

National identity forged by letting diverse groups co-exist as they are: Lawrence Wong



Pupils of Anchor Green Primary School on Racial Harmony Day on July 21, 2015. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

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SINGAPORE - Singapore's national identity was forged not by forcing a diverse group of people to assimilate or live in separate enclaves, but by allowing them to co-exist as they are, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Lawrence Wong said on Tuesday evening

"We allow people to interact with one another, retain your roots, retain your own heritage. At the same time, we allow for overlapping identities and amid that overlapping, we try to expand the common ground which we share as Singaporeans," he said at a dialogue with 120 alumni of National University of Singapore at the NUSS Suntec City Guild House.

Mr Wong, who is also Second Minister for Communication and Information, was responding to a question on how the government went about creating a national identity without causing a backlash from citizens.

Some of the policies can be "quite intrusive", he said. "For example, making sure that in every HDB block there is a mix of people from different races. You don't find that in many countries, but it's a policy deliberately designed so that we have maximum interaction with one another."

Other topics raised by the audience include what the government can do to encourage Singaporeans to pursue their passion in the arts and sports.

Mr Wong said the mindset of parents that their children should find a stable job and earn money instead of pursuing their passion, is changing.

The government has also allocated resources to give athletes who play sports on a full-time basis an allowance to support themselves, he said.

More is being done to increase the following of athletes so that corporate sponsors will want to invest in them, such as printing posters of the athletes during the recent Southeast Asian Games and taking them to events to raise their profile, said Mr Wong.

"By doing so, it will increase their marketability and companies will want to invest in them. We're starting to get athletes to think along those lines," he said.