

## **NCMP scheme remains bone of contention**

***Hoe Yeen Nie***

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More than a quarter of a century after its introduction, the Non-Constituency Member of Parliament (NCMP) scheme — which received an airing during Tuesday's "live" televised forum between the Prime Minister and a cross-section of society has remained a bone of contention for the Opposition.

Responding to Mr Lee Hsien Loong's comments during the forum that the scheme allowed for alternative voices in Parliament, incumbent NCMP Sylvia Lim (picture) said yesterday the scheme remains flawed — despite allowing for more robust debate.

Singapore Democratic Alliance secretary-general Desmond Lim urged voters to vote for the Opposition, if they also disagreed with the rationale of the NCMP scheme.

Voters "can't have their cake and eat it", said Mr Lim.

National Solidarity Party president Sebastian Teo reiterated that he would reject the NCMP seat if it was up to him to decide.

"But this all depends on the party ... If a candidate, by not taking up the NCMP seat, would affect the party's position, then I think the candidate has to consider to take up the NCMP," said Mr Teo.

The NCMP scheme was recently tweaked to allow up to nine NCMPs in Parliament.

Responding to a participant's point that NCMPs were not "real Opposition", the Prime Minister pointed out that NCMPs enjoyed full debating rights in Parliament and the scheme gave Opposition politicians the opportunity to establish themselves.

Institute of Policy Studies' senior research fellow Gillian Koh felt that the NCMP scheme could entice more prospective Opposition candidates to come forward "because they know that something might come out of their efforts".

Ms Lim, who chairs the Workers' Party, concurred that her time in Parliament as an NCMP has made her more recognisable on the ground, which may translate into actual votes. But without full voting rights, Ms Lim said her role is limited.

During the forum, Mr Lee also noted that nine Opposition NCMPs was "a lot" — as the number was large enough to form two-thirds of the Cabinet. Mr Lee added that these Opposition MPs could organise themselves and specialise in different policy areas.

In response, Ms Lim said she interpreted that to mean that Mr Lee "actually sees ... that there is benefit to have a critical mass of Opposition MPs in Parliament". She added: "So I hope that Singaporeans can take the cue from there and vote in at least nine Opposition MPs."