

## Forum

on

### **Ethnic Identity and Culture**

Thursday, 19 July 2018  
Multi-Purpose Hall (Level 1)  
The Grassroots' Club  
190 Ang Mo Kio Avenue 8  
Singapore 568046

#### **PROGRAMME**

*(as at 13 July 2018)*

8.45 am – 9.15 am

#### **Registration**

9.15 am – 9.30 am

#### **Opening Remarks**

Mr S Iswaran  
Minister for Communications and Information  
and  
Minister-in-charge  
Trade Relations  
Ministry of Trade and Industry

9.30 am – 9.40 am

#### **Launch of the Singapore Ethnic Mosaic Public Education Series by OnePeople.sg**

9.40 am – 10.00 am

#### **Presentation on Ethnic Identity**

Dr Mathew Mathews  
Senior Research Fellow  
Institute of Policy Studies

10.00 am – 11.20 am

#### **PANEL I**

#### **Singaporeans' Ethnic Identities – An Evolving Dynamic**

Results from the 2017 CNA-IPS survey on ethnic identity showed that a simultaneous Singaporean and ethnic identity resonated with the highest proportion of respondents. This is contrary to a belief among some that ethnic and Singaporean identities are conflicting. What exactly are the hallmarks of the "Singaporean-ethnic identity"? Inevitably, any discussion of ethnic identities has to confront criticisms of the CMIO framework for being rigid and having homogenising tendencies, and thus suppressing expressions of various ethnic identities. The panel will also discuss the balance between communities asserting their ethnic distinctiveness and the broader need to build unity at different levels.

### **Chairperson**

Mdm Rahayu Mahzam  
Member of Parliament  
and  
Management Committee Member  
OnePeople.sg

### **Speakers**

Mr Zainul Abidin Rasheed  
Ambassador (Non-Resident)  
Embassy of the Republic of Singapore – Kuwait  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Associate Professor Eugene Tan  
School of Law  
Singapore Management University

Dr Alexius Pereira  
President  
The Eurasian Association, Singapore

### **Question-and-Answer Session**

11.20 am – 11.50 am

**Tea Break**

11.50 am – 1.10 pm

### **PANEL II**

#### **How Relevant are Ethnic Traditions in the Construction of Ethnic Identity?**

Ethnic music and art forms such as Chinese calligraphy are seeing decreasing interest, and the CNA-IPS survey showed these were considered less important as ethnic identity markers, than compared to, for instance, being able to speak and write in one's mother tongue.

What is the value of ethnic cultural preservation? Do we still have to be concerned about demonstrating our Asian-ness vis-à-vis the "less conservative" values associated with Westernisation? How much should the government step in to help preserve and/or fund these declining art forms, or should this be left as an organic process?

What about the new practices and traditions of new citizens? How much should the state help support the growth and spread of such traditions and language? What will an increasing adoption of ethnic cultures from India and China (in the face of a rising China and India) mean for ethnic loyalties?

### **Chairperson**

Ms Susanna Kulatissa  
Management Committee Member  
OnePeople.sg

### **Speakers**

Mr Tan Dan Feng  
Chairman  
Singapore International Translation Symposium

Dr Norshahril Saat  
Fellow  
ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute

Mr Sasitharan Thirunalan  
Co-Founder and Director  
Intercultural Theatre Institute

### **Question-and-Answer Session**

1.10 pm – 2.10 pm

### **Lunch**

2.10 pm – 3.30 pm

### **PANEL III**

### **Building Cohesion in a Multi-Ethnic Environment**

Singapore's multiracialism (and multireligiosity) stresses tolerance of ethnic and religious diversity and accords equal status to the main ethnic groups. It allows for a private-public distinction where groups interact in the shared public sphere as Singaporeans, while in the private domain they remain members of a particular ethnic community. Yet, recent trends of increasing religiosity and decreased social mixing among communities suggest that Singaporeans may become more exclusionary towards those of other ethnic backgrounds. Which public policies can be strengthened, tweaked or enacted to protect the shared common space and ensure that citizens continue to see value in it rather than turn towards segregationist practices? What aspects of shared history and commonalities between beliefs, experiences and our different cultural celebrations can be revisited, and emphasised so that it is apparent that Singapore's ethnic cultures are engaging and welcoming of others? What can be done to continue to ensure that there are good levels of intercultural understanding, including of new citizens and their traditions?

### **Chairperson**

Mr Leonard Lim  
Research Associate  
Institute of Policy Studies

### **Speakers**

Dr Hon Chiew Weng  
Former Principal  
Hwa Chong Institution

Mr Mohamed Irshad Abbas  
Founder and President  
Roses of Peace

Dr Sharifah Mariam Aljunied  
Lead Facilitator  
OnePeople.sg  
and  
Chartered Psychologist

**Question-and-Answer Session**

3.30 pm – 4.00 pm

**Tea Break**

4.00 pm - 5.20 pm

**PANEL IV  
Dialogue**

**Chairperson**

Dr Mathew Mathews

**Speaker**

Mr Bilahari Kausikan  
Chairman  
Middle East Institute  
and  
Former Ambassador-at-Large  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Question-and-Answer Session**

5.20 pm – 5.30 pm

**Closing Remarks**

5.30 pm

**End of Conference**

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