

It is up to PAP to decide if S'pore is ready to have non-Chinese PM, not the people: WP's Yee Jenn Jong

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Mr Yee was responding to Senior Minister Janil Puthucheary who had earlier said that it is up to Singaporeans to decide on the matter

It will be up to Singaporeans to decide on whether the country is ready to have a non-Chinese Prime Minister and two-party political system, said Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information and Health Janil Puthucheary at an Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) panel on Monday (25 Jan).

Dr Puthucheary was speaking in the IPS panel, entitled 'Politics of Singapore 2030'. Also in attendance were Aljunied Member of Parliament (MP) Gerald Giam and Non-Constituency MP Hazel Poa.

The panel took place at Marina Bay Sands, and was moderated by Dr Gillian Koh of IPS, as reported by Yahoo! News Singapore.

During the panel, an audience raised a question on the prospect of a non-Chinese Prime Minister, to which the Senior Minister replied, "It will be up to the people of Singapore to decide, ultimately, about this matter."

"And I do hope that our racial harmony progresses, to the point where, when people talk about a non-Chinese Prime Minister, it's not about an icon of resetting or an icon of reimagining, but on the basis of that person's ability to do the job right, and that will be for Singaporeans to decide," he continued.

However, the Workers' Party (WP) politician and former Non-Constituency MP Yee Jenn Jong begged to differ on this matter.

In a Facebook post yesterday, Mr Yee asserted that it is not up to Singaporeans to decide on whether the country is ready for a non-Chinese Prime Minister, because ultimately, the People's Action Party (PAP) has the final say.

"No, it is up to the PAP and not up to the people of Singapore. Singaporeans do not get to vote for who the PM should be. The ruling party votes internally for this position. The people are ready, but the PAP is not," he wrote.

Comparing the scenario to how it is like in political parties, Mr Yee said that Singaporeans do not directly elect the Leader of the Opposition, as the decision goes to the WP cadre members – just like how the PAP cadres select their leaders.

He went on to share an extract from page 205 of his book, titled 'Journey in Blue: A peek into the Workers' Party of Singapore', in which he described the thoughts that went through

senior members of the WP in 2018 when then party chief Low Thia Khiang did not wish to contest to retain his seat as the Secretary-General.

“For the records, with a Sikh (a minority within the minority Indian race) at the helm, WP went on to record its best ever GE performance,” Mr Yee added.

“Were we concerned that the leadership would move from a Chinese educated leader to an English-speaking Indian/Sikh? Not for me, nor for many of the senior members in the party. Those with Parliament experience especially felt that our biggest selection criteria would be how the person could stand up to attacks by the PAP.

“We are, after all, a political party with a very powerful opponent. There would also be the need for the person to be able to connect with and inspire confidence in members. In fact, for several of us, Leon Perera also featured high on our list of possible successors, given his good Parliament performance. The disadvantage that Perera would face was that he was an NCMP at that time.

“With elected MPs in the WP, the SG should preferably be an elected MP who could have a ground to be rooted in. Since Singh was able to take the role and was the best fit, many of us decided to put our support behind him. Race never came into our consideration. Two of our preferred candidates for the SG post were non-Chinese.”