

What to Expect from the SG50+ Conference

2 - 3 July 2015

Shangri-La Hotel Singapore

Registration for the SG50+ conference, "[Singapore at 50: What lies ahead?](#)", on 2 and 3 July 2015 is underway. Organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKYSPP), the conference will feature distinguished Singapore and international speakers discussing the broad themes of geopolitics; the economy; the city and governance.

The speakers will reflect on Singapore's success as the country turns 50, and deliberate on the kind of future the city-state can expect. The world order has become more complex and uncertain, new threats to the environment and our way of life have emerged and rapid technological advances are reshaping economic and social dynamics. Will Singapore survive and can we hope to thrive?

Up to 700 participants comprising business, community and civil society leaders, policymakers, academics and students will be at the event, which will also mark the National University of Singapore's 110th anniversary since its founding. IPS Senior Research Fellow Dr Gillian Koh, and LKYSPP Associate Dean (Research and Executive Education) Donald Low conceptualised the SG50+ conference, with the support of IPS Director Janadas Devan and LKYSPP Dean, Professor Kishore Mahbubani.

Here, in responses of around 50 words, Dr Koh (GK) and Mr Low (DL) give their take on why the conference is a special event not to be missed.

1. Different commentators have already highlighted the challenges and opportunities for Singapore in the next 50 years. How is this conference going to be any different?

GK: We are pulling together, at one place and one time, quite a few things — a discussion on the key internal and external drivers of change; a discussion with representatives from across the key sectors in society including students and the duly elected government leaders of Singapore.

DL: It'd be the only conference in our 50th year taking a long-range look at how the forces of technology, great power dynamics, climate change, and ideas about how we govern ourselves will shape our future. It's a uniquely Singaporean conference – few countries obsess and worry about the future as much as us.

2. How did you decide on these four themes for the conference: geopolitics, the economy, the city and governance?

GK: There are many things Singapore cannot determine but must better understand — big power rivalry, climate change, communications technology and business trends — to build up our anticipatory instinct and resilience as a people and country. The sessions will cover these; discuss their interactions; imagine possible scenarios of Singapore to mull over.

DL: We felt that those were the major drivers of our future. We are a small city-state - external developments would impact us. Take the economy for instance - we've been quite successful in creating jobs for virtually all Singaporeans. But with the advent of technologies that are likely to disrupt many jobs, how should we adapt?

3. CNN host Fareed Zakaria will moderate separate dialogues with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam at the conference. What tough questions are the leaders likely to get?

GK: The Prime Minister might be asked about leadership succession and what if those plans are scuppered, given the livelier democracy we have become. As the Deputy Prime Minister has been introducing policies to foster a more inclusive society, and to temper the unequal effects of capitalist development, there might be questions on whether he would succeed.

DL: Questions about how the future will unfold aren't necessarily tough. Leaders – arguably more so in Singapore's context – are expected to have ready-made answers. That's tough – to convey the inherent uncertainty and unpredictability of the future without creating a sense of fatalism that there's nothing we can do to prepare ourselves.

4. The session on “Governance” features two former Prime Ministers (Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong and former UK Prime Minister Sir John Major) who are friends. Can we still expect an exciting debate?

GK: Not all enlightenment comes from fiery debate. What we'd like is a grasp of trends, ideally those we don't yet know about or appreciate properly, and an honest discussion about what if we are blindsided by them, i.e., positive and negative lessons of governing in the midst of uncertainty and pluralism.

DL: Since they are friends, it may be a congenial setting to share what surprises they might have had, looking at developments that have unfolded in their respective countries and the world since they stepped down, especially how new communications technologies have changed the challenge of governance everywhere.

5. Since Dean Kishore Mahbubani has already covered the topic of Singapore's survival in his latest book, tell us: will Singapore thrive in the next 50 years?

GK: Our anticipatory reflexes can only be strengthened by conversations with as many innovative thinkers and well-informed experts, in different fields as possible. We hope that some of the toughest questions about Singapore's future are asked at the conference. It's not a set of correct answers we're chasing but a state of mind.

DL: That will depend largely on how we adapt and respond to inevitable changes. Whether we'll continue to stay ahead of change, given our achievements, is the key uncertainty. Among companies, those that are highly successful seldom remain so for long. Those that do, have to continually reinvent themselves – often radically.

The registration fee for the SG50+ conference on 2 and 3 July is S\$1,500 nett per seat. A limited number of partially sponsored seats are available, thanks to the generosity of our corporate donors. If you are from a voluntary welfare organisation or civil society group and would like to enquire about the sponsored seats, please contact Ms Choo Kia Ming at choo.kiaming@nus.edu.sg

If you have comments or feedback, please email ips.eneews@nus.edu.sg



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