

Committee of Supply

Debate on the Estimates of Expenditure for the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports

Amendment Speech (4 min) by Viswa Sadasivan, NMP

Integration - Strengthen the Core first

Preamble

1. The challenge of integration is exacerbated during times of economic strife - where scarcity deepens social and economic insecurities. Home grown citizens tend to be more sensitive when the chips are down economically, socially or politically.
2. So even as we put our heads together to find ways to better integrate new immigrants, it is important that we don't lose focus or attention on strengthening the level of comfort, confidence and contentment amongst home grown Singaporeans. We need to be stronger at the core.

I have 2 suggestions

3. *Firstly, we need to strengthen the material and economic security of home grown Singaporeans* - there are clearly issues that appear to bother Singaporeans.

Affordability of HDB flats - this issue has been brewing for several months now, especially amongst the younger generation. As long as this remains an issue, it will not help Singaporeans accept new immigrants, especially since quite a few see them a key cause of this problem. Similarly, the issue of competition for jobs - this is a perennial issue, but one that comes into sharper relief when people are losing jobs and there's the fear that you won't be able to find jobs. It is by no means an easy issue to address, especially since there are many competing stakeholders in Singapore. Even as we deal with the numbers and logic, it is important that we don't ignore or push aside the emotions around the issue, which may seem irrational and even indulgent.

4. ***Secondly, we need to strengthen the social security of home grown Singaporeans*** - this is not a new area. We have been paying a lot of attention to this for decades now, and especially after 9/11. Our leaders constantly remind us not to take our racial and religious harmony for granted. It is important to continue to assure Singaporeans, especially those who are in the minority or the disadvantaged, that they matter. You need this reassurance before you are comfortable accepting newcomers where there might be the risk of you being relegated to a position further down the food chain. Similarly, we need to find ways to deepen the rootedness of Singaporeans. In this regard, I feel we have quite a way to go. We desperately need to find more

radical and engaging ways of imbibing this sense of belonging, especially in our young. We can afford to have more closed-door heart-to-heart discussions on thorny, sensitive, even taboo issues.

Conclusion

5. In conclusion - We have started planning the infrastructure, water and other material needs of a 6.5 million population. Yes, we must be prepared to adapt and modify in some ways, but who we are as a society and what we stand for at the core must remain sacrosanct. And home grown citizens must feel assured of this before being comfortable playing host. I hope that as MCYS and NIC seeks ways to integrate PRs and new citizens, we do not ignore the need to build the social compact amongst home-grown Singaporeans.

 6. I thank you.
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