



Minister for Communications and Information S. Iswaran (second from left) at the forum at The Grassroots' Club yesterday. TNP PHOTO: JONATHAN CHOO

Multiculturalism must not be taken for granted: Iswaran

**YASMINE YAHYA, SENIOR
POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT**

Singapore must signal its resolute commitment to upholding diversity, promoting tolerance and opposing discrimination, amid the divisive rhetoric that has emerged around the world, Minister for Communications and Information S. Iswaran said yesterday.

Speaking at a forum on ethnic identity and culture organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and OnePeople.sg, he said this was one of the ways Singapore can build on its "multiculturalism project", which is still a work in progress.

In addition, every individual must be able to cultivate a sense of belonging that transcends ethnic identity, he said, and develop a deep and genuine interest in Singaporeans of other ethnicities.

The country must encourage greater social mixing between different ethnic and cultural groups, so that people can naturally forge strong bonds regardless of race, language or religion, he added.

Mr Iswaran pointed to a survey on race relations conducted by IPS and Channel NewsAsia in 2016, which

found that while almost all Singaporeans felt that people from all races should be treated equally, 60 per cent had heard racist comments and more than 40 per cent held negative stereotypes about different races.

"While we can take pride in what Singapore has been able to accomplish as a multicultural nation, we cannot take it for granted nor presume that the work is complete," he said.

When it comes to the individual's ability to hold both a strong ethnic and national identity, Singapore seems to be doing relatively well, he noted, citing another study by IPS and CNA last year.

That study found that 49 per cent of respondents identified with both their ethnic and Singaporean identity simultaneously, compared with 35 per cent identifying more with their Singaporean identity and 14 per cent identifying more with their ethnic identity.

However, Mr Iswaran added that this national identity is incomplete if Singaporeans do not have a keen appreciation of fellow citizens who are culturally different from themselves.

yasminey@sph.com.sg