

## **Singapore's government moving towards 'increasing openness': Heng Swee Keat**

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The government will be more open in its engagement and invite more Singaporeans to participate in dialogues, said Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat.

Citing the leadership styles of Singapore's past and present prime ministers, the late Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Chok Tong and Lee Hsien Loong, Heng said on Monday (18 January) that the "the trend has been towards increasing openness and participation... to build a better community in terms of how we secure a collective interest".

He was one of the speakers at the Singapore Perspectives' forum, which focused on the future visions of the country's fourth generation leaders. National Trades Union Congress Secretary-General Chan Chun Sing, Acting Minister for Education (Schools) Ng Chee Meng, and Acting Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) Ong Ye Kung also spoke at the event organised by the Institute of Policy Studies.

Heng also said that more information from the government will be made available to the public in the coming years to facilitate more dialogues.

As the society continues to form more diverse views and beliefs, it is important for the government to have "deep" dialogues with the public, including members of civil societies, Heng added.

"It's about how we can agree on certain actions and how we can then work together to achieve what we will do," he said.

Towards the goal of openness, Heng said that the government ought to do more to educate students on the history of Singapore, as he believed there are "gaps" in what is taught in schools.

"I do think there is a gap partly because we have been quite reluctant to talk about history... we are very reserved in the way we teach history and I don't think that is a good thing," he said.

"In fact, there are many parts of our history that are not properly collected."

### **GDP per capita is a 'flawed concept' - Ong Ye Kung**

Ong spoke about achieving inclusive growth and measuring economic performance and income in Singapore.

Gross domestic product per capita and the Gini coefficient are the most widely used measurements of a country's growth and income distribution, respectively. But Ong said there are limitations in using these measurements.

Citing a professor he met recently, Ong said that the GDP per capita measurement is a "flawed concept" as it does not gauge the welfare and income disparity in a country's population.

The Gini coefficient measure is also inadequate. He said, “For many of us who know, Gini coefficient when it is zero means everybody earn the same salary or income...but it’s also a matter of scale.”

However, Ong said that while the measurements have their limitations, they are still relevant.

Ong also spoke about the importance for Singapore’s economy to maintain its growth as it has a direct impact on income levels. He cited the examples of the higher take-home pay of Singapore’s fresh graduates in the past five years.

For university graduates, their starting salary has increased from \$2,700 to \$3,200 over the period. Polytechnic graduates’ pay rose from \$2,000 to \$2,400 while that for ITE graduates, increased from \$1,500 to \$1,800.

Defining poverty line ‘may not be the most effective’ - Chan Chun Sing

During Chan’s Q&A session with the audience, the Minister in Prime Minister’s Office said that defining a poverty line in Singapore is “convenient, but may not be the most effective”.

He was answering a question posed by Angie Chew from local charity Brahm Centre, who said that without a defined poverty line in Singapore, it is hard for charities to gauge the number of people who are left behind in the community.

Chan replied that there are different segments in society requiring different types of help. By defining a poverty line, he posed a question as to how the needs of the people who are above the line can be met.

### **Ng Chee Meng on minority races and the LGBT community**

To maintain cohesiveness in a diverse society, the needs of the racial and sexual minorities in Singapore have to be continuously represented, Ng said.

The policies governing the interests of Singapore’s different racial groups are primarily based on the CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, others) model.

When asked about the possibility of doing away with the CMIO model as Singapore’s society becomes increasingly diverse, Ng said that it will be hard for the government to represent the interests of the racial minorities without the model.

“If you were to blur it, who will represent their interests? How would we design inclusive politics to make sure that my Malay brethren are represented in Parliament? How would we create policies that will ensure that my Indian brethren are represented in Parliament? ... I would be very, very careful to move away from principles that have served us very well.”

When asked if the government will implement new policies to deal with issues concerning the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) community in Singapore, Ng said that the “space for consensus in this is still small”.

“The best way forward is to allow it (society) to evolve,” he added.