

## **Conflicting views in the Opposition on forming govt**

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***Today***, 2 April 2011

Leaders of various Opposition parties have declared that they have what it takes to run the country — even if there was a slim chance of that scenario unfolding after the coming General Election — following comments by Workers' Party (WP) chairman Sylvia Lim that her party was not ready to do so.

The perennial question of whether the Opposition is ready to form the government popped up again last month at a National University of Singapore (NUS) forum.

At the forum, Ms Lim reportedly added that she did not think that Opposition parties “were at a stage when they can form shadow Cabinets to take over from the Government now”.

Weighing in on the matter, Singapore Democratic Party chief Chee Soon Juan said in response to Today's queries that it was “not right for leaders of today's Opposition parties to talk as if the (People's Action Party (PAP) is of such high quality and that the Opposition ... are unable to take over the governance of Singapore”.

Dr Chee said: “Singaporeans, including those in the Opposition camp, must not fall into the mindset that the Opposition has trouble matching the PAP in terms of our candidates and our ideas.”

Concurring, National Solidarity Party secretary-general Goh Meng Seng noted that the Civil Service forms the backbone of the government, and Ministers are there to “give the right direction”.

While no single Opposition party “has the ability to fill more than half of the seats at the moment”, collectively, the Opposition will be contesting in “at least 50 (to) 70 seats”, Mr Goh noted. He said: “You must always be prepared ... in the event the PAP loses half of the seats and be prepared to have at least a coalition government — whether with the PAP or not, that's another matter.”

Reform Party chief Kenneth Jeyaretnam, who was also present at the NUS forum, told Today that he was open to the idea of a coalition government.

While the Opposition are “very unlikely to form a government in this election anyway”, he told Today that there was “no need for (the Opposition) to have any inferiority complex with regards to the PAP over policy”.

Ms Lim did not respond to Today's queries. But WP organising secretary Yaw Shin Leong reiterated in a recent blog posting that Ms Lim's comments must be seen in the context of just the coming election.

Said Mr Yaw: “In 2007, during WP's 50th anniversary, WP secretary-general Low Thia Kiang laid the strategic vision, which calls for WP to be ready, in a position to mount an electoral bid for Singapore's alternative government in 20 years ... the Workers' Party has approximately 16 more years to get there.”

The WP's measured stance on the issue found favour with academic Derek da Cunha, who noted that the "moderates and neutrals ... tend to favour politicians who are realistic and who do not engage in hype or hyperbole".

Political analyst Gillian Koh of the Institute of Policy Studies noted that the Opposition parties have "different positions" on the matter.

Said Dr Koh: "It would still be a very long way for this diversity of Opposition parties to come together to discuss and negotiate in what would be a very involved process of discussing the prospects of a coalition government."