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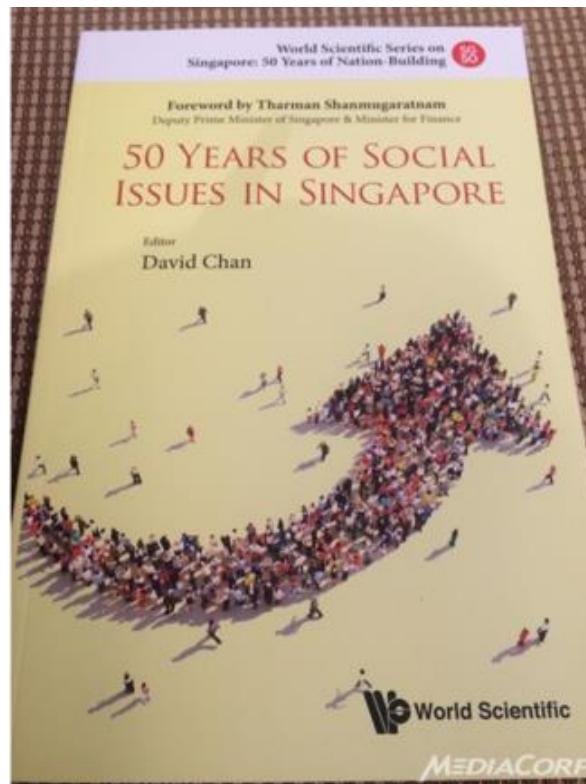
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Headline: Fresh studies on social issues will benefit policy-makers: Education Minister

## Fresh studies on social issues will benefit policy-makers: Education Minister

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The book cover for 50 Years of Social Issues in Singapore. (Photo: Vimita Mohandas)

**Speaking at the launch of the 50 Years of Social Issues book, Mr Heng Swee Keat says discussing topics such as the ageing population, marriage and parenthood, racial and religious harmony and community building will lead to a better understanding of the issues, and better formulated policies.**

SINGAPORE: The Republic's ageing population, marriage and parenthood, racial and religious harmony and community building are some of the issues examined in a book launched on Thursday (Apr 30).

The book, titled 50 Years of Social Issues in Singapore, was written by Dr David Chan and a team of 23 authors. Speaking at the book launch on Thursday, Education Minister Heng Swee Keat said it is timely to discuss these issues with fresh views as Singapore celebrates its 50th year of independence.

Mr Heng added that the book offers a range of perspectives and it will not be a surprise if some of the views do not receive consensus, but the ultimate goal is to better understand the issues so that it can be addressed in a way where it makes a positive difference to Singapore.

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To do this, it is important to think about the issues in terms of its future dimensions, the Education Minister said. As such, the study of social sciences is most relevant to policy-makers when it can point to possible needs and directions in the future.

"It is easy to recommend policies that have short-term benefits but which may not be sustainable in the long run. Sustainable, responsible solutions that balance the needs of all sectors of society are important in building and maintaining a fair and just society," he said.

Secondly, it is key to base the study of social issues and the current generation of solutions on evidence, because as our environment grows more complex and diverse, Singapore has to be more rigorous and clear-headed in the way it studies evidence and its meaning, Mr Heng said. This is so it can draw inferences from facts in meaningful ways, to formulate policies that are appropriate in the current context.

## **HOW HDB EARNED ITS SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS REPUTATION**

Singapore's public housing is a defining feature of the country's urban landscape. Today, an estimated 82 per cent of Singaporeans live in HDB housing and more than 90 per cent own their flats.

The book traces how HDB has earned its reputation in providing one of the world's cleanest and most socially conscious public housing programmes. But even as Singapore has achieved much excellence in urban planning, there is always room for improvement.

Mr Liu Thai Ker, chairman of the Centre for Liveable Cities and former CEO of HDB and URA, said: "I have been wishing that Singaporeans inject the kampong spirit into it. Fortunately, in recent decades, this has been happening. Now, residents within the precincts will plant flowers and vegetables together, they organise activities and sometimes they even paint the void deck together collectively.

"So I begin to see the kampong spirit, it is starting and I think it is going to spread. It will give people a greater sense of belonging and community."