

## **Opposition 'can help de-polarise politics'** **Healing among themes at forum that brings together PAP, Opposition representatives**

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SINGAPORE - Exactly a month after Singaporeans took to the polls, the healing of any political rifts wrought at the General Election (GE) was among the themes at a forum yesterday that brought together representatives of the ruling and Opposition parties.

And the latter group can play a role in the "de-polarisation of politics" - by explaining the intention of Government policies to residents they meet, and if the People's Action Party and government agencies engage "alternative parties" in policy-making - said two Opposition panellists who were invited in their personal capacity for the Institute of Policy Studies forum titled "What Youth Want".

The first suggestion was made by Mr Yaw Shin Leong, the newly-elected Member of Parliament for Hougang. "At the end of the day, there's only one Singapore (for) all of us," he said. The "nation-building" role of Opposition figures is to "gently persuade, educate and to share" the reasons why some policies are implemented.

Engaging Opposition parties in policy-making would help create "a better Singapore", said Mr Jimmy Lee, who stood in Bishan-Toa Payoh Group Representation Constituency. He said: "I'd propose to the incumbent party and the public service: Engage us, the alternative parties in your policy-making directly. Bring us into your committee meetings."

At a press conference held after the election results were announced last month, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had marked the close of the GE by saying it was "time for healing and for acceptance of the people's decisions - not just for the PAP but for all Singaporeans". He had also urged Singaporeans to "close ranks to secure our future together".

Just over one in four voters this time were aged 36 and below and the forum zoomed in on the political significance, awareness and engagement of this group.

The panellists agreed that post-75ers want meaningful engagement. Generation Y's deference to those with money or power is not "automatic", noted Ms Michelle Lee, who was an Opposition candidate in Holland-Bukit Timah GRC.

Ms Nicole Seah and Mr Jeffrey Lim - who contested in Marine Parade GRC and Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC respectively - wanted critical thinking promoted in schools. The authorities could also "lighten rules on having independent publications on the Internet", Ms Seah suggested.

Jurong GRC MP Desmond Lee said the "touch-and-go politics of the past" would not go well with today's youth, who expect substantive engagement.

Put in charge of university interns while he was at the Law Ministry two years ago, Mr Lee gave a group of them a hand in a project that was "in the process of being developed" and watched as they set about it enthusiastically. The result: The Criminal Procedure Code, introduced this year, incorporated some suggestions the students had made.

But didn't the Government already promise in the 1990s to be kinder and more consultative, asked a forum participant.

To this, Mr Lee said the Government must now "consult in a different way and to reach out to people who want to make a contribution but cannot find the means to do so". The MPs and activists on the ground must also ensure that views are fed back to the right people, he said.