

## **Racial, social identity issues will continue to be a challenge**

**Yuen Sin**

***The Newspaper***, 15 January 2021

*Issues arising from racial and social identities will continue to be a challenge societies have to contend with in the years ahead, and how they should best be dealt with will remain a question that has no simple solution, said panellists at a forum on identities and cohesion yesterday.*

One key question is where the dividing lines between state, religion and politics should be drawn, said Non-Resident Ambassador Mohammad Alami Musa, who heads the studies in inter-religious relations in plural societies programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.

There could be tensions surrounding the question of how much people who have no religious affiliations can or should weigh in on issues in the public sphere, he told a virtual dialogue at the Singapore Perspectives conference organised by the Institute of Policy Studies.

"People of no religion... are going to (want to) have a seat at the table, because they believe that even without religion...(they) have the wisdom and this moral sensibility to contribute to public reason and morality," said Mr Alami.

There are also growing forces and trends that society has to contend with, including sub-groups seeking greater recognition from the state on issues like sexuality, youth who are paying more attention to social justice, as well as the rise of populism, xenophobia and economic nationalism, he added at the dialogue moderated by IPS' senior research fellow Mathew Mathews.

Professor Joel Kotkin, a presidential fellow in urban futures at Chapman University in the US, said the US has much to learn from Singapore.

"There are things you've done in Singapore that would be unconstitutional for us to do in the US," he said, pointing to interventionist policies like the Ethnic Integration Policy, which specifies the proportion of units in a Housing Board block and precinct that can be owned by a racial group to ensure a balanced mix.

"We're in a very different situation, but there's a lot we can learn from."