

Inclusive politics, policies drive 'one united people' vision: Ng Chee Meng

“As a society, Singaporeans must respect our differences, and proactively defend our common spaces,” says the Acting Minister for Education (Schools).

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SINGAPORE: Inclusive politics and policies are what will continue to drive Singapore’s vision of “one united people”, as reflected in the National Pledge, said Acting Minister for Education (Schools) Ng Chee Meng on Monday (Jan 18).

This vision, said Mr Ng, was conceptualised by the country’s founding fathers, who saw the importance of building a “cohesive diversity” with different races, religions and languages in the nation.

“These are careful policies, deliberate policies, practical, pragmatic policies. Our politics did not shy away from difficult decisions to create common spaces for all groups to live, work and play together - common spaces that we should continue to guard jealously,” he said.

"These policies create, enlarge, and defend our common spaces. And they are not static; these policies will evolve over time, even as our society evolves and matures."

While he noted that policies may change over time, Mr Ng stressed that core elements like education, meritocracy and leaving no Singaporean behind must remain amid a more complex landscape. This complexity is due to increased advocacy, income inequality, inter-marriages and immigration, he added.

“As a society, Singaporeans must respect our differences, and proactively defend our common spaces, regardless of whether they are Singapore-born or new citizens, regardless of religion and regardless of whether we are rich or poor.

The Integration and Naturalisation Champions committees already actively reach out to new immigrants to welcome them to Singapore, he noted.

"Over time, these new citizens and PRs can contribute more to our community and at the same time, expand their social network, and I'm quite glad to see that we're on the right track."

But even as the country “appears to be more different and diverse”, Mr Ng said its citizens agree on one thing: Being “one united people”.

Mr Ng was one of four of Singapore’s fourth-generation leaders speaking at Singapore Perspectives 2016, organised by the Institute of Policy Studies. Joining him were Labour Chief and Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office Chan Chun Sing, Acting Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) Ong Ye Kung and Minister for Finance Heng Swee Keat.

Mr Ong spoke on inclusive growth through social progress and economic prosperity. While the Government has done much in these areas, there are still areas for debate, he noted. For example, whether a national minimum wage should be implemented.

"We decide on what policies will best serve the welfare of the people, and help us achieve that elusive inclusive growth. And ultimately such choices are moral ones, political ones, and requires collective decision - which is why they are often contested," Mr Ong said.

"Whatever we contest, ultimately the people of Singapore will decide what package, what measures, and where we stand in that whole spectrum. And whatever our choice is, we must live with it, be satisfied with it, and we must even be contented with it."

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