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Lucky to be Singaporean

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GE2015: What the Media Say





Lucky to be Singaporean

As Singaporeans go to the polls, we would do well to remember that the world outside our tropical island is not all sunny and bright.

by Ong Ee-Ing on 09 Sep 2015



Politics & Public Policy

This is a historic moment for 50-year old Singapore: all 89 seats in 29 constituencies are being contested, meaning that, for the first time since independence, everyone gets to vote.

The usual issues are being dissected: CPF money, high housing prices, rising income inequality, foreign workers, transportation woes, the AHPETC saga, and so on. The predictable political squabbling and ad hominem attacks are also coming into play. (Seriously, Cheo Chai Chen? Don't choose a mother for your MP because she might "focus more on her child than on her voters"?)

Unfortunately, the rest of the world is dealing with something far more sombre – the refugee crisis in Syria and its impact on Europe. The picture of the dead little boy Aylan Kurdi, his body washed up by the waves onto the beach, is a heartbreaking reminder of what happens in wartime.



That could have been my child. In other, worse, horrible, unthinkable (but absolutely possible) circumstances, that could have been any of our children.

If you think that is an unlikely scenario, then let me propose the flip side: where refugees from other countries, including children, attempt to flood our shores due to a crisis in their own countries. What would Singaporeans do then? Would we accept any of them into our borders, or instead cry out "Too many foreigners! Go home!"

In the midst of our historic elections, I would like to remind Singaporeans that there remains a wider world out there. That our concerns about CPF money, high housing prices, rising income inequality, foreign workers, transportation woes, and the AHPETC saga, while important, are nonetheless First World problems. We have the luxury of arguing about them because we don't have to worry about the fundamental problems of survival. Literally.

Thus, as we consider what we would like our country to look like in the coming years, I suggest that we first contemplate the concepts of grace and gratitude. Not towards any specific political party, or any particular god, religion, or credo, but just grace and gratitude. For what is. For what we have, and what we don't have. (Like war. Or famine. That kind of thing.)

Just for a moment – consider being grateful that you live in a region where no bombs fly into your home. Where your children don't go hungry because there is simply no food to be had, however much you are willing to pay. Where you don't have to crawl into an overcrowded dinghy with your family and your meagre possessions and travel across the deadly seas, knowing that you and yours might die on the way, but knowing that the alternative is certain death if you stay.

And with that grace and gratitude in mind, think about how we want our politicians, and by extension our country, to approach the next few years. Do we want them to be purely focused on local concerns, however important to Singaporeans, or do we need them to consider the larger, global picture as well? And do we want them to include compassion in our dealings with others, or remain solely driven by the desires of the electorate?

If we want to be more than what we are now, our concerns have to be more than just purely domestic. We Singaporeans, who are so proud of heading up world rankings and punching above our weight globally, also need to care more about global issues and concerns. Not just because they may affect us one day – and they will (see, for instance, ISIS, the Eurozone crisis, and looming environmental disasters) – but because we should. Because that is what it would take for us to truly grow up and be a mature, compassionate nation.

That's my hope, if not for this GE, at least for the next one.

And now, back to the electioneering.

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