

Differing views provide rigour in policymaking: DPM Heng

While Singapore wants that, it must not let a divergence of views lead to paralysis, he says

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A plurality of views adds to the rigour of policy formulation and implementation, but Singapore must not let a divergence of views lead to paralysis, Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat said.

He was speaking yesterday at the launch of the book *The Singapore Synthesis: Innovation, Inclusion, Inspiration*, a collection of four lectures delivered by the Monetary Authority of Singapore's managing director Ravi Menon as the Institute of Policy Studies' (IPS) ninth S R Nathan Fellow in July last year.

DPM Heng, who is also Coordinating Minister for Economic Policies, said that while Singapore wants a diversity of views and to debate different perspectives rigorously, it also needs leaders with the vision and courage to decide on a course of action.

"Once a decision is taken, it is time to act collectively and decisively, with all hands on deck, and we must periodically review the choices made, to see whether we could do even better," said Mr Heng, adding that this is how things work in Singapore, and it has made the nation successful.

MOVING SINGAPORE FORWARD

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Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat (centre) and Mr Ravi Menon, managing director of the Monetary Authority of Singapore and the Institute of Policy Studies' ninth S R Nathan Fellow, unveiling the book, *The Singapore Synthesis: Innovation, Inclusion, Inspiration*, yesterday. With them is IPS director Janadas Devan. ST PHOTO: FELINE LIM

He noted how Mr Menon's candour in his lecture series had drawn surprise from some, given his position in the establishment.

Mr Heng reassured the audience at the event, held at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, that Mr Menon had not gone rogue.

In his lectures, Mr Menon had brought up contentious suggestions such as increasing carbon

taxes, raising wealth taxes and studying having a minimum wage.

But within the Government, issues are often extensively deliberated, Mr Heng said, adding it is not just Mr Menon, but also many others, who are contributing to the contestation of ideas. Singapore must continue to harness this productive diversity of ideas, Mr Heng said.

He also stressed "the need to en-

sure that discourse grows the common space and not diminish it", referencing Mr Menon's lecture where he spoke about the celebration of diversity.

"There are difficult and deeply emotive issues that societies must grapple with, locally and globally."

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“We must learn to handle these issues sensitively and with forbearance. Progress cannot be made by advocating loudly for a single viewpoint,” said Mr Heng.

He cited the discourse on Section 377A of the Penal Code – a “longstanding and deep-seated issue, with strong views for and against a repeal”.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, at the National Day Rally on Sunday, said Singapore will repeal the law criminalising sex between men, and amend the Constitution to protect the current definition of marriage from being challenged in court.

This step towards “a new equilibrium” was taken after extensive consultation behind closed doors in a candid and constructive manner, Mr Heng said.

“A new balance would not be possible if people insist only on pushing across their views or venture into polemics,” he said, adding that Singaporeans by and large cherish the harmony and common space they have. “Even for difficult and evocative issues, parties have approached dialogue with respect, restraint and rationality.”

He said that arriving at a new equilibrium on Section 377A will show that even for contentious issues, there can be room for accommodation.

“But we all need to do our part to carry out dialogue in a way that will move society forward and call out those whose actions undermine the harmony that we so treasure,” added Mr Heng.

Speaking after Mr Heng, Mr Menon said he wrote the lectures “out of a conviction that Singapore can do better”.

“Uncertainty in the world around us need not obscure our own clarity of purpose. Our journey cannot be one of merely solving the problems that come our way; it must be guided by a vision of what we want to be and how we want to get there,” he said, noting this is also what the current Forward Singapore conversation is about.

Mr Heng expressed his hope that the book will inspire Singaporeans to step forward to shape the next chapter of the nation’s history.

“Not just to contribute ideas, but to also put good ideas into action. In this way, we can continue to be an inspiring nation, an inclusive society and an innovative economy,” he said.

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