

Committee of Supply

Debate on the Estimates of Expenditure for the Ministry of Home Affairs

Amendment Speech (3 min) by Viswa Sadasivan, NMP

Community Engagement Programme - Focus now on Youth Leaders and PRs/New Citizens

Preamble

1. Mr Chairman, Sir, my sincere apologies for not being present for my cut yesterday, and my appreciation to DPM Wong and the chair for this opportunity to speak today. Thank you. Let me first declare my pecuniary interest as I have been engaged by the government to design and conduct Community Engagement Programme (CEP) workshops. But it is precisely because of this experience that I feel I have gained some insights to recommend what might be useful next steps for this increasingly important programme.
2. In the last few years, the CEP Directorate in MHA has directly or through other agencies engaged hundreds of community and grassroots leaders including CCC and IRCC leaders. Similar workshops were conducted for all Cluster Superintendants, school principals and key HODs. Apart from gaining specific skills in accurately sensing anomalies

and dealing with them, feedback from participants indicate that what they benefited most from was the opportunity to share openly about issues that are generally considered highly sensitive and even taboo. The feeling was that hearing the viewpoints of the trainer and other participants in a “safe” and closed-door setting, heightened their awareness and sensitivity. This in turn helped to build and deepen trust, which is critical for community engagement and harmony.

3. What was instructive was that some participants shared their surprise and sense of awakening that in spite of having been born and bred in multiracial Singapore, there were many aspects they were either not aware of or inadvertently had been deaf to.
4. This got me thinking: if those who’ve lived here all their lives are struggling to understand the nuances of multiculturalism, imagine the challenges faced by our new immigrants! Likewise, if these community and school leaders who are in their late 30s and 40s, on average, aren’t sufficiently clued-in on the deeper aspects of key historical events such as the 1964 racial riots, how can we expect youth to understand this. The truth is, if we don’t have a deep enough understanding of racial and religious issues as well as other social fault lines, true community engagement would be impossible. And our youth and new immigrants are increasingly important constituencies.

Engaging Youth and New Immigrants

5. The most effective way to engage youth and new immigrants is by reaching out to leaders in these two groups:
 - **Youth Leaders** - we need to start with leaders within the school system, which could include student leaders at secondary, JC, ITE, Polytechnic and University levels. We should also work with organisations such as PA and other prominent non-government groups to identify youth who hold leadership positions outside the MOE catchment. By sensitising these leaders, we increase the chances of good judgment prevailing on the ground.
 - **New Immigrants** - this is likely to be a more amorphous and diverse group. I envisage the leaders of this constituency would be identified in collaboration with PA, NIC, religious and ethnic/sub-ethnic groups and even the chambers of commerce.

Conclusion

6. To conclude, the pace at which we are seeing new immigrants, and the increased exposure especially for our youth through the internet, makes it even more challenging for us to build a collective consciousness, sensibility and reflex as a society.

7. Mr Chairman, Sir, I thank you.
