

Zaobao provides platform for exchange of views on race: Editor

Having open conversations about race is important, and newspapers like Lianhe Zaobao play a role in providing a platform for differing views, the Chinese-language daily's editor Goh Sin Teck said yesterday at a forum on race.

Responding to a question on why the paper had published a recent editorial that a forum participant said "stoked racist sentiments", Mr Goh acknowledged the risk that comes with discussing such issues openly.

"But there is also a risk if you don't discuss it, and we don't talk about it, then if something major happens... (the situation may) just explode," he said at the session organised by the Institute of Policy Studies and the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.

In publishing pieces discussing issues of race, Mr Goh said, the newspaper ensures the tone and language are carefully calibrated, and that the authors are sincere in wanting to discuss issues instead of merely stoking emotions.

"When we start talking about this, it is inevitable that you have people from different schools of thought... and then we have to accept that there are people who don't actually share such views.

"And we have to start to learn how to... open our hearts and minds to also listen to people who have different views," he said, adding that the newspaper can provide such a platform for the exchange of views.

The editorial published on June 9, titled "Expanding public space to promote racial harmony", argued that the pandemic, social media and popular ideological trends from abroad have all exacerbated racial tensions.

Critical race theory – the idea that racism is embedded in and perpetuated by systems and policies, and which originated in the United States in the 1970s – was cited by the editorial as an example of the influence of foreign ideas.

It prompted an open letter

signed by more than 200 academics and researchers that criticised the newspaper for ignoring the dynamics of structural racism and misrepresenting critical race theory as "promoting hatred of white people" in the US, and by extension, Chinese people in Singapore.

At the forum, Mr Goh said the term "Chinese privilege" could be misinterpreted by the Chinese-speaking community here.

It is a term adapted from the concept of "white privilege" used in critical race theory, where a group enjoys dominance in a society because of identity markers such as one's race or sex.

Mr Goh said the term "Chinese privilege" can be misunderstood by the Chinese-speaking community here who have suffered marginalisation because of their lack of fluency in English.

"They would say 'what privilege do I have?'. And then, instead of forging understanding, we end up dividing people."

He said that this group may be misunderstood by others as denying that racism and racial discrimination exist in Singapore.

"This is not what they mean. They are just saying that 'as a Chinese-speaking individual, I don't see that I enjoy any privilege at all'," said Mr Goh, who called for open communication in conversations about race.

Yuen Sin