

Small states must aim to remain relevant: Ambassador-at-Large Panellists offer views on Singapore's future as a sovereign state, in light of challenges presented by globalisation.

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SINGAPORE: Remaining relevant must be the overarching strategic objective of small states, said Ambassador-at-Large Bilahari Kausikan, who spoke at Singapore Perspectives, an annual conference organised by the Institute of Policy Studies, on Monday (Jan 26).

Mr Kausikan added that the bedrock of relevance is success as a country and this has to be defined using economic terms first.

Looking ahead as Singapore celebrates 50 years of independence this year, panellists had been asked to consider Singapore's future as a sovereign state, in light of challenges presented by globalisation.

One speaker added that threats to Singapore's sovereignty can no longer be thought of in the conventional sense.

Said Ms Evelyn Goh, Shedden Professor of Strategic Policy Studies at the Australian National University: "Conflict, in how we think about war and invasion, is actually much less common than we would like to think. What's more common is - do you do better than others, are you more competitive, are you more able to exploit the opportunities offered by globalisation?"

"So competitiveness is the issue. It's much more important for Singapore than being able to counter threats of war, invasion, disease and things like that. So the question is how competitive can Singapore be in leveraging on the opportunities offered by globalisation. And this has - of course - economic, political and security dimensions to it."

Other speakers at the conference also examined Singapore's position as a global city, with one suggesting that a mindset shift is needed. This is especially as more global cities emerge as competition.

Said Ms Linda Lim, Professor of Strategy at the University of Michigan's Stephen M. Ross School of Business: "If we look at the market environment that Singapore faces and the regional markets around us, China, India, Southeast Asia will continue to grow faster than - what I call - distant rich markets. It makes sense that if the part of the world that is most fast growing and developing is next door to you, you should target that market, there's less competition from other global cities in that market.

"My main line is that we must shift our mindset from providing manufactured goods to rich distant markets to providing services to near lower income markets where the middle class is

burgeoning. And that requires a mindset shift in terms of orientation of education, language acquisition, and so on.

Because we have limited resources, we have to focus those resources on where as they say we can get biggest bang for the buck.