreme way.

"It's in the nature of the medium, the way the interactions work. That's the reason why we think it cannot be completely left by itself."