

## Restless youth seek purpose in politics

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Singapore's youth need to feel a sense of belonging to the country, and see political participation and the support of alternative voices as ways of achieving that.

This was the key theme that emerged from a forum discussing what youth want, held yesterday at Orchard Hotel.

Organised by the Institute of Policy Studies, it featured a panel of speakers from six political parties and was attended by 300 people.

Mr Desmond Lee of the People's Action Party (PAP) and Ms Michelle Lee of the Singapore Democratic Party noted that though today's young people grew up in a stable Singapore, they have been deeply affected by world events in recent years.

Mr Lee, 34, an MP for Jurong GRC, said younger generations of Singaporeans are still trying to cope with the effects of globalisation on the cost of living and employment.

Ms Lee, 35, pointed out that those who came of age in the past decade grew up in an 'iconoclastic time', witnessing the rise of terrorism and the global financial crisis which resulted in scepticism towards governments and institutions.

There is a sense of restlessness, noted Mr Yaw Shin Leong, 35, the Workers' Party (WP) MP for Hougang.

'I believe they are searching for their place in society, where their aspirations can be fulfilled,' he said, adding that there were 'huge turnouts' at rallies, such as the WP's, during the general election.

'Today our youth want to be heard. They rally around causes they believe in, be it pro-opposition or pro-PAP. The youth want to collectively make a difference in the society they live in,' said Mr Yaw.

Mr Lee noted that young voters hold 'no automatic affiliation to the PAP or to any political party'.

He added: 'While many support the idea of more voices in Parliament, and the need for external checks on the Government, we are still discerning in our choices: Who presents a better team of candidates... who can tackle our future challenges.'

Ms Nicole Seah, 24, of the National Solidarity Party, said that for young people to become more vested in Singapore, schools should engage students in more critical thinking. She also called for more independent publications.

Mr Lee wanted the Government to change the way it carries out public consultations when it is formulating policies. It should be done earlier, and not 'two to three weeks' before a Bill is tabled in Parliament, he said. Only in this way will 'young people, in fact all Singaporeans, feel that our views make a real difference', he said.

Mr Jeffrey Lim, 35, of the Singapore Democratic Alliance, and Mr Jimmy Lee, 35, of the Singapore People's Party, spoke respectively on the need to expand young people's potential and give them constructive guidance.