

DPM Tharman 'would have preferred a contest' for Presidential Election: reports



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PHOTO: REUTERS/Ralph Orlowski

Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam said on Wednesday that he would have preferred a contest in the recent Presidential Election.

Speaking at the first Majulah Lecture organised by the Nanyang Technological University on Wednesday (20 Sept), Tharman was quizzed on the 2017 Presidential Election after the lecture, according to media reports.

One student asked if the reserved presidential election is an indication that Singapore is "regressing as a society", despite Singaporeans growing up reciting a pledge with the words "regardless of race, language or religion".

In response, Tharman said while he was "proud" that Halimah Yacob was the first Malay president in 47 years, he told the audience of more than 1,500 it was "understandable" that Singaporeans had questions about the recent election, which was reserved for Malay candidates.

Halimah became Singapore's eighth president after being declared the sole eligible candidate by the Presidential Elections Committee.

Tharman added, "It is understandable that questions are raised on the reserved election. It is also understandable that most people, including myself and I'm sure most people here, would

have preferred a contest. But the aspiration for race not to count is something that needs working towards. It cannot just be a pledge, it cannot be just an incantation.

"If along the way you see decades after decades, that you don't have a Malay president, I think that what we say loses its meaning. That's the reality."

He also said that it was "encouraging" that people felt strongly about the election and "they want race to matter less in the future". "It is encouraging because it shows that we value what we say in our pledge," he said.

Tharman also spoke of his own experience of growing up as a minority in Singapore. He said, "Never forget, that growing up as a minority is different from growing up as a majority. It is different. Never pretend that it's the same. It requires extra action, extra empathy, and that sense of sharing the same boat together."

Further thoughts on the PAP

The Deputy Prime Minister was also asked for his thoughts on the lack of independent media in Singapore and whether the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) resorted to personal attacks during the 2016 Bukit Batok by-election.

The election was contested by the PAP's Murali Pillai and Singapore Democratic Party chief Chee Soon Juan. During the campaign, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and other ministers brought up Chee's past run-ins with the government.

Tharman responded saying that while he did not agree "with every tactic by every one of my colleagues", he said that the PAP is defined by its insistence on "character, honesty and being true to Singaporeans".

He said, "That trait of the PAP shows up almost all the time. Sometimes the PAP itself falls short, and action has to be taken on individuals and it is taken."

Source: <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/dpm-tharman-preferred-contest-presidential-election-reports-022244090.html>