

## No ban on things just because some find them offensive: Shanmugam

**Linette Lai**

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People may find many things offensive, but that does not mean the Government will ban all of them, Law and Home Affairs Minister K. Shanmugam said yesterday.

He was responding to a Facebook post by Workers' Party MP Chen Show Mao which had given some people the impression that certain songs with offensive lyrics would be banned.

"People who did not listen to the speech may misunderstand that the list contains songs which have been banned or are going to be banned. All of that is untrue," said Mr Shanmugam, who on Monday gave a ministerial statement in Parliament on restricting hate speech to maintain racial and religious harmony in Singapore.

Mr Chen had posted a picture of a list of four songs with offensive lyrics handed out in Parliament on Monday, with the caption: "Lesson of the day. Ministerial handouts."

The songs included pop hits like Ariana Grande's God Is A Woman and Lady Gaga's Judas. Heresy by rock band Nine Inch Nails and Take Me To Church by Irish musician Hozier were on the list too.

Mr Shanmugam said the list was to illustrate what people might find offensive. "Doesn't mean that it can all get banned just because some people find it offensive," he said.

Yesterday evening, Mr Chen, an MP for Aljunied GRC, responded to say the illustration of the offensive lyrics raises several questions.

"Should we allow unrestricted offensive speech in general mainstream discourse, in religion, politics, media and entertainment, even if it is not hate speech?" he wrote. "If we agree that there have to be restrictions on offensive speech even when it is not strictly speaking hate speech, what should be the extent of the restrictions?"

Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Mathew Mathews noted that there are different degrees of offensiveness.

"A fair number of Christians have come to accept that some artistic expressions may ridicule some aspects of their faith," he said. "They probably are not happy with that but have come to expect and accept that. But there will certainly be art forms which are deeply offensive."

Singapore Management University law don Eugene Tan said that what the Government "is signalling is that there should instead be a focus on responsible speech, given our social make-up".

In his parliamentary speech, Mr Shanmugam said that when assessing potentially offensive speech, the authorities also consider who is speaking, where it is being delivered and the reach. He added: "We have to assess where the weight of mainstream opinion lies."