

Success is independent of race for most Singaporeans: CNA-IPS survey

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SINGAPORE: More than seven in 10 Singaporeans believe that a person's ethnicity does not influence his or her success, according to a nationwide survey specially commissioned by Channel NewsAsia in partnership with the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

Most of the respondents also strongly endorsed Government policies that are aimed at safeguarding racial and religious harmony.

The survey, which polled 2,000 Singapore citizens and permanent residents aged 21 and above, is one of the largest surveys on race relations in Singapore.

The survey showed that nearly three-quarters (73 per cent) of respondents disagreed that race is "very important" in determining a person's success. Similarly, nearly nine in 10 (89 per cent) agreed that a person who works hard has an equal opportunity to become rich, regardless of his or her race.

"Overall there is strong endorsement that success in Singapore is meritocratic," said IPS senior research fellow Dr Mathew Mathews, who headed the survey.

Positive attitude towards race and policy

Around seven in 10 of the respondents regarded policies meant to protect racial harmony, like the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act and the CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Others) racial categorisation, as helpful in building trust between the different races.

Meanwhile, 85 per cent of the respondents said they thought that the Racial Harmony Day celebrations fostered inter-racial trust.

With regard to race-based information being made public, 65 per cent of the respondents were not in favour of this for topics like crime, educational performance or social problems. However, more than half were supportive of ethnic-based information relating to health issues and the successes of the different races to be publicized.

"Singaporeans endeavour to socialise their children to understand and be sensitive of cultural differences," said Dr Mathews. "They also do not want to highlight the negative aspects of racial differences in the media."

Racial discussions cause tension

The survey also noted that around two-thirds of the respondents found ethnic discussions disconcerting in that it could be offensive.

When asked if talking about racial issues would cause unnecessary tension, 66 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while 64 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with the

statement that it was “very hard to discuss issues related to race without someone getting offended”.

"While most respondents have broached sensitive issues with those of other races, there was still substantial reservation about such discussion. This stems from the belief that such conversation has the potential to cause tension," said Dr Mathews.

"As such, a small portion of respondents continued to have unanswered questions about the cultural practices of other races," he added.

The survey also highlighted some issues relating to religious beliefs and practices associated with racial groups the respondents felt needed clarification. The issues that ranked highest include "How is a Chinese funeral conducted?" and "How does an Indian/Malay wedding run?"