

## **S'pore govt committed to maintaining racial percentages but CMIO shouldn't be overemphasised: K Shanmugam**

**Shanmugam clarified that he views keeping the percentages constant as a form of assurance.**

***Hannah Martens***

***Mothership***, June 12, 2023

During the panel on "Revisiting Pluralism" at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) 35th Anniversary Conference on Jun. 12, 2023, Minister for Home Affairs and Law, K Shanmugam, said that the government is "publicly committed to keeping our percentages [of race] more or less constant".

Shanmugam was responding to Ambassador-at-Large Chan Heng Chee's question on the future of Singapore's pluralism and whether "Singapore will be able to move away from a CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Others) structure of pluralism".

Shanmugam, together with his panellists Zuraidah Ibrahim from South China Morning Post and Corinna Lim from AWARE, discussed the importance of the CMIO classification and Singapore's immigration policies.

### **200 races in Singapore**

When talking about the future of pluralism in Singapore, Shanmugam said that "we should not over-emphasise the importance of CMIO classification because if you look at it in most aspects of life, we don't think about CMIO."

He went on to clarify that it is useful in specific contexts, like helping minorities and self-help groups, citing MENDAKI and the Eurasian Association as an example.

"It's an open society that [has] a lot of open opportunities, which is not somehow tied or restricted to CMIO classification. And I don't think we should be too caught up in that."

Shanmugam also shared that there are over 200 races that parents can select from when registering their child after birth and that the families can choose the ethnicity of the child instead of following the father's ethnicity.

### **Immigration policy in Singapore tries to maintain CMIO percentages**

Speaking on Singapore's immigration policy and its importance in helping to maintain the CMIO percentages, Shanmugam stated that the government is "publicly committed to keeping our [CMIO] percentages more or less constant".

However, Shanmugam shared that the percentages are not maintained to keep the Chinese community percentage at 70 per cent, but the main community concerned about immigration is the non-Chinese community.

He shared that when he has dialogues with senior Malay community leaders, the main question he gets is whether the government would set the community percentage to 14 to 15 per cent.

He cited the challenge in persuading "highly skilled, successful Malays from Malaysia or Indonesia to come to Singapore."

"The Malays are very, very sort of mindful that they want to be the second largest community in Singapore. Now, if you mess with that, you undermine Malay confidence."

"Our guarantee, that these percentages we do our best to keep them constant, is actually because of the Malay community."

Later, Shanmugam clarified that he views keeping the percentages constant as a form of assurance.

"We see this as a kind of assurance, so that people feel assured of their place, and they are not going to be overtaken."