

'A cosmopolitan, open society critical'

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by Teo Xuanwei

SINGAPORE - While the grand vision is a "distinctive global city" and "an endearing home", observers said yesterday that the Economic Strategies Committee's gameplan to achieve this must give Singaporeans a sense of belonging here in equal measure even as it draws top foreign talents to our shores.

Singapore Institute of International Affairs chairman Simon Tay told MediaCorp: "If people feel second-class in their own home, they will not be good and welcoming hosts, and tensions will result. We have to continue to build a nation but in the context of globalisation."

In agreement, social sciences professor Kirpal Singh said: "For us, as citizens, and especially for those of us who have made Singapore home in spite of the fact that we could have gone anywhere, we do need to be at some point made to feel we also matter in a significant and real way."

To secure future growth, Singapore has to "offer the best quality of life in Asia", Acting Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts Lui Tuck Yew said at the press conference where the ESC revealed its main recommendations to the Government.

To that end, the sub-committee looking into Singapore's global city aspirations has suggested developing "economically and socially vibrant districts", such as Bras Basah-Bugis, Orchard Road and Singapore River, to generate more economic activity and raise Singapore's status as an exciting cultural destination - all without disrupting local identity and heritage.

New districts that offer different lifestyle options - as with Punggol, Jurong Lake District and Marina Bay - are also in the works to up the Republic's liveability factor, as the recommendations pointed to an island city full of districts with distinctive character, not too dissimilar from New York City.

"Pinnacle" international events should also be drawn here to add "buzz and vibrancy" to our city, said Rear-Admiral (NS) Lui, the sub-committee co-chair.

To develop Singapore into a "leading cultural capital", efforts will be channelled toward strengthening the city's arts hub competitiveness.

This will be through development of reputable degree and research programmes, which enhance artistic, professional, scholastic and technical capabilities.

The country also has to grow into an "even more attractive place to nurture, attract, develop and engage talent", he added.

Among the various suggestions, the ESC asked the Government to provide economic agencies "some flexibility" to take a "talent-centric approach" - instead of one centred on firms - to attract top-quality people.

Prof Tay agreed that it was important that Singapore not be "insular".

"We're deeply connected to the world, for better or worse," he said.

"It's critical for Singapore to remain an open, cosmopolitan society in which both native-born and foreigners mix. If we can achieve this, we would be at an advantage compared to almost every other Asian city."

At the same time, Assoc Prof Singh urged for greater support for local talents.

"I think it's time for Singapore to really champion our own writers, our own artists. Give them the same kind of break, the same kind of spaces, the same kind of money we pay these overseas people," said the English Literature and Creative Thinking don at the Singapore Management University.

"Otherwise we're always going to be seen as a city where the other - meaning the foreigner

- is the best."

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