

NMP SCHEME

A question of party

One of the nine new names
is a Young PAP member

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SHOULD it matter if a member of a political party, albeit an inactive one and a youth wing member, is selected to be a Nominated Member of Parliament?

The scheme was conceived for non-partisan views to be heard in Parliament. And the question arises for the first time, as one of the nine names submitted to the President for the NMP appointment is a Young PAP member.

In his curriculum vitae given to the parliamentary committee deciding the nominations, Mr Calvin Cheng, 34, stated that he joined the young wing of the ruling party in 2006, but has not been active.

When first contacted on this, Mr Cheng said yesterday: "It won't discharge my duty as an NMP to speak freely, and I will do so."

But he was in two minds about his political affiliation. He later told TODAY he will resign from Young PAP. "Even though the Constitution does not disallow it, I feel this would be an albatross around my neck," he said.

Among the criteria in the Constitution that the Special Select Committee "shall have regard" for is the need for NMPs to "reflect as wide a range of independent and

non-partisan views as possible".

When asked if the law should be more specific to disallow party membership, MP Michael Palmer, a member of the committee, said that doing so would not only limit, but turn away people interested in politics.

"A number of people join a party, but are inactive. Or they join and find that it's not their cup of tea or whatever reason, but they still want to contribute," he said.

In his opinion, however, "an NMP should be prepared to resign from the party".

Former NMP Shrinivas Rai believes any political membership, inactive or otherwise, "undermines the spirit of non-partisanship".

Singapore Management University law lecturer Eugene Tan added: "Being a political member means you abide and identify with the party's ideology — nothing wrong with that — but it will rattle the public's confidence." There should be no concern the scheme can be a back door to Parliament.

But another former NMP, Mr Zulkifli Baharuddin, disagreed, as political affiliation would not mean "an NMP wouldn't speak his mind". "Singaporeans should judge an NMP on what he does in office, what cause he will represent in Parliament," he said.



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