

## Younger Singaporeans want a two-party system, whatever Ong Ye Kung may say

*Tan Bah Bah*

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As Singapore transits to the post-Lee Kuan Yew/Goh Chok Tong/Lee Hsien Loong era, the big question has always been: Will the party which has been ruling the country for so many years be able and willing to adapt and remain relevant and dynamic? I am not so sure, judging by the remarks of Health Minister Ong Ye Kung at a Singapore Perspectives conference organised by the Institute of Policy Studies.

We are at a stage where we are watching a new 4G group about to take complete charge. The next PM will come from this group, as we have all been told. This new PM is supposed to carry the aspirations and expectations of many younger Singaporeans who had sent a clear message in GE2020: They want a two-party system, they want better checks and balances, they want greater accountability. This message came in the Workers' Party's capture of a new GRC (Sengkang), stronger showing in retaining Aljunied GRC and creditable performance in East Coast GRC which practically derailed the political trajectory of the then designated 4G PM to be.

Which part of the two-party system and greater public accountability points in the crucial GE2020 message did Ong Ye Kung, considered a potential senior hot shot in the next PAP government, not understand?

Like Finance Minister Lawrence Wong, a leading contender to be the fourth PM, who did it sometime back, Ong took part in what must now be seen as a de rigueur rite of passage for anyone who aspires to be in the top echelons of Singapore's national leaders – deliver a philosophical cum realpolitik speech about the fate of thriving hubs past, present and future. Jericho, Chang'an, Rome, Constantinople, Kaifeng and Pataliputra got honourable mention together with New York, London, Paris, Tokyo, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Singapore in Ong's speech.

Fine.

Decades ago, far-sighted 1G DPM S Rajaratnam had already laid down the vision of Singapore as a "globalpolis", which was shared by Singapore's first Chief Minister David Marshall. Singapore has no choice but to constantly update itself to be relevant to the world – or be buried by the sands of time. Be a world hub, be capital of ASEAN (as someone suggested), be a smartphone offering linkages to all sorts of services and goods, as Ong himself pointed out. People like Prof Tommy Koh and former Foreign Minister George Yeo have also been painting their own grand own sweeps of history – on the rise and fall of cities – to remind Singaporeans not to be complacent.

It is precisely because Singaporeans are not complacent and are dissatisfied with the current political system that they are pushing vigorously and in no uncertain terms for change. They want stronger Opposition in Parliament and, perhaps, inevitably, a two-party system.

If the Health Minister, supposed to be a part of a reset government attempting to be more in tune with a younger generation, can unabashedly bang the same old outdated drum beat that Singapore cannot afford a two-party democracy, then he and the party he represents are out of touch and out of tune. Hopefully there are other 4G leaders who are not.

More ridiculous that he believes, as other establishment figures have in the past, the government can check its own self. Very few Singaporeans share this absurd belief.

That is why the Opposition has been growing in strength.