

Factiva

Review

Singapore can be intellectual capital of Asia

357 words

29 November 2011

Straits Times

STIMES

English

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FIRM and precise, Professor Kishore Mahbubani has long been a passionate champion of Asia and he is now looking forward to a cultural renaissance in the region, riding on the bracing confidence of its youth. Here he is on:

Singapore

'It has the opportunity to be the intellectual capital of Asia because of the quality of its ideas. As an American thinker told me recently, 'I come to Singapore to get my geopolitical fix.'

The view that Singapore is too repressive for ideas to flourish here

'I disagree completely with that. Singapore has opened its door to many foreign universities; that's a sign that it is strong and confident enough to allow the marketplace of ideas to decide what is right and what is wrong.'

Critics who say his latest book, *The New Asian Hemisphere*, is an anti-Western polemic

'How can that be when I say the reason why Asians are succeeding now is that they have finally understood, absorbed and implemented the seven pillars of Western wisdom? Any Asian reading my book should send a thank-you note to the West for sharing that wisdom with him.'

The West's view of China

'China has been run by a communist party in 1949, 1979 and 2009. But Westerners don't see the change, whereas I've been dealing with Chinese government officials for 30 years and am absolutely astonished at how the younger ones among them are far more thoughtful and aware of the changing world than their Western counterparts.'

The Arab Spring

'It's a wonderful phrase but it conveys a false sense of hope about the future because the Arab world hasn't got middle-class populations yet, so its transition to democracy won't be as easy as it was for Eastern Europe, which already had a large, well-educated middle class when communism fell there.'

The idea of an Asian century

'I actually call it the Asian Millennium; I'm far more excited about the next 20 years than I have been about any other period of my life.'

CHEONG SUK-WAI