



Law and Home Affairs Minister K. Shanmugam. PHOTO: THE STRAITS TIMES

Reserved presidential election safeguards multiculturalism

The reserved presidential election for Malay candidates underscores the importance of racial and religious harmony here in Singapore, Law and Home Affairs Minister K. Shanmugam said yesterday.

Mr Shanmugam's remarks at an Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) forum on the reserved presidential election come as Singapore gets ready to elect its next president on Sept 23.

Only Malay candidates can take part in the election, under new laws that reserve the election for a community, if no one from that community has been president for the last five terms.

A survey by IPS and Channel NewsAsia last year showed that among the Chinese, 96 per cent would accept a Chinese president, but only 59 per cent would accept a Malay president.

Such race differences are common worldwide, but Mr Shanmugam said that Singapore does not take a "laissez-faire" approach to multiculturalism like some other countries and intervenes instead.

The reserved elections are in line with Singapore's other efforts to preserve multiculturalism, he explained, like the racial quotas in public housing and establishing the Group Representation Constituency system.

By "accepting that we also have our differences", Mr Shanmugam said that a "stronger national identity" can be formed.

"Look at the state of our race relations in Singapore. I am prepared to compare that record against any other country... I think our record speaks for itself," he said.

— HARIZ BAHARUDIN