

Pritam Singh to Lawrence Wong, “GRC scheme continues to be routinely abused at the altar of politics”

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Singapore — Leader of the Opposition and Workers’ Party head Pritam Singh responded to a recent speech made by Finance Minister Lawrence Wong wherein he tackled the issue of race as well as the GRC system.

In his speech, hosted by the Institute of Policy Studies and the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies last Friday (Jun 25), the Minister called for more understanding on the preservation of cultures and traditions and the possibility of an ideal society without the need for a Group Representation Constituency system.

Mr Wong acknowledged the difficulties of being a minority in a multiracial society and urged the public to do more and take an extra step to make the minority feel comfortable.

At one point in his speech, he said, “Believe me, nobody would be more pleased than the PAP leadership – past and present, from Lee Kuan Yew and S Rajaratnam onwards – if one day we no longer needed the GRC system to ensure sufficient minority representation in Singapore.”

On Saturday night (Jun 26), Mr Singh took to Facebook to comment on the speech, saying that what Mr Wong said about racism is “well worth a read, no matter what your political leanings,” as racism is an issue that affects everyone.

Furthermore, the WP head also pointed out as “particularly noteworthy” that Mr Wong acknowledged that not everyone is in agreement with long-standing PAP policies that he had discussed in his speech.

Mr Singh specifically mentioned that the Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP) for public housing, which he wrote has bothered his fellow WP members as they have heard the feedback “from minorities of all races having to lower the price of their flats to effect a sale” over the years.

He added, “Mr Wong’s tone and acknowledgment of the problem goes much further than any Parliamentary pronouncement on the matter by the Government in my recent memory (See Hansard below).”

But Mr Singh said that the Finance Minister’s remarks “on the prospects of racial enclaves...deserve a second look,” and that “the inequity the EIP engenders for some

minority Singaporeans is real, distorts the market and has serious economic consequences.”

As for the GRC scheme, Mr Singh wrote that while the People’s Action Party’s (PAP) asserts that the scheme ensures insofar as the Minister’s defence of the GRC scheme is concerned, the PAP’s argument that it ensures “a minimum number of minority representatives in Parliament is elegant in theory, but unconvincing in practice.”

MOREOVER, HE ADDED, “THE GRC SCHEME HAS LONG BEEN OVERSHADOWED BY INCUMBENT POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS, TO THE EXTENT THAT IT ALSO SERVES A MORE IMPORTANT COLLATERAL PURPOSE... AND THE GRC SCHEME CONTINUES TO BE ROUTINELY ABUSED AT THE ALTAR OF POLITICS.”

The Leader of the Opposition pointed out that what was once 3-seater GRCs expanded in number. And even more especially, he gave the following examples.

“See how Fengshan became an SMC and was absorbed back into East Coast GRC within one election cycle? And who can forget Joo Chiat SMC of 2011? Why?”

One cannot help but to conclude that in the case of GRCs, minority representation is a Trojan Horse for the PAP’s political objectives.”

Amending this, he added, can begin with removing the Electoral Boundary Review Committee out of the Prime Minister’s Office and for Singapore to have a more substantive EBRC.

He added that the “WP has offered some realistic institution-building alternatives to get Singapore out of this self-serving quagmire” and said he hopes the Government will rethink its position on these matters.

Before ending his post, Mr Singh underlined there were other issues to study from Mr Wong’s remarks, including whether or not it’s true “that the majority of Singaporeans today will inevitably vote along racial lines?” /TISG