

KOPI SESSION ON SINGAPORE SOCIAL FABRIC AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

25 August 2022 | NTUC Centre

In PM Lee's 2022 National Day Rally (NDR), he highlighted the rising geopolitical tensions, higher cost of living, need to update laws to keep up with current times and future physical developments of the city-state. With all these challenges, what values and aspirations do youths want to see to secure Singapore's continued success, and how do we get there?

On 25 August 2022, 37 youths discussed their concerns about the NDR's announcements and examined how Singaporeans can remain united despite having different views on various topics. The session involved the following panellists:

- Ms Nabillah Jalal, Founder, NJ Studios (a boutique piano school which aims to sponsor classical music education for selected students under MOE's Financial Assistance Scheme)
- Mr Danial Hakim, Director, Young Mendaki Club; Chairman, M³@Jurong Youth Wing (an initiative which oversees mentorship programmes for Malay/Muslim students in Jurong)
- Mr Rovik Robert, Co-founder SGExplained (a podcast series on Singapore) & The Hidden Good (a social enterprise and media platform that raises awareness on social issues and inspires action)



Here are the key insights from the session:

Key points raised by youths

National Day Rally Speech:

- Government policies could better help those with lower income – Participants called for more measures to relieve the toll of rising prices and inflation and reduce inequality in society.
- Society should be more welcoming of foreign talent – Participants said that although foreign talent was able to provide valuable perspectives and capabilities that differ from Singaporeans, the wider society still struggles to accept them. As such, participants called for Singaporeans to work towards becoming more inclusive and welcoming of foreigners.
- Youths welcomed the repeal of Section 377A but called for more dialogues to promote understanding and allow society to remain cohesive – Participants shared that while they were optimistic about the repeal, they were concerned about navigating conflicting viewpoints. Participants called for more dialogues between the Government and various communities to ensure Singapore remains a cohesive society.

Maintaining the Social Fabric

- Society should be more open in understanding opposing views – Participants acknowledged that hearing various perspectives and finding common ground for potentially divisive issues would allow everyone's views to be considered, represented and respected.
- Safe spaces should be carved out for communities – Participants called for more safe and constructive spaces for communities to have open and respectful dialogues and mutual learnings on issues typically deemed sensitive among Singaporeans.
- Youth desire collaborative efforts to strengthen the social fabric – Participants called for the community as a source of financial and emotional support, especially in times of crisis.

Moving Forward as Singaporeans

- Society should adapt to address changing issues – Participants acknowledged that society is complex and fast-moving and called for Singaporeans and the Government to step up their efforts to address current demands – i.e. issues such as mental health and climate change.
- Building resilience is critical for society – Participants said that learning from the past and developing better paths for Singapore is critical in building resilience during times of uncertainty and adversity.
- Taking small incremental actions towards resolving differences can lead to big changes – Participants said that small steps, such as being open to learning about other religions, languages, and cultures, could affect change over time, bridging social barriers and resolving tensions.

Key points raised by panellists

Living in a Pluralistic Society

- Society should converge on shared values – Mr Rovik said that youths should pay more attention to values important to the nation before their voices and wants to build a committed nation.
- Recognising diversity in national identity is important for society – Mr Danial shared that individuals may use different yardsticks, such as heritage, to define their Singaporean identity. He said youths must first acknowledge this diversity before delving into discussions on national identity.
- Communication is key in celebrating and understanding diversity – Mr Rovik shared that Singapore's diversity entails constant and active maintenance, which could be achieved through engaging people, creating space for other voices to be heard and proactively listening across different communities.
- Society could afford to be more empathetic towards foreigners – Ms Nabillah shared that Singaporeans could be more welcoming to foreign talents rather than looking inwardly to grow the talent pool.
- Society should rethink the status quo and adopt new mindsets – Mr Danial shared that society should reevaluate their life achievements away from acquiring the 5Cs (credit card, cash, condo, car, country club) and centre conversations on dealing with current divisive issues instead.

Pioneering Change

- Youths have a role to play in making their voices heard – Mr Danial shared that youths should continue to make their voices heard and engage others in conversations even if they have divisive viewpoints.
- Youths should create a more inclusive culture starting from social circles – Mr Rovik said it was necessary to show care for individuals in their own communities affected by the new announcements to create the inclusive culture youths desire in Singapore.
- Youths can make the first step and take action – Ms Nabillah shared that youths who feel passionate about those issues could start initiatives, catalysing others to do the same.