# AI models like ChatGPT can create new jobs, opportunities, but Govt needs to help workers adapt Lawrence Wong

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- Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong said that while technology may make certain roles obsolete, it will also create new roles
- The Government thus has to think of ways to help workers adapt to these new roles, Mr Wong said at an Institute of Policy Studies conference
- Law and Home Affairs Minister K Shanmugam addressed points on political plurality in a separate panel at the conference
- He said that while political plurality may seem an attractive proposition, it may not work well for a small country like Singapore

SINGAPORE — Amid concerns that the unchecked development of generative artificial intelligence (AI) models could lead to many jobs becoming obsolete, Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong has his own positive take: That AI models such as ChatGPT can help to enhance inclusivity.

This is provided workers get help in adapting to the new technology.

"I do not think that we will end up in a dystopian future where it's all about machines and humans become obsolete."

Speaking at the Institute of Policy Studies' 35th Anniversary Conference at Sands Expo and Convention Centre on Monday (June 12), he added: "While technology may make certain roles obsolete, it will also create new roles. And so, it's really about helping humans adapt, helping workers adapt to these new technologies."

The conference, which saw about 950 participants, had four panels touching on various topics, with Mr Wong speaking on the panel discussing Singapore's social compact.

Home Affairs and Law Minister K Shanmugam was also present at a panel on plurality, where he touched on how political plurality may not necessarily be effective for a small nation such as Singapore.

The other panels were on meritocracy, featuring Education Minister Chan Chun Sing, and on housing, featuring Ms Sim Ann, Senior Minister of State for National Development.

Responding to a question from the audience on how the Government is looking to harness AI while ensuring inclusivity and fairness in its implementation, Mr Wong said that the Government's biggest challenge is how to help workers adapt to these new technologies on a continuous basis.

He added that this is why the SkillsFuture system will be "such an important part of our new compact going forward".

SkillsFuture is a national movement that aims to provide Singaporeans with training and upskilling opportunities.

He said: "We are now reviewing what are the different ways we can do, different measures we can take to reduce barriers to learning... What are the different types of barriers that hinder individuals from reskilling and upskilling themselves, and how can we go about systematically reducing these areas and building a culture of lifelong learning?"

On the same topic, Education Minister Chan said in the earlier panel discussion that generative AI could help to reshape how work, especially hands-on work, is rewarded.

He said that for instance, the hands-on sectors such as nursing and eldercare cannot easily be replaced by ChatGPT.

"I know some robots can do some interactions to keep the aged active, but it's different from human touch," he said. "So, the high-touch (sector), involving the care industry, will get a premium over time."

## ON POLITICAL PLURALISM

During the panel discussion on pluralism, Mr Shanmugam spoke about the prospect of political pluralism in Singapore, in response to one of the other panel speakers, Ms Zuraidah Ibrahim, the executive managing editor of Hong Kong daily South China Morning Post.

Political pluralism refers to having many different interest groups and political parties in a political system.

Ms Zuraidah said during the panel that while most people would agree that Singapore can be considered culturally plural, it can "hardly count as politically plural".

"I believe we shouldn't underestimate public desire for a plural political system," she added. "When offered higher quality opposition candidates, a high proportion of swing voters tend to use their ballots to register their desire for a more plural Parliament."

Responding to her, Mr Shanmugam said that it is not the incumbent People's Action Party (PAP) that decides the current structure of Parliament, but the people who vote.

"I have no doubt that (if) the PAP doesn't perform, it can be out in a single election, because all constituencies in Singapore are more or less the same — highly educated population, the people know what they want," he said.

He added that it is not that the PAP does not welcome diversity, but rather it does not want to lose its power to another party.

"I am not sure you will find any party or any party in the world that wants to lose an election... When you compete, you compete to win," he said.

He also said that while the prospect of political pluralism may seem like an attractive proposition as more viewpoints are shared in Parliament, he has yet to come across any country, outside of Scandinavia, that has successfully made political pluralism work for its citizens.

Particularly, in Singapore, there is also the consideration that "we are extremely small, and have a variety of natural insecurities".

"Does (political plurality) work for us? I don't know... eventually I'm sure we will find out at some point," he said.

In the same vein, he has not observed any single party dictatorship that has worked either.

Ms Zuraidah also made a point about how some Singaporeans were looking forward to the upcoming Presidential Election because they were hoping for a close fight, which was what happened in the 2011 election.

However, these sentiments were quashed, she said, when the "Government-backed" candidate Tharman Shanmugaratnam announced his plans to contest last week.

"Mr Tharman Shanmugaratman's entry into this year's race, as the putative Government-backed candidate, shows how badly Cabinet wants to avoid the awkwardness of another close fought election," she said.

Responding to this, Mr Shanmugam said that Mr Tharman "is his own man" who had decided on his candidacy for President, and made up his own mind.

"And if you look at it like that, he's a strong candidate, does that become the PAP's fault? That he's a strong candidate?

"If the Prime Minister is good (and runs) at the next Presidential Election, are we supposed to take a bow and say I'm very sorry that the Prime Minister is standing, that we are putting up such a strong candidate?"

Mr Shanmugam added that if a good candidate comes forward, "that's pluralism".

"Singapore has other good candidates, they should come forward too."

## RACIAL PERCENTAGES MAINTAINED IN SINGAPORE

Another panellist on the same panel, Ms Corinna Lim, the executive director of the Association of Women for Action and Research (Aware), raised the point that immigration numbers have kept racial percentages constant, and questioned if this constant proportion could hamper Singapore's growth as a racially plural nation.

Responding to this, Mr Shanmugam said that the Government is "publicly committed to keeping our racial percentages more or less constant".

"A lot of people think that it is actually to keep the Chinese percentage at 70-odd (per cent), this is not the reason."

This is to keep the Malay population at 14 to 15 per cent.

"For us to get immigrants of Chinese ethnicity is not an issue, for us to get immigrants of Indian ethnicity is not an issue," he added. "But try persuading highly skilful, successful Malays from Malaysia or Indonesia to come to Singapore, that is the challenge."

He also said that the percentages are kept constant as a "guarantee" to the Malay community here.

Separately, Mr Shanmugam said that the Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others (CMIO) paradigm should not be overemphasised in day-to-day life.

"In most aspects of our life, we don't think along CMIO lines."

It is useful in certain contexts such as policymaking with the Ethnic Integration Policy, for example, or administering targeted support to certain races, but there are few other contexts in which CMIO is relevant.

"It's an open society that has a lot of open opportunities, which is not somehow tied into the CMIO classification," he added. "I don't think we should be too caught up in that."