

SINGAPORE PERSPECTIVES 2010

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Thoughts on Singapore Perspectives 2010

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A thought-provoking day, I left Singapore Perspectives 2010 with 3 takeaways.

One, the nexus of Singapore as Economy, Society and Nation must be seriously looked at, and delicately handled. We are at an interesting inflexion point. Singaporeans want Singapore as Society and Nation to be given stronger visibility, greater prominence. I feel they are now less content to “sit by the side”. Singaporeans want to get involved, they are more prepared to share their views, and they want to suggest improvements. This is a healthy phenomenon which Singapore’s leaders should embrace and encourage. As *quid pro quo* for a kinder, gentler Society and a more united, cohesive Nation, Singaporeans are prepared for a trade-off. This trade-off, one which more and more Singaporeans can accept, is a slower rate of growth for Singapore as Economy.

Two, Singapore should cater to and accept Pluralism. Whether Singapore subscribes to the terms “melting pot”, “mosaic” or “multiculturalism” as the primary mode of culture assimilation or identity formation is not the point. The point is that Pluralism is, and will be, the order of the day. Singaporeans, second-/third-generation or new; sojourners through Singapore, long or short term, PR or work passes; all of us must accept that Pluralism is part of our lives and that it is here to stay. We must accept one another; we must work together, we must “give and take”, we must look for “win-win”, for a smoother, happier, kinder Singapore. It’s not just numbers and borders; it’s no longer just social cohesion and national integration. It’s also very much about going the extra mile, it’s about making somebody’s day (dramatically) better and in the process, improving our own (dramatically) as well!

Three, we must focus on “What Unites”, rather than on “What Divides”. At the beginning of this, a new decade, I feel that Singapore needs to go beyond politics that is practical and pragmatic; we also need politics that unites and uplifts. The right policy response I feel is for Singapore and Singaporeans to emphasize what unites, what uplifts, beyond what divides, what depresses. Perhaps it will make sense to re-ignite Singaporeans’ sense of pride, patriotism, citizen engagement, nation-building and esprit de corps as seen and experienced in the rapid nation-building days of the 1960s to the 1980s? How can this best be done? Through a new, inspiring, unifying vision of the future? Or perhaps we can appeal to Singaporeans’ higher-order need “to feel good and to live exceptional lives” by giving back to Society, to Singapore, and to their fellow man? If we make an attempt to focus on what unites, what uplifts, rather than on what divides, what depresses, I think Singaporeans will heed the call, and will find much to rejoice and be excited about. Our National Pledge, the Global City of Distinction which Singapore has progressively become, the world’s first Night Race, the excitement of the new IRs, Changi Airport, SIA, Tiger Beer, Tiger Balm... The list goes on. Regardless of race, religion, heritage, creed or the values we

each hold dear, human beings across the world inherently share the same understanding and longing for what constitutes an ideal society, an ideal community and an ideal neighbourhood -- isn't that amazing?

What did the various conversations at Singapore Perspectives 2010 suggest? The delicate nexus of Singapore as Economy, Society and Nation; Pluralism is here to stay and we should embrace not fight it; and a Politics of What Unites and What Uplifts. These I believe, is the clarion call.

Until 2010, Peter Ong was Managing Partner of Gallup Singapore, Hong Kong and South-East Asia. At the start of this decade, he left "his comfort zone" to form his new firm, Rested Edge Advisory, where he is Managing Partner.

