

Many Worry Over Foreigner-Bashing

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An innocuous Facebook post inviting Filipinos to celebrate their national independence day in Orchard Road has led to an outcry by some Singaporeans.

The reaction of this minority of Singaporeans, who posted comments online, has left experts and other Singaporeans both surprised and worried.

Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies Mathew Mathews, who examines issues surrounding societal cohesion, said that some may have felt that the Filipinos were “taking over” their space, by celebrating in Orchard Road, which is seen as a Singapore icon.

Sociologist Paulin Straughan, from the National University of Singapore, said that there is no justification for such behaviour, and that it is worrying.

She said that since the debate on the Population White Paper, some people have found it acceptable to “foreign-bash” without valid reason. “We must be more cautious and culturally sensitive when we are making race-related comments,” she added.

The event is to be held at Ngee Ann City’s Civic Plaza on June 8.

Event organiser Pilipino Independence Day Council Singapore (PIDCS) had to take down the poster for the celebration on its Facebook page, following the backlash.

Mr Rychie Andres, co-chairman of the PIDCS, told The Straits Times that organisers had been harassed by calls and texts asking for the event to be cancelled. “The callers say we have no right to hold the event in Orchard Road,” he said. “We do not dare to pick up phone calls now if we don’t recognise the number.”

Lawyers told My Paper that there is no law preventing the celebration of a community’s independence day in public, as long as appropriate event licences have been sought and obtained.

The people behind “Say ‘No’ to an overpopulated Singapore”, a Facebook page that has more than 26,000 “likes”, had earlier urged Singaporeans to protest on the PIDCS page.

They said in a post that they were against the use of the Singapore skyline in the logo for the independence day event and using the terms “two nations” and “interdependence”.

They updated their post with news of the taking down of the “offending” poster.

On the other hand, other Singaporeans took to the PIDCS Facebook page to show their support, wishing Filipinos a happy independence day, and calling those against the celebration “black sheep”.

A 35-year-old Filipino, who has lived here for five years, said she felt that those who were upset were overreacting.

“If it had not been posted on Facebook, no one would have known about it and been upset. There are some people always online, waiting,” she said.

There are about 180,000 Filipinos in Singapore.