

Chronicling Singapore

History can be a weighty matter. If it ever turns up as dinner table conversation among distinguished guests, you can look to the the Institute of Policy Studies' (IPS) Singapore Chronicle series to help you stay one step ahead of the crowd.

Simon Vincent

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The SG50 year may be coming to an end, but the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) has just launched the first 10 books of its 50-volume Singapore Chronicles series.

Minister for Finance, Heng Swee Keat, who graced the launch on 10 December, said "I believe you cannot build towards the future without a deep understanding and appreciation of the past.

"The Singapore Chronicles serve not only as a reminder of how far we have come, but as a re

The objective of the series, according to IPS Director, Janadas Devan, is to reach out to the "common reader".

Sharing his love for primers, he quipped that the authors of Singapore Chronicles have made "significant contributions for making laziness productive, but being productively lazy is hard work and it requires a collective effort."

Like Janadas, Kevin Tan, the author of Constitution, is a fan of primers. He says, "As an educator I've always fought very hard to try to bring things down to a level where we can have some impact on the general public. And I think the easier and the shorter things are, especially in this day and age, the more likely you are to attract an audience."

The topic of the Constitution can be quite weighty. When asked if it has merely been a field for academics, the Adjunct Professor of Law at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) says it has generally been so, "although this is the irony, everyone should know their Constitution, everybody should know their rights under the Constitution."

"The trouble with constitutional law is that it is fairly complex, especially as practised in Singapore. There are lot of ideas. There is a lot of philosophy behind the ideas," he adds.

Speaking of a similar dearth of understanding on his topic, the author of Diplomacy Dr Daniel Chua says, "I think in general we are dealing with a situation where we don't have pressing issues and problems that are appearing on our headlines every day, such that the general public, the Singaporean on the street, needs to be wary of what kind of policy alternatives we need."

However, this is "a good thing" because it means "our policymakers have been dealing with our diplomatic relations very well," adds the Research Fellow with the Military Studies Programme at the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS).

Ho Shu Huang, Associate Research Fellow at the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, (RSIS) and the joint author of Defence, says each primer is not the last word on the subject and hopes readers will use it as a launchpad for further discussion on Singapore's history.

"I think history is a very powerful tool for nation-building, so the more stories we hear, the better."

The other seven books launched on 10 December include Colonial Singapore, Education, Eurasians, Heritage, Indians, Law and Presidency.

The remaining 40 titles in the Singapore Chronicles series will be published over the course of 2016.