

Title : New York City awarded LKY World City Prize

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SINGAPORE: The City of New York has been awarded the prestigious Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize this year, after beating more than 60 nominations received from all over the world.

The prize was awarded to the mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg, and the city's Departments of Transportation, City Planning and Parks, and Recreation for the city's transformation after the devastating September 11 attacks over a decade ago.

The biennial award goes to cities and their administrative departments for outstanding contributions towards creating vibrant, liveable and sustainable urban communities.

Mr Bloomberg accepted the award at Raffles Hotel in Singapore on Wednesday.

He said cities and its people will need to live with changes and transformation in order to stay competitive.

He highlighted some of the ways New York City has been transformed within a span of ten years.

They include adding 430 kilometres of bicycle lanes and closing off sections of areas for pedestrians, like the iconic Times Square.

Mayor Bloomberg said with the many projects the city had to implement came strong resistance, even though they were bottom-up initiatives. But he said cities, people and governments need to keep reinventing themselves.

He added: "The pace of change is going to continue to grow and we're going to have to learn how to live with that, and it's going to provide great challenges to governments and to peoples, whether you're in Singapore, New York, or any other city.

"The difference is, successful cities will find ways to cope, and unsuccessful cities will just throw up their hands.

"If you had to make a bet, you'd bet on those who've been able to deal with change -- like Singapore and like New York, and they're the ones most likely to be able to cope in the future."

Professor Kishore Mahbubani, chairman of the Prize Nominating Committee and dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, highlighted ways in which New York City stood out.

He said: "New York City, it's a very old city, very difficult to manage, has gone through very difficult times. ... On a scale of difficulty, with one being the easiest (and) ten being the most difficult, New York City is close to ten in terms of difficulties in transforming and reinventing itself...

"It's quite remarkable what New York City has done in terms of reinventing itself. I mean I've lived in New York City for over 10-and-a-half years. I know the degree of local opposition whenever change is mooted.

"I can tell you, when they tried to rejuvenate the High Line, which was by the way, a bottom-up initiative, not a top-down initiative, there was a lot of resistance to it. But people persisted.

"And the fact that New York City could, against great odds, transform itself was a very strong winning point for New York City."

Professor Mahbubani added that Singapore can learn a great deal from the way New York City has transformed in such a short period of time. This is especially important if Singapore wants to become the Asian capital city of the 21st century.

He said: "I think one of the biggest mistakes Singapore has made recently is the belief that it is actually quite easy to be open, it is quite easy to welcome immigrants, and to absorb them, and to live with them. And now we're discovering it's not so easy.

"And frankly, New York City's capacity for absorbing immigrants is probably number one in the world."

He added: "So New York's capacity to accept diversity and to live with it is, I think, one of its great strengths – and I think that's something Singapore can learn from.

"Singapore now has the great opportunity to become the capital city of Asia. Frankly, we're entering the Asian century; everybody wants to come to Asia. And just like New York City was the iconic city for the American century, Singapore can become the iconic city for the Asian century.

"So to become the iconic city of the Asian century, we must learn to be more open, accept diversity and take full advantage of it – the way New York City did."

The World City Prize is jointly organised by Singapore's Urban Redevelopment Authority and the Centre for Liveable Cities.

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