

Analysts caution against giving NCMPs equal footing with elected MPs

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SINGAPORE — While most political analysts interviewed by TODAY welcomed Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's proposal to raise the minimum Opposition representation in the House, some cautioned against undesirable outcomes in giving Non-Constituency Members of Parliament (NCMPs) equal voting rights as elected MPs.

Increasing minimum Opposition representation allows for more active debate and gives room for diverse views "not necessarily from one opposition party", said SIM Global Education academic Felix Tan.

Institute of Policy Studies deputy director Gillian Koh pointed out that critics may question the fairness of giving voting rights to NCMPs who do not have the same responsibility of tending and representing the ground, as elected MPs do.

"How then are the NCMPs accountable to anyone at all, except their parties? What then is their basis of authority ... how and who do they get their views from?" she asked.

Agreeing, Singapore Management University law don Eugene Tan said the proposal to accord equal voting rights to NCMPs is a controversial one, as some might feel that they had not "earned their right to represent their constituents in Parliament".

He also asked if raising the number of Opposition MPs to 12 will make a material difference to political outcomes, when seats in Parliament are still dominated by the ruling party.

An NCMP's vote would weigh more heavily with a "true two-party system", Assoc Prof Tan said.

The proposed move may also further deter a segment of voters from voting for the Opposition, said National University of Singapore political scientist Hussin Mutalib, as they know that "a sizeable number of them (Opposition members) will be in Parliament anyway".

Instead, he called for a review of the Nominated MP scheme, which allows individuals not affiliated to any political party to air their views in Parliament.

Existing channels for selecting NMP candidates should be made more transparent and representation from various fields must be enhanced, he said.