

President's role is not merely "symbolic" – Singapore High Commissioner rebukes Malaysian press

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Singapore's High Commissioner to Malaysia, Mr Vanu Gopala Menon, has rebutted "false assertions" made by Malaysia newspaper, Utusan Malaysia, in a commentary published this Monday on Singapore's Elected Presidency.

The commentary described the President's role in Singapore as merely symbolic, and, as such, not something that should make Malays proud, despite new amendments that have triggered a reserved presidential race strictly set aside for Malay candidates.

Adding that the office of head of state "has been dominated by non-Malays", the commentary put forth:

"Perhaps it is because the non-Malays in Singapore have been given priority and advantages in whatever fields, that the Presidents concerned did not have to struggle to think about the fate of their own community.

"As such, when a Malay holds the position of President, the direction that the Malay community is headed for will surely be given more attention, since the community has often regarded itself as being sidelined in its own country."

Menon quashed such assertions, opining that the Elected President "plays key roles in nation-building and in ensuring good governance."

In a letter to the newspaper, Menon elaborated that there roles include serving as the symbol and unifier of the multi-racial nation, serving as the custodian of the country's reserves and protector of the integrity of its public service.

Adding that the Malay community in Singapore "has achieved significant social and economic progress within Singapore's rules-based and meritocratic society," and that Singapore is proud of these accomplishments, Menon asserted:

"It is incorrect to say that non-Malays in Singapore have been given 'priority and advantages'. We certainly do not have a race-based system of benefits and patronage.

"Singapore will not tolerate the use of race or religion to promote ill-will between different segments of Singapore society, or to undermine our institutions."

Interestingly, this is the second time in three months that Menon has written to the newspaper on this subject. He previously rebutted an editorial published on 28 May

2017 in the paper that claimed “meritocracy was always being used as an excuse to discriminate against Malays” and “meritocracy was also open to manipulation.”

Menon’s response to the editorial was published on the Singapore Foreign Ministry’s website. He had said:

“Singapore’s meritocratic system has never been ‘manipulated’ or ‘used as an excuse to discriminate’ against Singapore’s Malay community, or any other community.”

Noting that Utusan Malaysia had not published his rebuttal to the May article, Menon said in his latest letter released on Thursday, that the paper’s decision to exclude his response may cause their readers to not understand a “true picture.” He added:

“Instead, the Editor published a second commentary (on Monday), with similar inaccuracies and misrepresentations of Singapore’s Presidential Election and of the statements by Singapore’s political office holders.”

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