

Thinking on S'pore's 'alternative futures'

It is surprises that make it important to imagine alternative futures for Singapore, according to Professor Mahbubani. - ST

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Mon, Nov 12, 2012
The Straits Times

SINGAPORE - Many did not anticipate the loss of a group representation constituency, or GRC, to the opposition in last year's general election, according to Professor Kishore Mahbubani, dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

It is surprises like this that make it important to imagine alternative futures for Singapore, he said on Friday at the launch of project Prism, which aims to acquaint people with three possible scenarios of government for Singapore in 2022.

Beyond Singapore, Prof Mahbubani named three "massive surprises" that caught hundreds of millions of people off guard.

One was the European economic crisis, which saw "the most competent continent in the world for the last 200 years" become incompetent.

Another was the Arab Spring, in which leaders of Arab states, whose time in power totalled around 130 years, were gone in weeks.

But the biggest surprise for him was the US. He said: "It was always the role model in terms of political leadership, dynamism and drive.

"Today, the United States is a role model of political paralysis - it cannot fix any of its problems."

He added: "Trust me, there will be surprises in Singapore also. We saw that already, that for the first time since the GRCs were created, the PAP lost a GRC."

While it is not possible to predict the future, "we can write scenarios about the future and we can talk about alternative futures," he said.

Prof Mahbubani said he believes artists are the best people to describe these futures.

Hence, the collaboration between the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and theatre company Drama Box for the Prism project.

Billed as an "immersive arts experience", it allows people to take part in a singalong of National Day songs that had been rewritten, watch short films or join interactive forum theatre performances, among other things.

Through the activities, people can learn about the three possible scenarios - mapped out by IPS after discussions with nearly 140 leaders from various segments of society.

The activities are being held at the National Library's ground floor plaza and fifth floor. Visitors are asked to complete a survey form on their views on politics and governance after their participation.

The IPS Prism experience is open till Nov 14, from 10am to 9pm daily. Admission is free.

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