

Hyper-competition does not necessarily lead to better economic performance: PSP's Kumaran Pillai

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Singapore – Opposition Progress Singapore Party's (PSP) Kumaran Pillai took to social media to urge more investment in local talent as many feel they "have gotten the short end of the stick" when it comes to employment.

In a Facebook post on Friday (Feb 25), Mr Pillai quoted Transport Minister Ong Ye Kung's views on Singapore doing well under a one-party system. "He (Mr Ong) does not believe in political competition and wants Singaporeans to put all the eggs in the PAP (People's Action Party) basket," wrote Mr Pillai.

However, Mr Ong "sings to a different tune when it comes to managing talent, specifically foreign talent," he added. According to Mr Ong, imposing a levy on Employment Passes (EP) would make the country's enterprises less competitive on the global stage.

During the Institute of Policy's Studies' annual Singapore Perspectives conference in 2017, Mr Ong, then Education Minister, said a one-party system might give Singapore its best shot at success because it is a small country that needs to stay nimble.

Mr Ong noted that Singapore's most desirable scenario would be a system of robust internal competition within the PAP.

During a Budget debate on Thursday (Feb 25), Mr Ong and Minister of State for Manpower Gan Siow Huang crossed swords with the PSP's Non-Constituency MP Leong Mun Wai over the latter's proposal to impose a S\$1,200 monthly levy on EPs.

Mr Leong's proposal indicated PSP favoured Singapore closing up instead of welcoming global companies and talent, reported straitstimes.com, quoting the two ministers.

However, Mr Pillai pointed out that "many advanced economies have implemented schemes that regulate the flow of foreign workforce." He mentioned Australia and the US which have their own system.

"Contrary to what Minister Ong thinks, hyper-competition does not necessarily lead to better economic performance. In this case, it has led to sub-optimal performance and created much social disquiet amongst us," said Mr Pillai.

He noted how minorities stand to lose the most as they become the subject of resentment by the larger population.

"Some of my local Indian friends feel that they have gotten the short end of the stick and feel that their jobs are taken away," he added.

Mr Pillai suggested investing more in local talent, noting it may require a multi-agency approach to solve the workforce's current challenges.