

## **Panellists discuss expectations placed on minority races**

***Tiffany Fumiko Tay***

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At a work meeting a few years ago, Mr Adrian Heng found himself in a situation familiar to many Singaporeans. Mid-way through conversation, he noticed that the smiles on three of his colleagues' faces "were getting a little strained".

This, he realised, was because the group of primarily Chinese Singaporeans had unconsciously been speaking in a mix of English and Mandarin in the company of non-Mandarin speakers.

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Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information Janil Puthuchear, who is the chairman of OnePeople.sg, hosted the event at the Asian Civilisations Museum.

Speaking at the start of the four-hour session, he said that issues of race and multiculturalism are central to Singaporeans' national identity, and the dialogue series aims to engage a wider network of citizens to discuss issues and turn ideas into action.

Among the perspectives shared by the four-member panel were the expectations placed on minority races, both by other groups as well as members of their own.

Lawyer Nadia Ahmad Samdin shared that when the topic of radicalism comes up, all eyes turn to her as a member of the Malay/Muslim community. "Sometimes I feel pressure from other races... I'm supposed to represent the views of everybody," she said.

Mr David Reddy, head of content creation and influencer marketing for the BlackBlue Media Group, related that as a member of the Jewish faith with Indian heritage and Malay as a mother

tongue, he is a minority in many respects. Still, being told how to feel and react by members of the majority can be jarring, he said.

"Racist comments can be very hurtful, but I don't know if I want to jump on the bandwagon of being angry," he added.

He shared how during national service, a fellow serviceman said he disliked him because of his race. But over the course of a decade of reservist training, the two bonded over football and became friends.

Ms Nadia, however, noted that being expected to find common ground and "make things okay" on top of facing discrimination can be a challenge.

Mr Leonard Lim, a former researcher at the Institute of Policy Studies, noted that there are shifting norms of engagement when it comes to race.

Social media plays a large role in how race is talked about, said Mr Reddy, and the platform can encourage aggressive discourse.

Said Mr Lim: "If we can all do better in the social media space and start calling out uncivil behaviour... perhaps the Government might be more open to let sensitive issues like race and religion play out a little bit more."

Mr Heng similarly challenged the "silent majority" to express their views online when they find content "more stupid than offensive".

Aspiring to a post-racial, Singaporean-first identity will require navigating the dynamics of the majority and minority, said Ms Nadia.

"Do we navigate by dialogue and understanding, or anger and resentment? That distinction is very important going forward."