Which has posed the greatest problem for singaporean

In a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society like Singapore, there is a need to manage the racial and religious sensitivities and promote tolerance and harmony. In addition, there is also the need to build national identity by instilling a sense of belonging. Therefore, there is a need to identify the most important problem out of the three and then solve it. The first problem is managing the perceptions of different racial groups. There is a need to manage this problem as preconceived notions of biased treatment by the government against any racial group could lead to the outbreak ofviolenceamong the different communities.

For example, in 1964, Singapore experienced race riots which resulted in 36 dead and 590 injured. Singapore was in Malaysia then, and the UMNO felt threatened when the PAP participated in the 1964 Federal elections. The UMNO then led an anti-PAP campaign in the medium using the Utusan Melayu, claiming that PAP's rule disadvantaged the Malays and that Malay Singaporeans remained poor under PAP's rule. They also claimed that PAP was uprooting Malay families in resettlement projects. Some UMNO extremists even came to Singapore and made fiery speeches that angered many Singaporean Malays.

In July 1964, during the celebration of Prophet Muhammad's birthday, a clash between a Chinese policeman and a group of Malay participants turned into a full-blown race riot over the next few days. This shows how the perceptions of unequal treatment towards the different races can cause suspicions, distrust and even hostility among Singaporeans, even if these perceptions are not based on facts. Therefore, this problem must be managed to prevent

any outbreak of violence among citizens. The second problem is managing the perceptions of different religious groups.

There is a need to do this as differences in religious beliefs and practices are issues that can create tension among people in Singapore, especially if it has been perceived that the concerns of a certain religious community have not been considered. This is shown in the Maria Hertogh riot during 1950. Maria Hertogh, born to Dutch-Eurasian parents was adopted during the war by an Indonesian Muslim woman, Aminah, as her parents were interned by the Japanese. After the war, the Hertoghs launched a legal battle for the custody of their daughter. The custody battle attracted intense media attention worldwide.

The judge ordered that Maria be placed temporarily in a Catholic convent while the trail was taking place. Photographs in newspaper of Maria, who was raised a Muslim, in a Catholic convent before a statue of Virgin Mary affected religious sensitivities and angered the Muslim Community as they felt that their religion was not respected at all. The British courts gave custody of Maria to her biological mother. Upon hearing the judgement, huge crowds outside the court rioted, convinced that the colonial laws, the courts and the legal system was prejudiced against the Muslims.

The riots showed that if issues with religious implications are not handled in a sensitive manner, hostility and distrust could occur among people. The last problem is managing the threats from external forces. This also needs to be managed because transnational terrorist groups tend to exploit religious or race issues in order to achieve their political aims, suspicion and tension may arise among people in multi-ethnic societies like Singapore. For an example,

the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) is a militant group which has been active in the Southeast Asia. Its aim is to set up an Islamic state in Asia.

Some of its activities include fund-raising and purchasing materials for making bombs. From 2001-2002, 34 JI members were arrested under the Internal Security Act for their involvement in terrorist-related activities. Targets in Singapore included the US embassy and some government buildings. Following the arrests, there was some mixed reactions from Singaporeans who were prepared to do harm in the various ethnic communities. Shocked that there were Singaporeans who were prepared to do harm to innocent civilians, some members of the public expressed distrust towards members of certain communities.

This shows that managing external threats poses a significant challenge, as it has potential to divide people along racial and religious lines. All in all, I feel that the problem that has posed the greatest threat for Singapore in ensuring social harmony is the threat of transnationalterrorism. As it can cause distrust between both religions and races while the other two can only either cause distrust among religions or races. In addition, if they manage to overcome the threat from external forces, citizens will be able to trust each other and violence and distrust will not breakout.