

S'pore must uphold diversity, fight discrimination: Iswaran

It must encourage greater social mixing so that people can forge strong bonds, he says

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.

At a societal level, 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 overall, 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.

"Thus, being a young nation with a strong Singaporean identity need not be at the expense of our deep ethnic and cultural roots," Mr Iswaran said.

"These two facets of our identity can, in fact, be symbiotic and draw strength from each other."

However, he added, this national identity is incomplete if Singaporeans do not have a keen understanding and appreciation of fellow Singaporeans who are culturally different from themselves.

He noted that the same survey last year found that while most of the respondents were interested in experiencing other ethnic cultures, ranging from trying their cuisines to learning their languages, there was a relatively



Minister for Communications and Information S. Iswaran (centre) with MP and OnePeople.sg management committee member Rahayu Mahzam and IPS senior research fellow Mathew Mathews at the launch of the Singapore Ethnic Mosaic Public Education Series by OnePeople.sg yesterday. ST PHOTO: JONATHAN CHOO

A WORK IN PROGRESS

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MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION S. ISWARAN

lower level of actual intercultural exchange and engagement.

"This is why our policies to promote communication, understanding and social interaction between people of different racial and religious backgrounds remain as relevant and important

as ever," he said.

"We must ensure that Singaporeans are immersed in a diverse everyday environment, and remain curious about each other's cultures."

yasminey@sph.com.sg