

## **Pritam Singh points out pros & cons of what Lawrence Wong said about race & racism**

**Singh took aim at the GRC system and the assumption that Singaporeans vote along racial lines.**

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Pritam Singh, Workers' Party chief and Leader of the Opposition, has urged new citizens and Singaporeans born here to find out what finance minister Lawrence Wong had to say about [race and racism in Singapore](#).

Wong gave a keynote speech, which lasted more than half an hour, and answered questions during the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) June 25 forum on race and racism.

Singh's response to Wong's views, which "affects everyone", were put up in a Facebook [post](#) on June 26.

### **Pros**

Singh called Wong's explicit acknowledgment that not all people in Singapore agree with long-standing PAP policies on race as "particularly noteworthy".

Wong's speech talked about long-standing PAP policies, such as the Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP) for public housing, which has been a persistent part of ethnic minorities' lived experience in Singapore and has generated a lot of discussion about its disadvantageous aspects.

The opposition politician went further by pointing out Wong's "tone and acknowledgement of the problem" as a recognisable shift in the ruling government's expression of views on the topic, which "goes much further than any parliamentary pronouncement on the matter by the government in my recent memory".

### **Cons**

While the government has many levers to operate when it comes to managing race, its relations, and its attendant issues, some policies such as the EIP have consequences that do end up penalising ethnic minorities, despite supposedly being for their own good.

The "inequity the EIP engenders for some minority Singaporeans is real", Singh wrote, as it "distorts the market and has serious economic consequences".

This refers to how the WP has heard their "fair share of feedback from minorities of all races having to lower the price of their flats to effect a sale".

Singh's post also highlighted the unintended effect of ethnic enclaves developing within a single block of flats, due to "the bunching of minority races on the lower floors of public housing in many cases in spite of the EIP".

This is understood to mean that open market forces and government regulation combined can price home buyers out of certain units on the higher floors just because those units on the higher floors tend to be more expensive.

### **Slaying of sacred cows**

Singh also proceeded to question some of the assumptions and beliefs of the incumbent, as seen in the way policies have been effected over the years.

Singh asked if it is even true that the majority of Singaporeans today will "inevitably vote along racial lines".

Singh is qualified to make this remark as he is speaking from his own experience.

This was after WP fielded three minorities in the [five-person Aljunied GRC team](#) -- Faisal Manap, Leon Perera and Singh -- and won in GE2020.

### **GRC "unconvincing in practice"**

The WP secretary-general also took a shot at the PAP's argument that the Group Representation Constituency (GRC) system ensures a minimum number of minority representatives in Parliament.

Wong came to the defence of the GRC scheme during his speech, by saying it ensures minorities are represented in a country with a majority of people from one race.

Singh responded in his post that the GRC system is "elegant in theory, but unconvincing in practice", as it can fulfil other purposes beyond what has been stated. Singh wrote: "And the GRC scheme continues to be routinely abused at the altar of politics. See how Fengshan became an SMC and was absorbed back into East Coast GRC within one election cycle? And who can forget Joo Chiat SMC of 2011? Why?"

Singh complained that Single Member Constituencies have a tendency of disappearing as they get absorbed into GRCs, sometimes after just one election cycle -- as witnessed in Fengshan SMC -- and do appear to be affected by "incumbent political considerations".

"One cannot help but to conclude that in the case of GRCs, minority representation is a Trojan Horse for the PAP's political objectives," he added.

The size of the GRC going from three-member to six and then to five -- which, although not mentioned, has been attributed to demographic changes in estates -- also gives people here the feeling that "minority representation is a Trojan Horse for the PAP's political objectives".

### **Take EBRC out of PMO**

Singh went further and called for the Electoral Boundary Review Committee (EBRC) to be taken out of the Prime Minister's Office.

The EBRC is responsible for the redrawing of electoral boundaries.

Singh also offered WP's ideas for consideration.

He wrote: "The WP has offered some realistic institution-building alternatives to get Singapore out of this self-serving quagmire."