

Write Way to Mark Nation's 50th Birthday

Series of 50 books by various experts on S'pore to be launched next year

Nur Asyiqin Mohamad Salleh

The Straits Times, 11 June 2014

A TEAM of experts on Singapore has been called on to pen 50 books to mark the nation's golden jubilee next year.

The Singapore Chronicles will be launched by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) next year to help Singaporeans deepen their understanding of the nation's journey from fishing village to global city.

Academics, civil servants and journalists will delve into 50 topics, including the country's bleak, war-torn years during the Japanese Occupation, civil society, and even the Central Provident Fund - the talk of the town in recent weeks.

"The series will provide a guiding hand to navigate the sometimes murky waters of politics, economics and social development, and give insight into what makes Singapore tick, and why Singapore chose certain paths untrodden," said IPS special research adviser Arun Mahizhnan at a media briefing yesterday. For the young, especially, he hopes the series will provide a "comprehensive picture of Singapore as a whole in a digestible form".

Mr Arun is one of two co-editors of the project, and will be writing on literature. The other is Mr Asad Latif, visiting research fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

The books are intended to serve as simple primers for the general public on wide-ranging and sometimes complex issues in about 100 pages each.

They will give historical accounts, highlighting critical milestones and issues, and also provide a glimpse into the future.

To fund this project, IPS has approached the SG50 committee, which is planning a nationwide celebration of Singapore's 50th birthday bash next year, and will also seek sponsorship from other organisations, said Mr Arun.

So far, 47 books have been commissioned, and some manuscripts have already started coming in, he said. The books will be released in batches throughout the year, and sold at major bookstores here. IPS is looking at promoting them in schools as well, he added.

Five of the authors shared their thoughts on the project yesterday.

One of them is National University of Singapore (NUS) sociology professor Chua Beng Huat, who will explore Singapore's policies in managing different cultures, religions and races.

Prof Chua said: "Every city, every post-colonial society is a mix of races, but there are very few which consciously make multiracialism a policy, especially constitutionally (like Singapore)."

Another is NUS biology lecturer N. Sivasothi, who will write on Singapore's ecological development to showcase the country as a "petri dish for South-east Asia".

Ambassador-at-large and policy adviser in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Bilahari Kausikan will draw lessons on the country's approach to foreign policy from the Confrontation era in the 1960s, while former civil service head Peter Ho, now the Urban Redevelopment Authority chairman, will share how "achieving good governance is not a simple matter".

Food writer Sylvia Tan said her message will be simple - that Singapore has "the best food in the world".

The ensemble of writers also includes IPS director Janadas Devan, who will write on Singapore's separation from Malaysia, and Ambassador-at-large Chan Heng Chee, who will give a broad view of political developments. The Straits Times' deputy editor Zuraidah Ibrahim will focus on opposition politics.