

First 10 titles of 50-volume Singapore Chronicles launched

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SINGAPORE - A series of books on topics such as Singapore's diplomacy and heritage, written to mark the nation's 50th year of independence, was launched on Thursday (Dec 10) by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat.

The 50-volume series is called Singapore Chronicles. Each title, written by experts in the respective fields, serves as a simple primer on the respective subjects in between 100 and 150 pages.

The first 10 books were launched on Thursday, while the remaining 40 titles will be published over the next year. The books are a joint effort by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and the Straits Times Press.

They are now available at major bookstores at \$16 each, inclusive of GST.

Mr Heng, who chairs the SG50 Steering Committee, said that the series of 50 books is unprecedented in its scope.

He added, at the launch at the National University of Singapore (NUS) law school: "We cannot build towards our future without an understanding and appreciation of the past. The books are a reminder of how far we have come, and are a reference as a way forward."

Added IPS director Janadas Devan: "These volumes seek to be as objective as possible. We also asked the authors to make sure their accounts are accessible to the intelligent lay reader, especially young Singaporeans.

"We did not seek academic tomes or strive to have the last word on any particular subject."

The first 10 books are:

1. Colonial Singapore by veteran historian Nicholas Tarling

The book looks at Singapore from the time it was a British colony, following the arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819, to the rise of anti-colonialists after World War II and its merger with Malaya. It studies the impact of British rule on developing Singapore's economy and society.

2. Constitution by Dr Kevin Tan, an adjunct law professor at the NUS

The book traces the development of the Singapore Constitution, including how issues such as citizenship, equality and fairness for minority groups are enshrined in it.

3. Defence by Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies researcher Ho Shu Huang, and Australian Defence Force Academy adjunct lecturer Samuel Chan

The book looks at Singapore's defence policy with the aim of addressing the David-and-Goliath question: how a tiny island can defend itself against bigger players in the region.

4. Diplomacy by researchers Evelyn Goh, of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University, and Daniel Cua of the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies in Singapore

The authors suggest four key threads to Singapore's diplomacy in dealing with challenges such as terrorism and transboundary pollution. They include being proactive in international affairs and emphasising cooperation with multiple stakeholders.

5. Education by Professor S Gopinathan, a researcher in teacher education and education policy

The book examines key policies that led to Singapore's successful education story - and how a more educated citizenry today has profoundly influenced education policy to one that is less elitist.

6. Eurasians by Dr Alexius Pereira, deputy director at Ministry of Home Affairs. He was previously assistant professor for sociology at NUS

The author looks at identity issues Eurasians face and which may not apply to other ethnic minorities in the country. He raises the ideology and policy of multiracialism - including the Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others model - that have affected the evolution of their identity in Singapore.

7. Heritage by Mr Kennie Ting, group director for museums and development at the National Heritage Board

The book looks at the factors influencing the preservation and protection of Singapore's heritage through the years, including the considerations of policymakers and conservationists.

The author, in noting that even new and manufactured landmarks of today may be considered heritage in the future, makes the case that heritage is living and there is no way to define it conclusively.

8. Indians by Professor Vineeta Sinha, who heads the sociology department at NUS

The book maps the deep diversity and rich dynamics behind the socioeconomic, religious and linguistic intricacies of the Indian community. It also looks at the impact of ongoing arrivals of professionals and foreign workers from India on the larger society.

9. Law by contract law expert Goh Yihan, who teaches at the Singapore Management University

The book tells the story of the legal system from the British years to the post-independence period. It notes that the system has expanded beyond the domestic towards internationalisation, with the launch of the Singapore International Commercial Court this year.

10. Presidency by Professor Thio Li-Ann, a constitutional law expert and former Nominated Member of Parliament

The book examines the powers held by Singapore's head of state, as well as how the elected presidency institution has evolved since it was introduced in 1991. The author also presents arguments both for and against the elected presidency system, noting the politicised nature of the 2011 Presidential Election.