

Critical to forge 'sense of unity' in Singapore: DPM

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In the course of history, many nations fell apart because their people no longer felt they belonged to a collective whole.

This makes forging a sense of unity among Singaporeans a critical task, Acting Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat said yesterday.

"The sense of unity in our nation is critical – the feeling that you and I are Singaporeans and we want to make Singapore work," Mr Heng said.

"How do we maintain that? That is the critical question."

He was replying to Professor Chan Heng Chee, who pointed out at a dialogue that Singapore's fortunes have waxed and waned over the centuries.

"Do you see a time to come when Singapore would be marginalised again and that we

would lose our position?

"And what should we do about that?" asked Prof Chan, who is Ambassador-at-Large with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Prof Chan, who is also chairman of the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities at the Singapore University of Technology and Design, was moderating a dialogue with Mr Heng at the two-day Singapore Bicentennial Conference, organised by the Institute of Policy Studies.

The conference, which ends today, aims to examine Singapore's history from before Sir Stamford Raffles arrived in 1819, as well as how the country's past can inform its position in the modern world.

Mr Heng, who is Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, stressed the importance of partnership, both among Singa-



Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat and Ambassador-at-Large with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Chan Heng Chee at the Singapore Bicentennial Conference.

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poreans and the wider global community.

"If we lose a sense of togetherness, whether among our people or around the world, we are in for a bad time," he said.

"But if we have that sense of purpose, that sense of community, then I think we can tackle the many challenges ahead."

Responding to Prof Chan's question, Mr Heng pointed out

that climate change and pandemics could also have a significant impact on Singapore's future.

Another critical challenge for the country is how it can remain useful and relevant to the wider world, he added.

"If Singapore cannot make a contribution to the world, if we are no longer relevant, then nobody will be interested in our survival or success."

Mr Heng also fielded questions from the audience, who asked about inequality, xenophobia, trade tensions between China and the US, and how Singapore will fare with growing competition from the region.

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