

**Beware racial and religious complacency: PM Lee**  
**Singaporeans - especially younger ones - must remember harmony is precious**  
**and not natural; issues are more complicated and difficult now with growing**  
**self-radicalisation**

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PRIME Minister Lee Hsien Loong on Sunday cautioned against complacency in matters of race and religion, noting that such harmony is not a natural state of affairs, and that issues have become more complicated and difficult than before.

In particular, he referred to the ongoing problem of jihadist terrorism - as reflected in the self-radicalisation of those who have aligned themselves with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) - and said that Singapore must remain on guard.

"We've made so much progress that sometimes Singaporeans may be lulled into thinking that we have arrived," said Mr Lee at a OnePeople.sg event. "I think that's being complacent, that's dangerous. Because in any society, race and religion will remain difficult issues, will remain sensitive issues." He also noted that this comes even as things are discussed more openly than before.

There are worries over ISIS's recruitment of those from Southeast Asia - with a recruitment video in Bahasa showing children training with weapons found online.

The Malaysians have arrested more than 100 of their citizens for involvement with ISIS; and nine people in Singapore who have become self-radicalised have been detained so far, said Mr Lee.

He further highlighted violence caused by such radicalisation as recently as late last week: in Australia, a 15-year-old boy of Iraqi-Kurdish origin shot a police employee.

"Can it happen in Singapore? Maybe. Because when somebody goes wrong like this, we may not know. We've arrested people who are self-radicalised . . . It was not from friends, not from networks, not from underground groups; just by themselves.

"Something went wrong - they went to the Internet, they were led astray, they went deeper, they got into trouble," said Mr Lee. "If it comes to Singapore, I think we must be very, very, very careful that we don't let it pull our fabric apart."

He also said that some prickly issues with a racial tinge have been dealt with quietly, cooperatively, maturely, among community leaders, religious leaders, and groups engaged in those issues.

"You just look at what happens when we don't manage to keep things under control. One person puts one rude post on his Facebook page and goes to sleep. The next morning, he wakes up, and half of Singapore is angry with him."

Mr Lee started his speech by going through examples of measures that have led Singapore to create a multiracial society. These include using English as a medium of instruction in all

schools, and ethnic quotas in HDB estates. The Workers' Party (WP), in its latest election manifesto, called for quotas to be removed.

Mr Lee further noted that a 2013 study by OnePeople.sg (an organisation promoting racial harmony) and the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) found that Singaporeans overwhelmingly believe the police treats them fairly regardless of race or religion. That is in stark contrast to racial tensions around the world that are linked to fears of bias by the police.

"If you look at Southeast Asia, some of our neighbours, you will know that when you go to the police, you don't know whether they are going to solve the problem or look for a problem," said Mr Lee.

But the same study also found that less than half of respondents said they had at least one close friend from a different race. So more work has to be done, said Mr Lee.

"We started off in the 1960s with race riots. For those who experienced it, lived through it, it changed us. We will never forget the experience, the fear, the uncertainty, anxiety, the loss of lives," he said.

"For the younger ones who are lucky, never seen such racial strife before - well, we have to constantly remind them, how precious this harmony is, how unusual and rare it is."

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong speaks during the Community Leaders' Conference at The Grassroots Club on Oct 4, 2015.