By Invitation

Renewing an exceptional Singapore

With National Day just around the corner, the question is: Can Singapore scale greater heights in the next 57 years, or will the nation invariably slip into middle-aged, developed country malaise?

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For The Straits Times

In just under two weeks, Singapore will celebrate its 57th National Day. There is much for Singaporeans to be thankful for as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. But how far has the nation come since independence?

Singapore’s path to independence has been tumultuous, with some calling it nothing less than a miracle. The question is: Can Singapore scale greater heights in the next 57 years, or will the nation merely slide into middle-aged, developed country malaise?

This will depend, I believe, on whether Singapore can maintain its edge in areas where it has traditionally excelled, and second, on building new systemic advantages embedded in people and society.

It is worthwhile to take stock of the national narrative that underpins discussions of what Singapore must do to survive and thrive. The notion of competitiveness and vulnerability remains relevant for our time but may be in need of a revamp.

REFRESHING CHINESE AUTOCRATIC

Generations of schoolchildren have been told the story of Singapore’s vulnerability – a story replete with natural resources, which dwells on the grit and determination of its people, underfunded leadership, revenue sources on obstacles and lack of nation, in the past and now. There was a national obsession for being No. 1. Singapore had to be the first to do everything.

The notion of competitiveness may seem somewhat crude in an age when inclusivity and solidarity are increasingly emphasized. But competitiveness is not to be replaced with a more confident posture. Others contend that Singaporeans should do well to lose sight of our vulnerabilities, given heightened geopolitical competition and the growing threat of foreign influence and disinformation.

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For Singapore to continue to thrive, we will need an exceptional society – one that can accommodate different views while fostering a broad unity of purpose and national solidarity, says the writer.


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