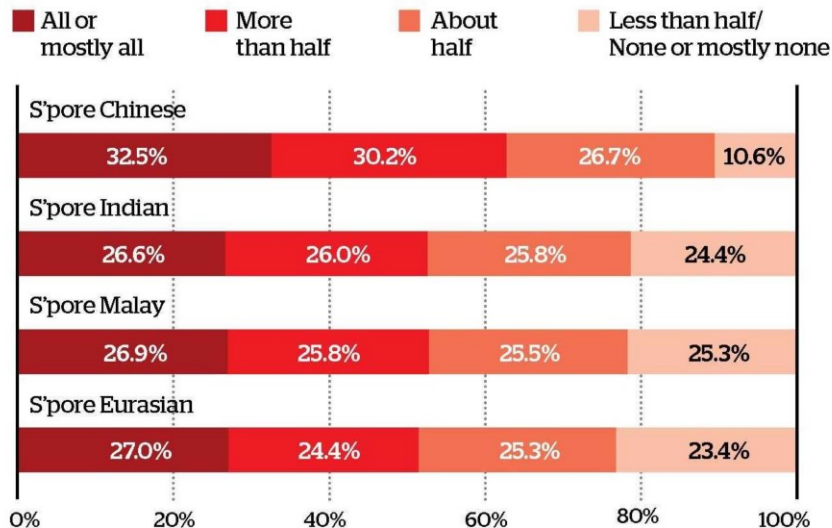# Concerns raised at forum on racial relations

## Trust in other races and religions

What proportion of people of the following races do you think can be trusted to help you if Singapore faced a national crisis (e.g. SARS)?

Legend:
- All or mostly all
- More than half
- About half
- Less than half/ None or mostly none

**S'pore Chinese**

| All or mostly all | More than half | About half | Less than half/None or mostly none |
|---|---|---|---|
| 32.5% | 30.2% | 26.7% | 10.6% |

**S'pore Indian**

| All or mostly all | More than half | About half | Less than half/None or mostly none |
|---|---|---|---|
| 26.6% | 26.0% | 25.8% | 24.4% |

**S'pore Malay**

| All or mostly all | More than half | About half | Less than half/None or mostly none |
|---|---|---|---|
| 26.9% | 25.8% | 25.5% | 25.3% |

**S'pore Eurasian**

| All or mostly all | More than half | About half | Less than half/None or mostly none |
|---|---|---|---|
| 27.0% | 24.4% | 25.3% | 23.4% |

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

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SINGAPORE – While relations between different races here appear to be good on the surface, as borne out by a recent study on racial and religious harmony, panellists and participants at a forum yesterday felt that things may not be as rosy if one scratches beneath the surface.

They cited some of the detailed findings of the study which were released yesterday.

In July, the broad findings of the study — which was conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies and OnePeople.sg — found that Singapore did well on most of the indicators on the scorecard, including the absence of minority discrimination in using public services, absence of interracial and religious tension and absence

# Concerns raised at forum on racial relations

of minority discrimination in the workplace. The study surveyed 3,128 households of all ethnic groups.

At a forum yesterday, where the detailed findings were shared and discussed, panellists voiced concerns over, for instance, the stereotyping of races. About 80 per cent of the respondents agreed that when they know a person's race, they have a "good idea" of what some of their behaviours and views are like. The study also found that 95 per cent of the Chinese respondents said that they have at least one close friend of the same race but only 23.3 per cent said they have close Malay friends, for instance.

And should a national crisis like the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome of 2003 strike, about 63 per cent of the respondents from the minority races believed that they could trust more than half of Singaporean Chinese to help them. In comparison, the trust of minority races was slightly lower.

Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) Eugene Tan, who was one of the panellists, said while the survey results were not alarming, they showed that the foundation for racial and religious harmony was not as strong as one might have hoped.

The others on the panel were former NMPs Zulkifli Baharudin and Viswa Sadasivan, as well as Nanyang Technological University sociologist Kwok Kian Woon. Associate Professor Tan said: "There is still a lot of work to be done ... we seem to be exhibiting a state of tolerance rather than one of appreciating differences. Are we sleepwalking our way to disharmony?"

Mr Zulkifli added: "You may like nasi padang cooked by the Malay guy, but does it translate into something deeper?" He noted that while about 80 per cent of Singaporeans live in the heartlands, and should have the opportunity to interact with other races, an "unacceptable" proportion of respondents do not. In fact, about 16 per cent said they would not try to get to know people of other races and religions even if they were given the opportunity. The panellists felt that people of different races were too careful or sensitive around one another, leading to a lack of honesty in relationships.

A forum participant, who is a lecturer from a polytechnic here, related an incident where he asked the school authorities if prayer areas can be situated in areas that are more convenient.

"Their response was this is religion ... we don't go into this whole area. Let's see what the civil service does. So if everyone is waiting for someone else to take the lead, then where is the lead?" he asked. "How much of this so-called comfort, that the majority population has, is the result of some subtle exclusion that they cannot see?" He added that nursing students at the poly have to remove their tudungs when they go to hospitals for clinical attachments, ostensibly for clinical control, but he argued that this was not "the real reason", as the tudungs can be sterilised.

Dr Mathew Mathews of the IPS, who led the study, said the drive to appreciate other cultures is still work in progress, borne out by the fact that just over half of the respondents were interested in meeting or understanding people of other races or religions.

He said: "I think the majority of Singaporeans are rather comfortable with the good state of racial and religious relations here which makes them see little need to actually go the extra mile to seek to understand and appreciate other cultures." He said that for the next study, which will be conducted in 2016, the researchers could explore deeper the areas where respondents did not score well in.

Some of the panellists pointed out that race is not the only issue creating fault lines here. Mr Sadasivan said: "Today, it is about socio-economic differences, class, foreigners, and it is no longer about racial lines." More opportunities need to be created for people to make friends, "talk straight and not be so cautious with each other", he said.

The study also found that Singaporeans are even less comfortable with new citizens of a different race in both the public and private spheres.

## Inter-racial and religious acceptance
and social connectedness between racial groups

### HOW COMFORTABLE RESPONDENTS ARE WITH DIFFERENT RACIAL GROUPS ...

| | As their colleague | As their boss | As their employee | As their next-door neighbour | If they make up the majority in Singapore |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Local-born** | | | | | |
| Chinese | 96.0% | 93.8% | 94.9% | 95.4% | 91.2% |
| Malay | 92.9% | 83.1% | 90.1% | 92.7% | 71.9% |
| Indian | 93.2% | 84.2% | 90.6% | 90.9% | 71.3% |
| Eurasian | 93.5% | 91.1% | 92.8% | 93.7% | 71.0% |
| **New Singaporean** | | | | | |
| Chinese originally from China | 84.9% | 74.0% | 83.0% | 81.2% | 51.4% |
| Indian originally from India | 85.5% | 73.7% | 83.5% | 82.1% | 51.2% |
| Malay originally from the region | 87.6% | 77.0% | 85.5% | 86.8% | 55.2% |

### MEDIAN NUMBER OF CLOSE FRIENDS FROM EACH RACIAL GROUP



**Number of**
- Eurasian friends
- Indian friends
- Malay friends
- Chinese friends