

# Governing the global village

**Academic and former Singaporean diplomat Kishore Mahbubani argues that nation-states must devise new ways to conduct its affairs in a globalised world**

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Kishore Mahbubani has long been a cheerleader for the alternative to Western dominance. In his first book, published in the mid-1990s, he warned Westerners that they must change their mindsets to adapt to the coming rise of Asia (meaning East Asia). In his second book, published in the first decade of the new millennium, he advised Western powers to accommodate rising Asia (this time meaning East Asia and India) in the high tables of the world.

His latest work, *The Great Convergence: Asia, the West, and the Logic of One World*, 9:00 PM 2/12/2013 goes further: it argues that as living standards between the West and the rest (meaning, effectively, Asia) converge, the world needs to move to an altogether different way of conducting its affairs.

Due to the unprecedented changes over the last three decades, Mr Mahbubani contends, the people of the world are no longer in a “flotilla of 100 separate boats” but in “193 cabins on the same boat”. While each cabin has its own crew, the big boat itself is without a captain. Nation-states, in other words, are no longer free agents; they have become hitched to each other, primarily because the environment, economics, technology and common aspirations have riveted them together into one big international system.

Mr Mahbubani identifies three geopolitical factors that can derail the great convergence: US-China ties, the India-China equation and how Islamic countries negotiate with the West. Any analyst unpacking any of these issues will end up deeply worried about the future. The book, however, offers optimism: if Southeast Asian countries could set aside their differences and create a miracle, so can the rest. Unfortunately, it is here that Mr Mahbubani fails to offer enough to persuade the sceptical reader that the Asean model can work in other settings. What appears to be “global irrationality” to the Southeast Asian mind often has perfectly rational explanations from other perspectives.