

Heng Swee Keat has spoken at the Singapore Perspectives conference more than other ministers

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New year, new me? Not if the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) has anything to say about it.

2018 has begun much like the previous years, with the IPS hosting its signature conference, Singapore Perspectives (SP). Since the inaugural SP in 2009, it has always been held in January.

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The SP features academics, intellectuals and other public figures discussing issues that concern Singaporeans. This year's theme is "Together", focusing on how Singaporeans are living longer and its associated challenges.

Previous years have been along similar lines, revolving around themes like our diverse society, economic competitiveness, and the future of governance.

Which Minister has been invited to speak at the event?

But reading between the lines is where you might find the real gold.

Starting from 2010, a Minister has always been involved in the SP. We've listed them below.

2009: No Ministers.

2010: Lee Hsien Loong.

2011: Wong Kan Seng, Lim Boon Heng. (Maliki Osman and Ong Ye Kung were also involved. However, Ong was not a Minister yet.)

2012: Tharman Shanmugaratnam.

2013: Lee Hsien Loong, Lawrence Wong.

2014: **Heng Swee Keat**, Sim Ann.

2015: Teo Chee Hean, **Chan Chun Sing**.

2016: Ng Chee Meng, **Ong Ye Kung**, **Heng Swee Keat**, **Chan Chun Sing**.

2017: **Ong Ye Kung**.

2018: Teo Chee Hean, **Heng Swee Keat**.

You'll notice that since 2014, at least one of the three 4th-generation candidates for the role of Prime Minister (Chan Chun Sing, Heng Swee Keat, Ong Ye Kung) has always been involved in this event.

And you'll notice that of the three most talked about candidates, Heng has been invited to speak at an SP panel three times, which is more than any other Minister.

While Ong was involved in the 2011 SP, he was not yet a Minister (then Assistant Secretary General of the NTUC) and he was also not listed a speaker for the panel, just a "discussant".

Higher profile

Heng's profile has been on the rise recently. In Nov. 2017, he delivered a speech in Beijing.

Heng Swee Keat might become our point man for S'pore-China relations in future

And in Dec. 2017, a top business magazine in China published a rare extensive interview with Heng.

Heng Swee Keat: Most important thing in S'pore's political system is to win trust of the people

Reading the tea leaves

So what could this mean?

Strictly speaking, there's nothing concrete we can conclude one way or another just yet.

There could be other reasons why any Minister did or did not attend the previous SP events. Perhaps there were scheduling reasons and other commitments to consider.

But for those of you who keep a close eye on local politics, it could provide us with a tantalising clue as to which way the wind is blowing.