

SINGAPORE

Empowering people to create, experiment, will help Singapore in next 50 years: Panel

As other nations catch up, Singapore must look for new ways of doing things to adapt to cultural and socio-economic changes, says panel.

By Samantha Yap



Panelists discuss the road ahead for Singapore on Channel NewsAsia's Perspectives.

CAPTION



SINGAPORE: The Republic has seen exceptional economic growth over the last 50 years, but the next 50 years will present an even more complex challenge for the country as it seeks to build on its successes.

So to stay ahead, Singapore has to adapt quickly to change and empower a new workforce culture with different aspirations, according to a panel aired on Channel NewsAsia's Perspectives on Aug 26.

These topics were discussed at a panel called Beyond The Metropolis: Singapore in the Next 50 Years, held at the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy on Jul 27.

"One observation is that the single one entity that enjoys freedom the most in Singapore are the corporates. And that freedom should be returned to individuals," said Ms Grace Sai, CEO and Co-Founder of the HUB Singapore, a co-working space for Singapore's entrepreneurial communities.

"Returning of freedom to the individual and allowing citizens to be active and alive would be an immediate thing that Singapore has to look into in the next five years if you want to talk about the next 50 years," added Ms Sai, who works with young entrepreneurs, problem solvers and potential industry disruptors.

Ms Sai was part of a panel along with Mr Kishore Mahbubani, Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at NUS; Mr David Skilling, Director of Landfall Strategy group; and Patrick Tay, Assistant-Secretary-General of the National Trades Union Congress.



Panel members include (from left) Ms Grace Sai, Mr David Skilling, Mr Kishore Mahbubani, Mr Patrick Tay with moderator Mr Teymoor Nabili.

BEWARE OF COMPLACENCY

“What Singapore has done in 50 years, that’s an amazing achievement,” said Mr Mahbubani. “The challenge then becomes much bigger because you’re trying to build on this massive achievement. It will be very difficult in the next 50 years.”

Mr Skilling, an expert on small states, added: “The biggest risk for Singapore is to hang on to a model that has worked so well in the past and not responsive enough to changes and emerging opportunities into the future.”

SETTING ITSELF APART

Mr Skilling also warned that other developing countries can do what Singapore does now, and the Republic would need to set itself apart.

“If Singapore keeps on regarding itself as a machine and tries to run that machine faster and faster, there are plenty of other people in the world including those in the region who can run the machine that much faster than you,” said Mr Skilling.

Noting that the economies around the world that have been successful have “blended the hard and the soft”, Mr Skilling said he would look to the arts as an area for Singapore to build upon.

EMPOWER YOUTH, ADAPT TO NEW WORKFORCE

Mr Tay noted that there has been an evolution in the workforce with new aspirations from a younger workforce.

"You look at the last 50 years ... it was a very blue collar, rank and file workforce," said Mr Tay.

"I think there has to be a marked transformation to ensure that we not just stay relevant for the next three to five years but for the long time to come because there will be new demands and new expectations, and millennials might feel disengaged."

But Ms Sai questioned if the Singapore environment was actually ready for a new workforce of young thinkers and disruptors.

"By 2020, research has shown that 40 per cent of the global workforce will be independent workers, meaning that they won't belong to a company that puts a label on them. They will have multiple jobs, and even the definition of a job will be different."

"It will not be labelled by a role in the company. It will be based around skills and talents that multiple individuals have across the world."

"Each individual will be more attuned to pursuing their own passions according to their own skills. Some would like productivity in the mind whereas some would like productivity in their hands. Is Singapore allowing for that?"