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Little red dot is sometimes misunderstood

MANY states have their admirers and detractors, but Singapore has more than its fair share of people who misunderstand it, said Mr Kishore Mahbubani, who is the dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

The key reason for this is Singapore's unique position: It is neither a developed or developing country, nor fully a member of the East or West.

'The world is mystified by us, how a little red dot has done so much is the source of much misunderstanding,' the country's former envoy to the United Nations said.

Recently, for example, Mr Jan Egeland, the UN's Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, praised Singapore's tsunami relief efforts in Indonesia.

In June last year, however, Mr Egeland said it was unacceptable that rich countries like Singapore and Malaysia were not doing their part on peace processes and humanitarian confidence-building measures.

He compared the two countries to Norway, which he said had been giving substantially when it was not as rich.

Negative perceptions of Singapore also run deep in Western minds, Mr Mahbubani said.

A Freedom House political freedom index listed Singapore as 'partly free', while the New York Times frequently uses the term 'nanny state' to describe Singapore.

On the bright side, Mr Mahbubani said that post-Sept 11, there has been a new attitude towards the value of good governance - one of Singapore's strengths.

And the massive logistical capabilities Singapore displayed in Indonesia recently illustrates how it had put principles of good governance in the area of defence.

By launching a larger-scale effort to share such principles with its neighbours, Singapore would enhance its national interests in the region and change perceptions about the country, said Mr Mahbubani.

As Singapore does this, the world would become 'less mystified' about its role in the global arena, he added.

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