

## 55% of Singaporeans say: President should be paid less than PM

That's the opinion of 55% of Singaporeans polled in survey

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On the panel at the Institute of Policy Studies forum on the Presidential Election on Tuesday were (from left): Lianhe Zaobao editor Goh Sin Teck (standing), Singapore Management University assistant professor of law Eugene Tan, IPS senior research fellow Gillian Koh, IPS director Janadas Devan, and National University of Singapore law professor Kevin Tan. -- ST PHOTO: AZIZ HUSSIN

MOST Singaporeans do not think the president should be paid more than the prime minister, according to a survey.

Many who hold this view tend to be university graduates in their 40s and early 50s, professionals or working as senior executives.

In all, 55 per cent of the 2,000 Singaporeans polled by researchers of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) disagreed that the elected president should get a bigger pay packet than the prime minister.

On the other hand, 25 per cent believe the president's pay should be higher than the prime minister's. They tend to be people aged 65 and older, and living in one- to three-room HDB flats.

The salaries of the president, prime minister, political appointment holders and members of Parliament are under review by a committee led by retired accountant Gerard Ee.

A progress report in May on the panel's work has indicated that the president's pay may be adjusted to below that of the prime minister.

Yesterday, when told of the findings, Mr Ee said: 'I'll take note of the sentiments. The review will be done by the end of the year.'

The pay of the president has risen over the years, in tandem with the salary increases of political, judicial and civil service appointment holders.

Earlier this year, the president's pay caused a stir when it was disclosed in Parliament that his salary for the year up to end-March was \$4,267,500.

As for the prime minister's salary, the most current figure available is for 2009 when he was paid \$3.04 million.

After the disclosure in Parliament of the president's salary, some people wrote to the Straits Times Forum page asking why then President S R Nathan was paid more than Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Mr Lee's press secretary responded, saying that as the president occupied the highest office in Singapore, it was 'appropriate to peg his salary higher than ministers' and just above the prime minister's'.

That was in March.

In May, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) issued terms of reference for the committee reviewing the salaries of the president, prime minister and other political appointment holders.

The PMO said that while the president's salary should reflect his high status as the head of state and his critical custodial role with regard to the reserves, it should also take into account that 'unlike the prime minister, he does not have direct executive responsibilities except as they relate to his custodial role'.

## **Background story**

### **IPS survey highlights**

- Nine out of 10 people want the president to be elected by Singaporeans and not selected by Parliament.
- 85 per cent believe a person from an ethnic minority group can be elected president through the current system.
- Three in five think there is no need to change anything in the existing system for electing the president.
- 42 per cent say the 'Patrick Tan issue' was 'very important' in deciding how they voted. But 48 per cent shrugged it off while the rest were neutral.

The 'Patrick Tan issue' refers to allegations that President Tony Tan Keng Yam's son Patrick had received preferential treatment in his national service deferment and posting. The Defence Ministry said no such treatment was given.

- 52 per cent say the outcome of the May general election shaped their vote in the August presidential election.
- Three in four think the mass media gave all candidates fair coverage.
- Newspapers were the most influential in shaping how Singaporeans voted in the presidential election.

Almost 90 per cent say newspapers were an important factor in shaping their voting decision.

Next in line were: TV (80 per cent), the Internet (67 per cent), election rallies (64 per cent), meeting candidates (62 per cent), radio (50 per cent), meeting supporters of

candidates (46 per cent), word of mouth (45 per cent), election literature (43 per cent) and mobile phones (31 per cent).

- Those who understand the president's role better tend to be highly educated and well-to-do men below the age of 65. Those who do not are likely to be low-income earners aged 65 and older, and living in one- to three-room HDB flats.
- 74 per cent believe political parties should not be allowed to endorse candidates. Similarly, 68 per cent say social organisations, unions and other community groups should not be allowed to endorse candidates.
- University-educated men aged 21 to 40, living in private property or bigger HDB flats and working in professional or executive jobs, tend to be more critical of the institution of the presidency.

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