

## **Shanmugam jabs Leong Mun Wai for past 'racist' comments, defends CMIO model for racial integration**

***Leong neither denied saying that 80 per cent of Singaporeans who live in HDB flats are condemned, nor that his comments were racist, Shanmugam noted.***

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Minister for Home Affairs and Law K Shanmugam slammed Non-Constituency Member of Parliament (NCMP) Leong Mun Wai for "racist" comments Leong had previously made in parliament.

Shanmugam also alleged that Leong "may not put much value in [Singapore's] multiracial approach".

The heated exchange in parliament on Feb. 5, 2025, stemmed from a question raised by Leong about whether the government is reviewing its longstanding [Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others \(CMIO\)](#) racial framework.

The CMIO framework undergirds various race-based policies in Singapore, such as the [Ethnic Integration Policy \(EIP\)](#), which stipulates the ratio of flats within neighbourhoods for different ethnic groups in HDB housing.

Leong later clarified that he had initially directed the question to Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Edwin Tong, who had commented on the continued relevance of CMIO at a [recent conference](#) organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) on Jan. 20, 2025.

### **Reviewing the CMIO framework**

During his dialogue at the IPS conference, Tong addressed criticisms levied at the CMIO framework for not sufficiently accommodating the complexities of racial identity in Singapore today.

Tong considered, for instance, how the framework does not fully account for mixed racial identities, and acknowledged that it has to be reviewed constantly. He nevertheless concluded that CMIO remains important as a tool of social cohesion.

### **Leong accused of 'racist' comments**

Echoing Tong, Shanmugam argued that CMIO continues to be important despite its broadness:

"The CMIO framework does not prescribe one's racial identity, but it helps us to administer race-based policies and progress that promotes social cohesion."

Shanmugam acknowledged that the government does periodically review the CMIO model, but argued that it has "worked quite well for us so far".

Shanmugam accused Leong, however, of having "very different perspectives" on CMIO and EIP than Tong and himself.

Shanmugam then proceeded to bring receipts for his accusation.

## **Shanmugam highlights Leong's comments on housing policy and CECA**

Shanmugam first highlighted a Facebook comment made by Leong in Feb. 2023 in response to one [Richard Weng](#) about how Singaporeans would not be "condemned to living in HDB flats" under Leong's proposed public housing policies.

Shanmugam then claimed that Leong had made "racist" comments in parliament before, adding that Leong has "quite freely admitted to that too".

Shanmugam was referring to statements made by Leong on the Singapore-India Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA), a bilateral trade and investment agreement between Singapore and India.

For context, the term "CECA" has taken on less than tasteful connotations over recent years.

On certain local forums, the term has become shorthand referring to Indian nationals.

Shanmugam [said in 2021](#) that it was a deliberate campaign to stoke fears and encourage racism over concerns of foreigners taking over the jobs of Singaporeans.

CECA is also a key issue for the Progress Singapore Party (PSP), which Leong belongs to.

When [campaigning in the 2020 General Election](#), the PSP singled out CECA as one of the free trade agreements they would review if elected.

Leong has talked about CECA on multiple occasions in parliament, famously criticising it on Sep. 14, 2021, for causing "widespread anxiety among Singaporeans on jobs and livelihood".

Leong insisted that his party's campaign against CECA was motivated by concerns about the economy and Singaporeans' livelihoods, not xenophobia and racism.

Shanmugam, however, quoted an exchange that subsequently took place during the Sep. 14 parliamentary sitting, where Leong himself admitted that some might have thought there were racial undertones to his statements.

Shanmugam then summed up his receipts as follows:

"So, if you look at his comments, the 80 per cent of Singaporeans who live in HDB flats are condemned, and if you combine that with his racist comments, Mr Leong may not put much value in our multiracial approach.

He may not put value in ethnic integration in our housing estates, but the EIP, for example, is a key plank of our policy to ensure that people live together, are integrated.

And, we put a lot of value in making sure our housing estates are well managed because we care for Singaporeans, and the CMIO is a key plank of those policies."

### **'We are not against the EIP at all': Leong**

Leong responded to Shanmugam by arguing that the EIP causes "economic disadvantages" for ethnic minorities in Singapore:

"There's an economic cost to the minorities. So we are looking, we have recommended, in this parliament that we should compensate the minorities for that economic cost they've incurred."

Leong then clarified that the PSP is "not against the EIP at all".

However, Shanmugam noted that Leong neither denied saying that 80 per cent of Singaporeans who live in HDB flats are condemned, nor that his comments were racist.