

Bicentennial of S'pore's founding offers teachable moment

Michael Seah Swee Lim

The Straits Times, 22 May 2017

Institute of Policy Studies S R Nathan Fellow Peter Ho identified two visionaries in Singapore's short history - Sir Stamford Raffles and Mr Lee Kuan Yew ([A red dot can and must shape its future](#); May 19).

Raffles founded Singapore in 1819, while Mr Lee shaped the Singapore of today.

In 2015, we celebrated SG50, marking the golden jubilee of Singapore's independence.

The year 2019 will mark the bicentennial of the founding of Singapore by Raffles. It is an equally important milestone in the history of our young nation.

I hope there will be a significant celebration of the occasion and the opportunity to relate and reflect on our short 200-year history.

Had Raffles not established Singapore as a British colony, our history and outcome would have been very different.

Singapore grew from a small fishing village to a thriving colony till our independence through Malaysia in 1963.

Over that period, our forefathers from China, India, the Malay Archipelago and farther ashore settled here to build Singapore.

We are what we are today because these men and women laid the foundations for modern Singapore. Theirs was a spirit of entrepreneurship, of survival against the odds, and of seeking better lives for a future generation.

These are qualities that we need to appreciate, recognise, remember and emulate.

The bicentennial should be a time for us to celebrate the heroes who built Singapore prior to 1965.

We should not be afraid or ashamed of our colonial past.

The bicentennial is an important opportunity for a younger generation of Singaporeans to learn and understand the roots of our multiracial and multicultural society.

It gives meaning to why we pledge ourselves as one united people regardless of race, language and religion. And, it is not just because of what we did or happened over the last 50 years.