

Netizens call out Heng Swee Keat over remark about “nativist tendencies”

The Online Citizen, 22 January 2020

Speaking at the Institute of Policy Studies' annual Singapore Perspectives Conference on Monday (20 Jan), Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat noted that he and his colleagues – the fourth-generation (4G) leaders – are committed to earn the trust and build a future of progress for Singaporeans.

Mr Heng highlighted that the “Singapore Together” movement he introduced last year will be the new cornerstone of nation building, saying “what we see forming is a new model of partnership, between Government and Singaporeans in owning, shaping, and acting on our future”.

Noting the cracking of political consensus around the world, he pointed out that Singapore is not immune to the same divisive forces that have overturned many other societies.

Mr Heng said that as a matter of fact, the nativist tendencies can be seen in the Republic, like some public debate revolving foreigners.

“If we do not act decisively, and if we allow these forces to creep up on us, our hopes and concerns can be exploited to create fear and anger,” warned Mr Heng.

He then reminded people to keep in mind that it's crucial to ensure that such differences do not become entrenched, and warned about political parties who use divisive rhetoric to gain support in cracked atmosphere.

Stressing the issue of increasing amount of information and misleading information in the society, Mr Heng said that it is crucial to find ways to deepen understanding and relationships among people.

He added, “We must reject extremist views that will fray our social fabric, and be discerning about falsehoods and irresponsible promises that cannot be fulfilled. Most importantly, we must find new ways to come together, reaffirm what we hold in common, and work collectively towards a shared future.”

Additionally, the current Finance Minister also hinted that plans are being constructed to offer more help to lower-and middle-income Singaporeans.

“We are now studying how we can better help lower-and lower-middle income Singaporeans, including current and future seniors, to meet their retirement needs in a sustainable way. I will provide more details in the coming Budget,” said Mr Heng.

Mr Heng then urged all Singaporeans to work collectively in order to solve the challenges that the country is facing.

Upon hearing what Mr Heng said, netizens penned their thoughts under the comment section on Facebook pages such as Channel News Asia, Today Online, and TOC. The majority blasted his speech for being little more than empty rhetoric. Pang Cheeyong said that all these are empty words and promises which did not inspire any confidence in the future.

Some netizens were displeased over the failure of the current government on serving its purpose at the right time. As a result, the sign of nativist tendencies has appeared in the country. Wilson Wong wrote, "If ICA has done their job, if MOM has done their job, if our laws and policies plus policing have done their job, we wouldn't be questioning, giving the image that we have nativist tendencies."

A handful of netizens also felt that it is too late for the government to propose a better way in helping the lower and middle income groups. They said the government expressed zero concern and do not take any initiative to solve the plight of the people, citing recent issues such as lift upgrading at Marsiling Rise, employment rate for local PMETs, increasing of GST rates, as well as the living costs of elderly people.

AC Heng even wrote, "Now we hearing all these sweet talk before GE. Then as with before, after GE we'll get chained like slaves to slog for these slave masters, fees hikes, proposed GST increase, HDB flat no value, CPF held further. Their "sincerity" is really beyond my comprehension."

Other netizens also ridiculed what Mr Heng highlighted in his speech about how all Singaporeans "work together". One person responded, "Yes, you can asked (All) Singaporean to work with us but (We) Born Singaporean can work with the opposition, whom is also Singaporean, to solve the unsolve challenges that had been facing for too long..."