

China can 'change image by strengthening WHO'

Coming to global body's aid will help alter negative perception: Ex-diplomat

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SENIOR WRITER

CHINA can counter the Western media's negative portrayal of it as an angry dragon about to swallow up the world by showing itself to be a responsible defender of global institutions, a leading academic and former diplomat said.

At the inaugural forum of a new think-tank yesterday, Professor Kishore Mahbubani said this is needed as such a negative image of the world's No. 2 power is detrimental to the relative calm in its relations with the top global power, the United States.

Noting that the West, particularly the US, has been systematically weakening institutions of global governance such as the United Nations because it sees such multilateral agencies as a check on US power – an unwise policy in today's global village that needs strong "village councils" – he suggested that China do the opposite.

"One concrete way in which China can send a very loud and powerful signal that it is behaving exactly differently from the United States... is to... select one global institution which the world clearly needs, and strengthen it," he said, adding that this would be

the World Health Organisation (WHO).

He said the West had weakened the world body by changing the composition of its funding from 75 per cent mandatory and 25 per cent voluntary contributions to 25 per cent mandatory and 75 per cent voluntary instead, so that it was difficult for it to make long-term plans.

If China could change this around and make the world body strong again – so that it can prevent future pandemics – "the world will say this is a country that we admire the most".

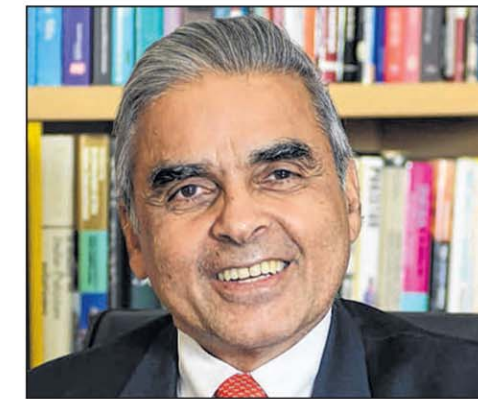
Prof Mahbubani, who is dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, made this suggestion in his discussion on how to prolong the current abnormal situation in which there are no rising levels of tension between China

and the US, as traditionally happens between an emerging and an established power.

He attributed such a situation to the two sides having been "remarkably wise" in handling their relationship, with each side making extraordinary efforts to keep it stable. For example, the US did not block China's entry to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), while the late patriarch Deng Xiaoping's policy of keeping a low international profile meant that when the Chinese were provoked, such as when the US bombed their embassy in Belgrade in 1999, they reacted calmly.

Also touching on China's foreign policy was Mr Long Yongtu, its chief negotiator for its WTO accession. Mr Long said China under President Xi Jinping is opening up further to the world and

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SIGNAL DIFFERENCE

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the “one belt, one road initiative” – shorthand for the new overland Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road – is part of this strategy.

Adding that China hopes its neighbours, particularly countries along the two trade routes, can share in the fruits of its development, he said these countries should give ideas on what projects can be implemented.

Mr Long is a strong supporter of the independent, non-profit think-tank, the Longus Institute for Development and Strategy, which was registered here in January. With initial funding from Chinese entrepreneur Lin Zhiqi, who is also its chairman, it comprises a research institute, an international consultancy and a training institute for top-level executives.

Other speakers yesterday were China expert Zheng Yongnian, who spoke on China's political reforms, and global talent expert Wang Huiyao, who discussed its need to recruit foreign talent.

Professor Zheng said China should learn from founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, who took the best from the East and West to build a successful Singapore instead of thinking that everything the West had done must be right.

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