

‘More debate within civil society good for S’pore’

DPM Tharman launches book offering insights on economy and environment

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Singapore will benefit from having more debate between groups in society as it enters its next 50 years, said Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam yesterday.

That debate is already under way, he noted, citing how more ideas and views are coming from scholars, public intellectuals and a broader range of commentators compared to even a decade ago.

This is also bringing with it a “more active scrutiny of government policies, and more active listening by Government,” said Mr Tharman, who was speaking at a book launch.

He continued: “But it will do Singapore good if we also have more debate and peer review within civil society itself, with participants evaluating each other’s analyses and proposals, and pointing to the trade-offs, thoroughly and dispassionately. This debate, which does not depend on only the Government responding to arguments being put forward, will help us mature as a society.”

The book – *Singapore 2065: Leading Insights On Economy And Environment From 50 Singapore Icons And Beyond* – invites readers to imagine a future where Singapore exports water, foreign workers are bionic and people live in 400-storey apartments.

Prominent economists, *Straits Times* journalists, Cabinet ministers and Members of Parliament were among the contributors to the book, which was edited by Nanyang Technological University economist Euston Quah.

Mr Tharman, who is also Finance Minister, wrote the foreword. He said Singapore’s future will depend on its ability to develop new skills and technologies, original business solutions and a spirit of experimentation in society.

“We are making an even better Singapore, both more innovative and more inclusive,” Mr Tharman said, adding that this must be done through a “blend of imagination and practicality that got us to where we are today, and always with a sense of fairness”.

Professor Tommy Koh, Ambassador-at-Large at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told the audience at the Singapore Art Museum, where the book was launched, that he is optimistic about Singapore’s fu-



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ture. “I have no doubt that we will remain a sovereign country, but we will be sovereign and independent in a very different world (that is highly integrated),” said Prof Koh, who cited economic integration efforts in Asean and on a larger scale, in the Asia-Pacific.

To remain competitive, Singapore must continue to embrace change and technology, as well as rejig its educational and employment landscape towards cultivating craftsmanship and deep skills, added Prof Koh, who is among the book’s contributors.

“One of the reasons for our success over the last 50 years is our capacity to constantly reinvent ourselves and our positive attitude towards change and technology.”

While there are new faultlines emerging which might threaten social stability, Singapore has been successful at maintaining a harmonious multicultural society, and there is no reason why this will not continue, he added.

“We should grow a culture of tolerance. We can have different attitudes towards issues, without seeing each other as enemies.”

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