

S'pore faces image problem in region: Kishore Mahbubani

He offers three branding ideas for S'pore in lecture on the national brand

By **JANICE HENG**

[SINGAPORE] One of Singapore's biggest challenges is to demonstrate to its neighbours that the old image of the island "as a parasite on the region is wrong", academic and former diplomat Kishore Mahbubani said yesterday.

Singapore has to persuade its neighbours that its economic role is not that of "a middleman taking a cut", he said. Rather, "Singapore actually adds value to the region".

Mr Mahbubani was speaking during the question-and-answer session of the first lecture in the Distinguished Speakers Lecture Series organised by the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in partnership with Performance Motors Limited.

Speaking to reporters at the event,

Mr Mahbubani said that Singapore "will always have problems with its neighbours" but there is now "a much greater comfort level" among Asean members.

"The critical thing is the chemistry of the relationship," he said. And that chemistry is "overall, still positive".

As for how Singapore might improve its image, Mr Mahbubani said patience is the key. "Singapore should not try to explain its case," he said. "I think it has got to wait for its case to become clear."

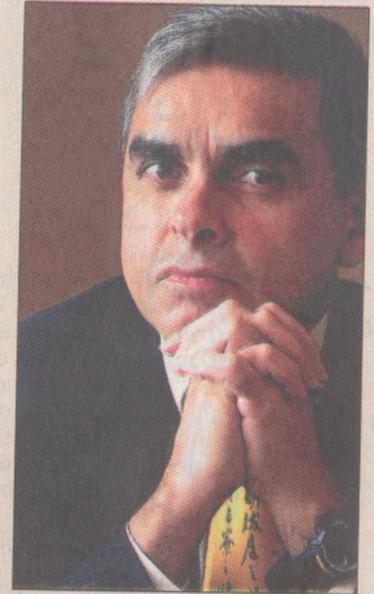
In his lecture, the first in a twice-yearly series, Mr Mahbubani spoke about the "paradox" of Singapore's national brand — that it tries to be world-class despite already having achieved world-class standards in many areas, such as health care and education.

"Singapore must develop greater self-confidence in its own judgment," he said. And according to him, the current "gold standard" of nation branding — insofar as there is one — is determined by countries in decline.

Singapore used to copy the best practices of other countries to gain an advantage, but such an approach may no longer work, he said.

Instead, he offered three possible branding ideas: Singapore as a garden city, as a water city, and as a city where East meets West.

Mr Mahbubani concluded his lecture by exhorting companies to promote the Singapore brand, as both the country and its companies will benefit from a better national image.



Mr Mahbubani: Exhorted companies to promote Singapore's brand