

## **Time to 'embrace diversity of views'** **Important for Singaporeans to remain united in spite of political differences:** **Swee Say**

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Labour chief Lim Swee Say yesterday called on Singaporeans to embrace the new political diversity that emerged from the general and presidential elections, and to stay united in the face of differing opinions and ideas.

The fact that Singaporeans have differing views does not mean society has to be divided, said the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) secretary-general and Minister in the Prime Minister's Office.

'Diversity and unity can co-exist,' he added in a reference to the outcome of the general election - where the People's Action Party's vote share dropped and more opposition MPs were elected, and the tight presidential election, especially between Dr Tony Tan, who will be sworn in tonight, and Dr Tan Cheng Bock.

The two elections in the space of a few months revealed a 'new normal' in politics as the electorate demonstrated not once, but twice, a desire for changes.

Mr Lim noted that a new Cabinet was formed after the May 7 General Election, a new president was elected last Saturday and a new Parliament will convene on Oct 10.

'Many of us will not be able to tell what the future Singapore will be like, with this new Cabinet, with this new president, with this new Parliament and with this new mood among Singaporeans,' he said at a National Day observance ceremony organised by the aerospace and aviation and the transport and logistics services clusters at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Changi Airport.

Singapore had not only crossed a major milestone, but now also stood at a crossroads, he said, adding that there were two paths the country could take going forward.

One would be to let this greater diversity of views and ideas lead to a divided Singapore - and to a country that is unable to reconcile its differences and which allows its unity to weaken.

'If we allow that to happen, this divided Singapore will just become another so-so country, with a so-so future, with nothing outstanding, nothing exceptional,' Mr Lim said.

The second path is to embrace the diversity and to strengthen unity.

'So, instead of heading for a divided Singapore, we should head for one that has diversity in unity, and unity in diversity,' he explained.

The labour movement had made a clear choice to take the second path, he said.

The presidential election was a good illustration of how the labour movement embraced diversity - by not adopting a top-down approach to endorsing any candidate. The NTUC,

instead, left it to the 61 affiliated unions to decide on which of the four candidates they wanted to back, he said.

The result: 75 per cent of unions endorsed former deputy prime minister Tony Tan, while the other unions opted to remain neutral.

But that did not mean the labour movement was divided, Mr Lim said, adding: 'Such a diversity ought to be respected, ought to be accommodated.'

He said the labour movement would also embrace diversity by becoming even more of an independent voice for the workers, and engaging in more ground-up consultations. But the NTUC would also continue to strengthen its cooperation with its tripartite partners - the Government and employers, he added.

Elaborating on Mr Lim's comments yesterday, NTUC deputy secretary-general Ong Ye Kung said the labour movement has to be able to accommodate diversity and remain united at the same time.

'What unites the labour movement is not whether we have the same view. A unity of views is not going to unite us. It is the united objective of every union leader to work for the worker that unites the labour movement.'

Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh said the move to let individual unions decide on which presidential candidate to endorse showed that Mr Lim was well aware of the diversity of views among them. 'It was therefore a message to say that no one, or union, would be marginalised or persecuted for being different.'

Mr Lim also said yesterday that with the global economy becoming more uncertain, it was important for Singapore and workers to stay focused, remain competitive and be inclusive.