



Professor Kishore Mahbubani (right) launched his new book, *Can Singapore Survive?*, yesterday with Ambassador-at-large Tommy Koh as the guest of honour. The book features a collection of Prof Mahbubani's essays that discuss whether Singapore can stay exceptional. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

S'pore's challenge: 'Be confident while being paranoid'

By **CHARISSA YONG**

SINGAPOREANS are not as paranoid as their Government about the country's continued success, which is understandable but also problematic, said Professor Kishore Mahbubani yesterday.

Speaking at the launch of his book, *Can Singapore Survive?*, the former diplomat who now heads a think-tank said the country's challenge is to "be confident, motivated and successful – while being paranoid".

"It is the Government's responsibility to be paranoid about the future of Singapore. But I think that the paranoia is not shared by the population at large, certainly now less and less shared by some in the Establishment," he said.

In a 45-minute dialogue with

Ambassador-at-large Tommy Koh, who was the guest of honour, Prof Mahbubani said Singapore's achievements have been exceptional, but such exceptionalism does not last in history.

As the odds are against the longevity of a small state like Singapore, "you've really got to work extra hard to survive; you've always got to be paranoid", he said at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, where he is dean.

"I'm not so sure if the people are ready (to be more paranoid)," he told about 200 guests, including academics and foreign diplomats.

On today's political environment, where governance has become more difficult with the rise of populist pressures and social media, he said: "I'm not so worried in the short term... I think the PAP (People's Action Party) is going to win the next election, but the next election after that? I really begin to wonder what's going to happen."

But this situation is natural, he said: "The new political winds in Singapore are the same political winds as in many other countries."

In his new book, a collection of essays on Singapore published in *The Straits Times* and other publications like *The New York Times*, Prof Mahbubani discusses whether Singapore can stay exceptional.

At the dialogue, Prof Koh was more optimistic, arguing that Singapore's skilled workforce and talented leadership, good governance, multiculturalism and pleasant living environment favour its continued success. "There is no natural law that says Singapore's exceptionalism will last only 50 years," he said.

Both men highlighted the stability and unity of Asean as key, adding that Singapore should not take it for granted. Said Prof Koh: "Some of our neighbours see us as being too boastful and arrogant. There's a need for Singapore to be humble and modest."

"I would not say, 'Come to Singapore and learn from our model'. We must never say that. We say, 'We want to share our experiences with you, come and look at us, we're not perfect but if there's something in our experience you can learn from, it's for you to do that'," he added.

The 280-page book, published by Straits Times Press, is available at bookshops or from www.stpressbooks.com.sg for \$26.75.

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