

Sneak Preview of *Singapore Chronicles* at Singapore Writers Festival

By Sim Jui Liang
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On the cover of the *Singapore Chronicles* volume on the Constitution is the dignified façade of the current Singapore Parliament building. By sheer coincidence, the book made its maiden appearance at the Old Parliament House, now popularly known as The Arts House, at the Singapore Writers Festival (SWF) on 1 November 2015.

Holding a copy of the book, Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Special Research Adviser Arun Mahizhnan told the full-house audience that the copy was literally hot off the press. He was speaking at a SWF panel discussion entitled “SG50 Anthologies: What makes Singapore Singapore”.

Moderated by Assistant Professor Richard Angus Whitehead from the National Institute of Education, the panel also included Angelina Choy and Cheong Suk-Wai, writers of *Living the Singapore Story: Celebrating Our 50 Years 1965-2015*; Susan Long, editor of *50+ Things to Love About Singapore*; and Gwee Li Sui, editor of *Singathology*. Like the *Singapore Chronicles* series, these anthologies have been produced to commemorate Singapore’s golden jubilee in 2015.

Responding tongue-in-cheek to Asst Prof Whitehead’s description of the 50-volume *Singapore Chronicles* as one of “titanic” proportions, Mr Mahizhnan quipped that “it isn’t sinking” before adding that “size matters”. He explained the motivation for producing this series, especially in a year marked by a bumper crop of books being published — despite the plethora of publications in the market, for the intelligent lay reader, there remains a knowledge gap of “what makes Singapore Singapore”.

Mr Mahizhnan also clarified that the *Singapore Chronicles* series is meant to serve as a primer instead of being regarded as a seminal or definitive source. Covering a broad spectrum of topics, including politics, economy, food and sports, it is IPS’ intent that the volumes reach out to the widest range of readers possible, from “A”-level students to ambassadors, from business leaders to academics. In line with the objective of making the books affordable, *Singapore Chronicles* would be priced at below \$20 a copy.

A few hands shot up instantly after the last panellist had spoken, with a member of the audience asking if working on their respective book projects had changed their impressions

of Singapore and whether they had learnt anything different about their country. Divulging his age without hesitation, Mr Mahizhnan noted that as a 70-year-old, he has known Singapore since its Independence. Yet, reading the *Singapore Chronicles* volumes never failed to “refresh my memory and in these 100 pages, there were insights that completely missed me”. He added that the *Singapore Chronicles* books proffer the opportunity to be “re-educated and reintegrated into a Singapore that we thought we knew all along”.



IPS Special Research Adviser Arun Mahizhnan (in white shirt) participating in a Singapore Writers Festival panel discussion.

Given the anthologies’ perceived celebratory tone, someone from the audience quizzed the panellists if the books contained stories on “political dissidents”, for instance. Mr Mahizhnan assured the audience that incidents, trajectories and contests of a political nature would be put on record in some of the books, where relevant.

A young member of the audience noted that the anthologies seemed to be dwelling in the past instead of focusing on the future, adding that it is his generation who would be around to witness the country’s centenary. His off-the-cuff remarks triggered laughter and protests from the engaging crowd. Mr Mahizhnan took the opportunity to elaborate on the editorial “template” suggested to *Singapore Chronicles* authors: Besides providing a historical account of and raising pertinent issues pertaining to the subject matter they were writing about, authors were encouraged to make future projections. “There is the freedom for authors to look at the future and see what might happen to Singapore,” he said.

The official launch of the first batch of 10 *Singapore Chronicles* titles will take place on 10 December 2015, with the remaining 40 titles to be released in 2016. More information on the launch is available [here](#).

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