

Singapore Perspectives 2021: Reset

Panel 2: Politics in Singapore 2030

The 11th forum, Politics in Singapore, took place on the final day of the Singapore Perspectives Conference. Drawing on the deliberations from the first nine online forums of the conference, representatives from three political parties discussed how Singapore's political landscape might develop in the next decade.

The panel's speakers included Dr Janil Puthuchery, Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information and Health, and the chairman of Young PAP, People's Action Party, Mr Gerald Giam, treasurer of the Workers' Party (WP) and a member of Singapore's 14th parliament, and Ms Hazel Poa, founding member of the Progress Singapore Party and a Non-Constituency Member of Singapore's 14th parliament. The panel was moderated by Dr Gillian Koh, Deputy Director of Research and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies.

In his opening statement, Dr Puthuchery touched on various topics – COVID-19 and its impact on the economy, identity, technology, and the developments in the PAP. He emphasised how the PAP aims to be adaptable, internally undergoing a gradual evolution to adapt to the values of the day.

Mr Giam then gave his remarks about the WP's vision of Singapore and his views on meritocracy as a guiding principle for Singapore. He also stated the importance of having a shared sense of responsibility and a desire for what is best for the country, in order to have an accountable democracy and progress for the nation.

In Ms Poa's opening remarks, she referred to the theme of the sixth forum, the soul of the nation, speaking about how politics also plays a role in contributing to the soul of Singapore. She noted that there is still a sense of fear among those who support or run with political opposition, and that people should be able to openly express their political stance without fear. She also said that she dreams of a day where powers are more evenly distributed, and where people can participate actively in all discussions, even uncomfortable ones, relating to our lives.

During the Q&A portion of the session, the speakers discussed a range of topics, including meritocracy, where the government should play a larger or smaller role, the idea of a multi-party system, and whether Singapore is ready for a non-Chinese Prime Minister. Mr Giam highlighted the need for parties and politicians to act in the interest of the country, to take the effort to explain policies, to address concerns and fears, and above all, to listen to the people's views.

Ms Poa noted that in the past, when the way forward was more clear-cut, having a one-party system proved to be more efficient for decision-making, implementation and progress. However, when faced with choices that are less clear, as is the case in the current day, it might be risky to continue the one-party system.

Dr Puthucheary emphasised how solving various difficult problems is not about having an absolutist or ideological views. He stated that in discharging their duty to Singaporeans, politicians, like doctors, artists and academics, should do their best and try their hardest with the opportunities they have, and that having such a mindset will only benefit Singapore.