

# New books on community development in Singapore

**Key takeaway from them is how spirit of unity has helped nation succeed: Heng**

**Fabian Koh**

In two new books on community development in Singapore, social work veteran S. Vasoo painted two scenarios of where the country could be headed.

One is pessimistic, with people at loggerheads over resources and not cooperating to serve the community.

In the more optimistic scenario, the National University of Singapore (NUS) associate professor of the social work department envisions a lively and vibrant environment in which people share and care for one another within supportive networks.

Both scenarios are possible, looking at societies around the world today, said Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat at the book launch yesterday. "I am confident that in Singapore, we are on the optimistic path. We have stayed united as a society, and trust between the different parts of our society remains strong," he said. "We can chart our future together, expand our common spaces, and journey towards a better future."

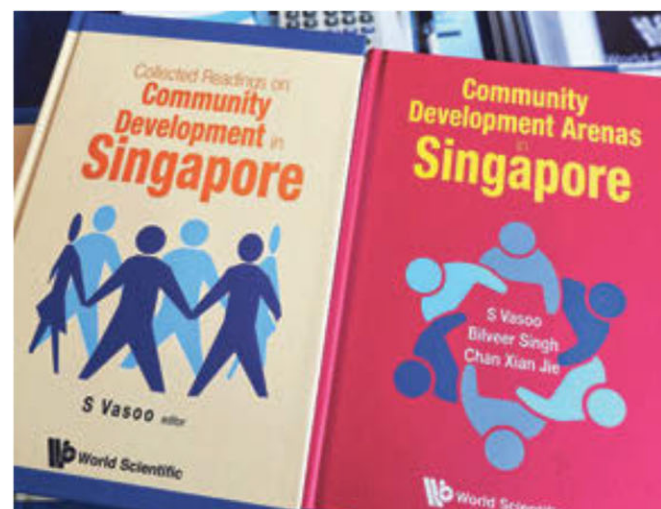
Prof Vasoo, a former People's Action Party MP, had set out the scenarios in the books, *Collected Readings On Community Development In Singapore* and *Community Development Arenas In Singapore*.

For Mr Heng, a key takeaway from the books was that "we are at our best, and have achieved remarkable things, when we come together as one, harnessing our diverse strengths for a common goal".

He cited a tuition programme started by two teenage students for young children living in rental blocks as an example of how the



National University of Singapore associate professors S. Vasoo (left) of the social work department and Bilveer Singh of the political science department presenting Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat with the books at the launch at the Ngee Ann Kongsi Auditorium yesterday. PHOTOS: LIANHE ZAOBAO



The books on community development in Singapore present two different scenarios of where the country could be headed.

department, who co-edited one of the books, said Singapore is an "accidental nation" that can be very easily undone by outsiders, so efforts to foster cohesion and bonds within the community here "can never stop".

"Community development is our building block. Our previous generations have worked so hard at it, and I think we have to continue working at it. This is more than a work in progress; it's really about our survival," Prof Singh added.

Those present at the launch at the Ngee Ann Kongsi Auditorium in University Town included students and faculty members from the NUS political science and social work departments, members of Prof Vasoo's family, and past politicians, including former Cabinet ministers Ong Pang Boon and Ahmad Mattar.

community came together over the years to help those in need.

Mr Heng, who is also Finance Minister, said this spirit of working together was also how the country overcame challenges such as the Asian financial crisis, Sars and the global financial crisis.

"Each time, our people worked with the Government and community organisations to overcome the challenges together, to keep our home safe, and our society strong and united," he said.

Associate Professor Bilveer Singh from NUS' political science

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