

## HistoriaSG

### 2019 Lecture 3

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#### MAKING OF SINGAPORE CHRONICLES: GETTING HISTORY DONE

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Published in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Singapore’s independence, *Singapore Chronicles* is a 50-volume series that records, explains and offers insights into what makes Singapore, Singapore. Written by subject experts from the public sector, academia and journalism, the books trace the nation’s evolution on a wide variety of fronts, from governance to the economy, from food and sports to the CPF and our flora and fauna. In this lecture, *Singapore Chronicles* series editor Arun Mahizhnan shares more about the project – why it was conceived, for whom is it intended and what will it lead to.

TIME (MIN)	
0:06 [Speaker: Moderator, Vidya Murthy]	<p>Good afternoon. My name is Vidya. Welcome to the National Museum. I would like to thank you all for joining us on a Saturday afternoon. I would like to introduce Mr Arun Mahizhnan. Please join me in welcoming Mr Arun Mahizhnan to the museum. I thank you for accepting the museum’s invitation to present in the HistoriaSG series. This is a regular series that we hold in the museum to foster and also to understand the kind of scholarly work that has been done in Singapore on Singapore’s history.</p> <p>The series is very much enriched by Mr Arun’s presence here. He is a Special Research Adviser at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, NUS. He has worked at the IPS for 28 years and concurrently been an Adjunct faculty member at NTU. He has held senior positions in both public and private sectors, served on both government and non-government boards. His accomplishments are too many for me to list here. He is a very modest person. When we asked him for a bio, it was just two lines. So I managed to get some from the NAC website and I’ve put it together. But I must tell you that his presence here is very important because his accomplishments have really shaped Singapore’s culture to be seen. For instance, from 1970 to 1979, he was senior producer in the Central Productions Unit in Radio Television Singapore. During this time, he was involved in a lot of arts-related programmes and documentaries including the one on sculptor Ng Eng Teng.</p> <p>Another important contribution is his role in the Singapore Arts Festival. We hear of Singapore Arts Festival and the attention it’s gaining now. But he’s a pioneer</p>

	<p>and was not just involved in driving the festival but was also instrumental in getting sponsorship which was the most important thing. When he was working in Mobil Oil, in 1982 Singapore Arts Festival received a hefty sponsorship and it was thanks to his effort. He also brought a lot of professionalism to the festival. By 1982 for instance, the robust programming was made possible because of the hiring of a programming director. He has been actively involved in various cultural institutions, sits on various boards like the Intercultural Theatre Institute and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and other cultural organisations. He has published several books on media, social issues, and arts, including <i>Selves: The State of the Arts in Singapore</i>. It was a commemorative book, marking the 10th anniversary of NAC. Then he spends time on community and arts-related activities especially the Singapore Tamil community. I welcome him to speak about the series that he spearheaded, <i>Singapore Chronicles</i>. Thank you Mr Mahizhnan.</p>
<p>3:38 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 1]</p>	<p>Good afternoon. Are you able to hear me clearly? Sure. Actually I wanted the introduction to be very short, so we can concentrate on that, she was very generous. I think what it suggests to you is that I had a very chequered career, unlike most people. I have taken the liberty to circulate five volumes from this series that we are going to talk about. I hope you have had the chance to very quickly browse through it. When the museum asked me to talk about this, I wasn't sure whether there would be that much interest, but I'm glad that I've at least more than three people, other than Vidya, myself and one other staff. So thank you for sparing your Saturday afternoon. How many of you have ever been involved in any kind of book production? Any of you have been involved in any book production at all? So I wonder whether you have come here to really learn about how some books are produced. And I hope that what I have to share with you is of some interest to you. So let me get on with this presentation.</p>
<p>5:14 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 2]</p>	<p>And as often happens, we want to understand what it is that we want to do. So I always start off with the question, "What is it?"</p>
<p>5:26 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 3]</p>	<p>So in that regard, we basically, in the Institute of Policy Studies, we normally produce book reports that are directly related to policy issues. That's what our normal work is. We rarely produce anything that is very general or historic. But because it was the 50th anniversary, we felt that we must make some intellectual contribution. Of course I suggested to my boss, "Let's produce five volumes". And he said, "Yes we will produce books but it is not going to be five, it is going to be 50 volumes." This project that I'm going to talk about, is primarily my boss' idea, Mr Janadas Devan, who is the Director of IPS. So he felt that we should do something that will have lasting value, way beyond the 50th anniversary celebrations. So, one is of lasting value. Then we felt that it should also be somewhat educational. Of course most of the work that we do in IPS relate to policies which affect most, if not all Singaporeans. But at the same time, we don't do a lot of public education programmes because we are dealing with the policy</p>

makers and the so-called elites. The thinking group of Singaporeans, right? This one we felt should reach out to as many Singaporeans as possible. So we felt that it should be... I don't know if you can see it... we use the term "primer" to characterise this series of books. Primer meaning it's an introduction. It is not something that is a definitive book on the subject. Just an introduction.

The second is what I would call an elevator pitch. What this book is about in one line. We want to explain to the reader what makes Singapore, Singapore. Because Singapore's history has been studied by a lot of people around the world. Many consider Singapore's development as exemplary, they have even bandied about a term like "Singapore Model". I'm a bit more reticent about it. I don't think we are a model for many other countries. But the way we did things, why we did things, the Lee Kuan Yew government which was the first government Singapore had as an independent, first as a self-government in 1959, and then subsequently when we went into Malaysia in 1963, and then we were separated, we became a fully independent nation in 1965. And since 1959 and especially since 1965, Singapore has gone through a transformation that many people around the world want to know about and they actually have an admiring view of what we have done. So we wanted to explain to people, what makes Singapore, Singapore. By the way, our primary audience is Singaporeans themselves. Because so many Singaporeans have grown up as the post-65 generation. I mean, some of us in this room, I can guess, were there a little earlier. But many others, like those who are seated in the second row probably are not aware of what went on. So, we wanted to give a kind of overview of what made Singapore, Singapore. Then we wanted to make sure, that we provided a wide coverage, from the very esoteric dense subjects to very ordinary day-to-day lives.

So in this series, you will find the book on constitution, will find the book on presidency, on law. But you'll also find the book on sports, food, so it is a very wide range of topics. And we decided on 50 volumes for the simple reason that it was a 50th anniversary gift to the nation. That's all, there's no other magic to this number 50. And then we also felt that we must make it not too long because a primer when it becomes so long-winded, most people will tire of it and then they won't read the second, third, fourth volumes. So we basically told all the authors that you have about 25,000 words, which usually runs between 100 to 125 pages. That's why I gave you the actual book to see how it feels and looks like. The five volumes that I have distributed to you just now. And most of the authors that we selected are leading experts, and mostly academics. But we insisted that they are not writing for fellow academics, they are writing for intelligent lay Singaporeans or lay readers, intelligent keen lay readers. So we wanted them to craft it in such a way that it would be accessible to them. And then we also wanted to make sure that the book is affordable. Because if we put 50 volumes in the market, and each is costing \$50, we felt that this will not go very far. So we had an agreement with the publisher, and I will come into some other details later, that it should be priced at a very reasonable cost and actually you can go to any bookshop, Kinokuniya and other such good bookshops, and you can get it for \$16. That's the cost of most of these books. And of course the final point I want to make is, as you have seen, it is a very handy size. We didn't want a big tome. And this befits the primer idea.

<p>12:54          [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan          Slide: 4]</p>	<p>Then we wanted to ask ourselves, why do we do this? Normally when we produce books, we always ask “is there anything like this in the market, in the public domain?” And we felt at that time, I’m talking about 2013, when we started planning for this, there was nothing like that. And I dare say, even now, six years later, there is no similar series of books on Singapore like what we have done.</p>
<p>13:37          [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan          Slide: 4]</p>	<p>And, we also wanted to provide more than any other series of books on Singapore, with such a wide range of subjects. There are individual books on individual subjects which are very detailed, very analytical, deep, deep, deep books. But in terms of the range, in fact there are hardly any. Those that are coffee table books for instance, they are very nice to look at and very interesting, but they don’t go deep enough. But in our book, we are not going so deep to become a tome or an analytical book, but at the same time it provides enough coverage.</p>
<p>14:26          [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan          Slide: 5]</p>	<p>And as I had mentioned to you, my director felt that we must do something that will have a long shelf life. And that’s why this series, it is not so topical that by next year or two years from now it will be out of date. It’ll only be out of date in terms of what the final part of each book we have asked to look at the future which I will come back to. But that will change. But the basic story about how we started, how we crossed many milestones, that’s not going to change much.</p>
<p>15:05          [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan          Slide: 6]</p>	<p>The next step in our thinking is: How should we do it? The first thing we needed to was to find a publisher. IPS is a publisher too, but because this is a commercial book, this needed very wide distribution, we needed a professional commercial publisher. We know how to publish a book but we don’t know how to distribute a book, we don’t know how to sell a book. So we put out a tender, and we had about five very, very good publishers who bid for the contract. Finally, we selected the Straits Times Press (STP), which you will see on the spine and the front cover. Straits Times Press is a very good publisher, but they have one advantage which no other publisher in Singapore has. It is that they have access to the Straits Times library, which is probably apart from the government’s collections, the best photo library that we have in this country. So they were willing to let us have access.</p> <p>Normally – that’s why I asked you if you had any experience in publishing books – every time you ask Straits Times to publish a photograph that they have, they will charge you several hundred dollars for each photograph. So you can imagine how many photographs we would need for a 50-volume series and how much it would cost. So they came in with this offer, to let us have access to their photo library, and it has turned out to be a great asset for us. So each of the books have some photographs which are highly relevant and highly interesting. And also, normally, when you go to a publisher, there is a certain amount of cost that they will ask you to bear. I can share with you that for this particular project, because it was the 50th anniversary project, we appealed to the ministerial committee, there was a committee made up of several ministers and other advisors, and there were so many projects presented to them, and we were one of them. And</p>

	<p>we appealed to this committee, and they gave us almost a million dollars for this book project. So we, IPS, absorbed all the development costs, the costs of authors, the costs of administrative work, the cost of proofreading and reviews, all of those things were absorbed by IPS because there was this funding.</p>
<p>18:13 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 7]</p>	<p>That's why we needed to make sure, that we have... because IPS itself lives on charity. We live at the pleasure of government grant and then we have a bunch of multinational Singapore companies who give us an annual gift, and then we also generate our own revenue through some of the projects that we do. But in any case of projects of this magnitude, it could not be funded from IPS' own budget. So we needed to go look around for sponsorships and we were so lucky that the ministerial committee thought that this project was worth funding, and they gave us most of the funding for this. And that was the grant that I had mentioned to you just now.</p>
<p>19:06 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 8]</p>	<p>Now let me take you through the actual process of developing this series. The title was given by my director, Mr Javanoas Devan, as <i>Singapore Chronicles</i>, which I thought was rather fitting. Because it is so much historical, and also instead of using the word "history", because the word "chronicle" has a sense of what you see in terms of a series of publications or series of expressions. So we thought "chronicles" was a good word, so we called it <i>Singapore Chronicles</i>.</p> <p>Then once we determined the series title, we needed to look at the actual 50 titles. And the process we did, because I was arrowed by my boss to be the chief editor, I could not just pick 50 topics myself and go with it. We had a fairly rigorous process. But first we also appointed an advisory group, under the chairmanship of a person I think everyone in this room would know, Professor Tommy Koh. So he and five other very eminent thinkers became our advisors. They come from different disciplines. Some from the private sector, some from the public sector, and some from academia. So they are the advisors who will give their blessings, but we needed to come up with 50 topics. And I asked all my colleagues and then some of my own contacts, and I said "Please tell me what should this series include?". At the end of it, I had some 150 topics, which is actually not very difficult to come up with, even one of you could have come up with all of that, because anything under the sun could be included.</p> <p>So from these various inputs, we selected about 70 of them. Then we went to the advisory panel, and said that among these we are going to select 50. And then they gave their input, most of them were accepted by them. Now, every time I talk about this project, people always ask me: "Why didn't you include that?". And there are at least 50 other "thats". Each person has his or her own special interests, and I can only say that there were two considerations. Whether it would have wide appeal, second whether we have the expertise to write a primer that we want and within the time constraint. That's in fact sometimes the most difficult constraint because there are people who are able but they were not available. So finally we settled on 50 topics.</p>

<p>22:26 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 9]</p>	<p>And the authors, when I conceived of this, I thought one author per topic. Because it is a primer. But, as we went along, we discovered that in some cases, one author couldn't cover the whole subject, so we allowed a second author. In some cases, we found that the person we wanted was so busy that he or she could only spare only a little bit of time, but we wanted the name and the insight and the wisdom, so we said "okay you choose another person", and one of them actually chose five others to do this. And that's the exception to the rule. That's the only book where you have five authors. Most of the books are single-author books. And few of them are two authors altogether. But there was one particular type of book where we knew even from the very beginning, that we will have four authors. There's a book on literature, there is no one in Singapore who can write intelligently and deeply about all four literatures in Singapore, as far as I know. Nobody can do that. So we decided to have four authors from the four language streams to write about the four – English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil – literatures. In theatre, it was the same. Because there are four language theatres and we had four authors. You need to do it that way, because there is hardly anyone who can do all. But in some cases we have a couple of authors mainly because of the other reasons that I explained to you.</p>
<p>24:16 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 10]</p>	<p>And people always ask me, "you're doing 50 books, how many people do you have?" I had two and a half. Myself, I was the senior person. Then I had a research assistant, a full-time research assistant, his name is Sim Jui Liang. I can tell you, he was a godsend for me. If not for him, these 46 volumes (we haven't finished yet), it wouldn't be there. And he was an extraordinarily capable and committed individual. He is part of IPS. Then we had another person by the name of Asad Latif, who is very experienced. Some of you may know, I can see you nodding your head. Some of you may know because he has been in the press for a very long time. He is an exceptionally talented writer and editor, so he joined me as a part-time editor. So he's like half time, so that's why I said 2.5. That's all. Just the three of us, we did 46 books that are out now.</p>
<p>25:26 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 11]</p>	<p>When we do anything in academia, it's a matter of routine that the manuscript must be reviewed. So we've set it up in such a way that we will have at least two reviewers for each volume. In some cases, we had like for instance the literature book and the theatre book, we had to send it to eight reviewers because no reviewers, just like the authors, nobody can do more than one language. So we had more reviewers. So all of the books that you now see in the bookshops have been reviewed by other domain experts.</p>
<p>26:15 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 12]</p>	<p>Okay, then we decided how we are going to scope the book.</p>

<p>26:19 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 13]</p>	<p>Because we said it's a primer, the first cardinal principle is that it must be factually correct. While it may not be very analytical because it's an introductory book, it should be factually as accurate as possible. And because we called on experts in the field, who had already published copiously a lot of other papers, even some of them in book form, we knew that they would be highly reliable, but we insisted that please make sure that you fact check. We will not be able to do that because our institute is not big enough to handle 50 books with the fact checking. But we asked the authors to be responsible. And I would say, that we got most of it right, if not all.</p> <p>Then we wanted each author to provide a historical overview of the subject. That's the first thing. We provide the big arch of the story. The second part would be to focus on just two or three most important issues in that subject. Because if every subject has 50 issues, we don't have the space. So we told them, whatever you think are the two/three most important things that were game-changing, then focus on that, and we also told them, that in discussing these issues, you should not be seen as partisan. You should be seen as descriptive, analytical to some extent, but not conclusive on one side or the other. Because we wanted the readers to come to their own conclusions after reading further on the subject. So we pleaded with the authors to be objective, to be descriptive, to be as analytical as possible within the space constraints, but not conclusive on one or the other. This is a very important thing, because it is a primer.</p> <p>And finally, so historical thing, highlighting of two or three issues, and the third component of the structure, was a glimpse into the future. Now the first two parts, there is no individual feeling or views, just stick to the facts. But the final few pages, we told them it is purely speculative. Look into the crystal ball, look at the subject, where do you think it is going. Alright, for each subject. And we told them that you are entirely at liberty to think out of the box, to think whatever as long as it is within legal constraints that we don't get sued. But we encouraged them to think ahead of what is the current state of play on that subject matter. So historical, highlighting of a couple of issues, and then a glimpse into the future. That's the overall structure of the book.</p>
<p>29:56 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 14]</p>	<p>And that's the brief we gave to all of the authors. Now in some cases, like for instance there is a book titled "Pre-colonial Singapore". There was no glimpsing of the future and speculation because that was a historical document. Whereas in some of the cases, the future is so unknown, that what would it be? As you look at the topics that we have, almost many, even our economy, nobody knows what our economy is going to be 50 years from now. And that is what the government is grappling with, that's what the economists are grappling with, academic economists, and business thinkers are also grappling with. So, in many of the subjects, that was scoped for a look into the future, but some, the package was done. Just revealing the package for your benefit.</p> <p>Editing, now one of the biggest problems in Singapore and you know in IPS itself we have published not only these 50 books, some other 50 books already, and I myself have handled quite a lot of books. Not only in my capacity in IPS, but also in my other capacities. And what I have discovered in Singapore, somebody like</p>

	<p>Roopa here would know this, for all our English proficiency, we are basically an English-speaking nation, most of us do not write English like the natives do. We have a Singaporean English. That's okay. But because the audience we have in mind is international, not just Singaporeans, we wanted to make sure that the English is written in a fairly internationally comprehensible way. So we avoided Singaporean expressions. And we adopted British spelling and syntax. And also generally speaking, a kind of more conservative use of the language. And I can tell you that we had trouble in getting some authors to write the way we wanted. But even when they were competent in English, we found that there was a lot of copyediting that was required.</p> <p>And this is what I wanted to highlight. In Singapore, despite the fact that we have a number of publishing houses, copyediting is really not up to scratch. There are exceptions, but overall by and large, our copyediting capacity in Singapore has a long way to go. And in fact my assistant, Sim Jui Liang, actually developed a copyediting capacity over the last five years and he has now become – in my book, the best copyeditor – but he is certainly one of the best that I have worked with the last 30–40 years. So copyediting is so important, it is not only just grammar and punctuation, but how a sentence should be constructed. I think the English teachers know this better than most of us. But when it is done well, you will find that reading is a joy, otherwise you'll be going back and forth, back and forth. And especially when it is a primer, and we want the intelligent lay reader to sail through smoothly, copyediting is very important, and we had a lot of problems in copyediting.</p>
<p>33:45 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 15]</p>	<p>So, this is the exact process. The author will provide us with an outline or a synopsis of the subject. We look at it, as an editor I have to. And if it is very sensitive, of course I escalate it to my boss. But most of the time we just decide ourselves, okay this outline is good. Mind you, I'm not an expert on 49 of the subjects. I have been involved in two. Culture and media – these are my specialisations. I'm fairly competent to make judgements. But the others, I'm not an expert. But what I do as an editor is, whether it fits in with the mission of this project and the mission of IPS. And of course, as you all know, there are certain red lines in Singapore that we can't cross. So I make sure they don't cross the red lines.</p> <p>And finally, as a lay reader myself, I put myself as a lay reader, and does it answer the questions I would like to know about the subject. What would come to my mind, you know? So I actually look at the synopsis like a lay reader. And later on when the drafts come, that's exactly what I do. I'm a lay reader, does it make sense to me, is it interesting, and so on. So we go through the first draft. And then, when we are reasonably satisfied, sometimes it is the second draft, sometimes it's the third draft. And there have been rare occasions where we had to go to four drafts. Once we are satisfied in IPS, we send it to the reviewer. And the two reviewers will give their opinions, and we use what is called a double-blind system. We don't tell the reviewers who the author is, though experts in the field would have a sense oh this must be so and so, and we don't tell the authors who the reviewers are. We merely pass it on anonymously, the reviewers' comments. And then once the reviewers' comments are taken on board, and the</p>



	<p>authors give us the so-called penultimate draft, the last but one, we send it to the copyeditor. The copyeditor will look at the language, that's the most important contribution that the copyeditor does. And once the copyedited version is given to the author, I might tell you that not all the edits are accepted by the author. They will still insist that the way they have put it is better. And I say that's fine. Because at the end of the day, it's your name on the title, on the cover. Not mine, not the copyeditor's. Right? So if you insist that's fine. But it is our job to point out that this is a bit awkward, that it is stilted or that is not how English is normally written, and so on and so forth. But the final word, it is actually the authors'. It is not mine, it is not. Only when it is factually wrong, I can put my foot down and say no we will not accept that.</p> <p>And so once the final draft is settled, we lay it out with the visuals, and this is what the Straits Times Press people do. We don't do that. So we just give them the word document and then they put the visuals which the author himself or herself would have selected. And once it's laid out, we send it to the author again and say okay is this alright with you. And sometimes they do make changes and all that. After that, we go for printing. But there is one stage before it is finally printed which we called proof. And that is because the earlier version may be just a word document with pictures, but the final proof is exactly as it would appear when it comes as the book at the bookshop. So every stage, the author must sign off, and the author has a final say. The editor doesn't have the final say. So what you see in your hands, is ultimately the work of the author or authors, and they bear the full responsibility for that.</p>
<p>38:20 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 16]</p>	<p>Now, of course we commissioned these 50 books within one year, but as it happens, it is taken us more than four and a half years to produce. The book "PAP" is the last which I had to produce which is the 46th in the 50-volume series. There are four more which are in the works. They will take a bit of time. I can't guarantee when they are going to come out, but they are in the works. So these 46 have taken roughly four and a half years. It's almost like ten per year. Which is not a bad piece of work I would say. We commissioned them within a short period, but for some authors it took two years to produce, some authors took a year. Everybody was given at least nine months because that was what we felt would be reasonable time. By the way, the authors we chose, most of them were already overwhelmed by their other commitments. They are so much in demand. So that's why they took so long to produce it. Because when they really sit down to write a 25,000-word document they probably can do it within a month, in terms of concentrated time. But in some cases it took two years, and we also had delays on our side. I should tell you that even though we had this big grant from the government, we did not pay any author what we would call a market rate. We just gave them an honorarium of \$5,000, which if any of you ever produce a book would know, this is peanuts. Books of even this size from a leading expert would demand a higher fee. But they were very gracious because one, it was IPS, but also more importantly I would think, it was their contribution to the 50th anniversary of Singapore. So all these authors were very gracious in not demanding money but they wanted extension after extension, so some of the books were delayed for quite some time.</p>

	<p>In the same way, the reviewers were also doing this pro bono. Completely free, we didn't pay them anything. In the end we gave them two copies of the book they reviewed. That was their compensation, if you like. So they were extremely generous with their time. So we couldn't crack the whip and say I'm only going to give you two weeks and you've got to return the reviews. So sometimes, they too took time. And then on our side, it is not that we were faultless, sometimes it is what they say the feast and the famine. I would have no draft in front of me for a whole week, or sometimes two weeks, and then suddenly I would have five drafts. Obviously I can't deal with all of them. So I too will be delaying on my side, even though the author has given it at a certain time, because it didn't come on the scheduled date, I would have to. So altogether, we have taken four and a half years to produce the 45 books. Which is not bad going by publishing records. Because we wanted to get at least some books out in 2015 itself, on the last month, in December, we managed to release the first ten in the 50-volume series. Mr Heng Swee Keat who is our current Deputy Prime Minister, was also the chairman of the ministerial committee who gave us the grant, so we invited him to be the Guest of Honour. He launched the first ten books. After that, we haven't had any formal launch at all. The other thirty-five books were just released as they came. And we hope that at the end of the 50th book, we will have maybe a big bang launch.</p> <p>So, as you can see these are some of the authors, some of the titles, "Defence", "Law", "Presidency", and so on. And "Constitution" by Mr Kevin Tan, was one of the fastest to produce the book. In fact he turned it in before the deadline, and then he had to sit for a very long time to see the book. Almost two years before we released the book. Okay, so that's just an overview. So, I thought in case you have any questions, I shall be very happy to respond. I hope it is of some interest to you. Yes, please go ahead. Somebody is bringing you the mic.</p>
<p>44:08 [Audience]</p>	<p>You mentioned difficulty with the copyediting. I'm quite surprised. Despite our long history of having so many English teachers who could do it well from a language viewpoint, and yet you still think that we are nowhere near good enough.</p>
<p>44:30 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 16]</p>	<p>Because copyediting is an art. It's not just... we can't give this book to an English teacher and say "edit". Because there are publishing conventions and they also have to be aware of that, and in many cases, because it's a rushed job, it would be a bit difficult for somebody who is so new to the game to be given and then we say okay please you have to redo it and all that. But generally speaking, publishing houses must have good copyeditors, and I'm sure many of them do have, but I'm just saying when we have a big project like 50 books coming together, there are not enough good copyeditors in the industry. We need a lot more good copyeditors. And in fact some of the copyeditors, you see there are two types of editing. One is structural editing, the other one is language editing. The structural editing is even more challenging.</p> <p>Do you know that in the English world, whether you are writing fiction or non-fiction, there are great editors who make great authors look great. And many</p>

	<p>great authors actually acknowledge in the acknowledgements that the editors made a big difference. So, we don't have that kind of editors, that kind of copyeditors and so on. Enough. I'm not saying that there is no one, I'm saying we don't have enough for the amount of publications that Singapore puts out in English, we don't have enough. We need a lot more and I really, really hope that the younger generation will take up editing as a profession. And I think there is a scope for this. In fact, I've told my own colleague, Sim Jui Liang, "Resign from IPS, set up a copyediting shop, and I said I will be your biggest marketer". But really, we need more people, I'm not saying that there no good copyeditors, I'm saying that there are not enough. Are you by any chance an English teacher?</p>
<p>46:55 [Audience]</p>	<p>I'm actually from Chinese school.</p>
<p>47:01 [Audience]</p>	<p>If no other questions, I would like to ask you something else. Flipping through, I was looking for the list of 50 titles. I was flipping through the book, I was looking for the 50 titles. So, would it come up in your second printing?</p>
<p>47:15 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 16]</p>	<p>Okay, yes because we could not guarantee until... I can also tell you, now that you've asked, we had commissioned a certain author with a certain topic. After two years, the person did not turn in a single word so we had to drop this author. Which was why right from the start, I didn't want to publish the 50 titles or even the authors' names, definitely not the authors' names. Somebody said why don't you at least publish the 50 titles? I said, you never know because in this business with the best intentions, you can't deliver, it is no point going and apologising for something that didn't show up in the end. So, I declined to publish the 50 titles. But of course when we have done the 50, the second run.</p> <p>By the way, I'm very happy to report that many of the books have gone into a second print. Yes, because they normally publish about 1,000 copies. Alright so, STP has informed us that "Education" which is by Professor Gopinathan has already been printed twice. So, some of them are doing brisk sale, some may not. But, I hope there will be several editions, but eventually we also intend to put out an online version, that was part of the contract, we want to put it online so it will have very wide access. Do you know, the number of embassy people, some ambassadors themselves when they came for the launch, we had a very nice boxset with 10 of them in it and they wanted many copies you know, because they found that it's a quick read. They come into Singapore, they want to understand our economy, they want to understand about defence, they want to understand about presidency, you know our presidency is not like presidencies in many other countries. So within about 3 hours – that's the length of time you will take if you are a fast reader – they get a quick understanding on the subject and a quick overview, right. So they, a number of foreigners have expressed interest in this series so we hope we can publish them online as well. And for Singaporeans abroad, they are not going to come down to Kinokuniya and get the copies. I think the lady at the back, or somebody, yes.</p>

<p>49:50 [Audience]</p>	<p>I was going to ask about the 50 topics as well. You mentioned briefly that you are now in book 46. Okay, so, how long more do you think this... till closure?</p>
<p>50:03 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 16]</p>	<p>Okay, that's a good question. I'm afraid I can't give a firm answer, oh it will be by June next year, or something like that. It is in the works, we'd like to finish as soon as possible.</p>
<p>50:15 [Audience]</p>	<p>If you buy them in the whole set, would that be, is it possible?</p>
<p>50:17 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 16]</p>	<p>Yes, indeed, indeed. We have already designed a very nice box for the whole set. And we hope it will be like a collection at homes and offices and in academic institutes. Certainly, every school should have this entire set because this is an excellent, not because I'm the editor, this is my boss' idea. And I, having done it, I can see immense benefits in having this as a complete collection and in fact, we, in principle... by the way this series was inspired, my boss was inspired by an Oxford University series, called "A Short History of". And they have published 470-odd books already. So IPS, is likely to publish beyond 50, because it is such a good format, such a good idea so they may go beyond 50 but I can say because I am responsible for the first 50 that it is a really wonderful collection to have at home and we hope to come up with a box that will put all the 50 together. Yes, the microphone is coming to you, yes.</p>
<p>51:51 [Audience]</p>	<p>Firstly, congratulations on this just looking at just one volume, it's so friendly.</p> <p>Mr Arun: What is it? "Heritage"?</p> <p>"Architecture". So even if, yes, you know nothing about the subject, just flipping through, you can become an expert quite easily. Not expert, but I think it's what do you call, a very good format. But my question was the, this 50 chronicles were for the SG50 and we have the 200th anniversary this year, there are two landmarks, I'm not sure whether there was any specific reason for doing it on the SG50 and whether the focus was more on the 50 years of independence and the post-independence period in the publications as opposed to the longer-term 200-year history.</p>
<p>52:50 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 16]</p>	<p>I think that's a good question. When we conceived this in 2012, 2013, we conceived of it as a SG50 project. Now, most of the topics actually have a history not too far in the past. I mean if you took a look at "Constitution". The constitution we are talking about is the first constitution we had as an independent nation. "Education System" does go back beyond the 50 years, because we already had an education system in the British colonial rule. And that covers that. But we also have two books, one called "Colonial History" and another one called "Pre-</p>

	<p>colonial History” where you will actually see the introduction to the 700-year history. I’m sure now you have seen in the media that Singapore has a 700-year history. 700 years of our history has now been accounted for because they have found artefacts, other evidence of the existence of people and whatever they did, business and things like that. Because of the excavation, archaeological excavations and their findings. So we have one volume that talks about pre-colonial history. So that would not change whether it’s a 200-year thing or a 50-year celebration but most of the subject matters that we wanted to address are the ones that the independent Singapore has gone through and as I’d mentioned earlier, the one line elevator pitch. What makes Singapore, Singapore? That idea attaches itself overwhelmingly to the 50 years of Singapore’s independent existence, even though we have been around for much longer. So that was our main focus but we urged each author to begin where the subject began. Alright? Not just 50 years ago but wherever you thought it may, that’s why I gave you the example of education.</p> <p>Now we have a book on Chinese, we have a book on Indians, we have a book on Malays and we have a book on Eurasians. All of them are out now in the ethnic series. Now each one begins at a certain point, you know? But many of them go back to the arrival of Raffles when Chinese and Indians arrived in good numbers and we have a continuous history. Whereas if you look at some other evidence, Chinese and Indians have been here more than a thousand years ago but there were discontinuities so that’s why the pre-colonial history does address some of those things but the bulk of the series tends to focus on the 50 years. And I’m sure there are some books that are coming out about the 200-year history too. But IPS is not doing any series with the title “200-year” thing. We are doing a number of individual parts, there’s in fact a conference that’s coming up, very soon in September, October. That will be a special edition for, to mark the 200th anniversary. You can go to our website and get the whole list of the 46 books. Just go to NUS, IPS, you will be able to see that. Yes sir?</p>
<p>56:52 [Audience]</p>	<p>How much is each book sold for?</p>
<p>56:59 [Speaker: Arun Mahizhnan Slide: 16]</p>	<p>As I said it’s about \$16, around \$16 if I’m not mistaken. It’s heavily discounted because as I said, we, IPS, thanks to the government, covered the bulk of the production, the pre-printing costs.</p> <p>The younger people, I was looking forward to hearing from you. Any questions, any concerns or anything that caught your interest? So I failed in capturing your imagination.</p> <p>[inaudible intervention from the audience]</p> <p>I wish I could do that, I’m not at liberty to do that because it’s a commercial thing. But certainly the museum could consider buying some and giving away to the friends of the museum. In fact, you know the book on heritage is done by Mr Kennie Ting who is with the National Heritage Board and he did it in very short</p>

	<p>time and I greatly admire the quality of his work, and the great care he took about the subject matter and of course he turned it in remarkably short time. I would urge if you are in this museum space, you should read the book on heritage which I circulated, that's why I brought that book. It's an introduction to all, there are these fantastic institutions like National Museum, Heritage Museum, the Peranakan Museum, the Indian Heritage Museum, the Chinese, they are all absolutely they are treasure troves. And the government has spent some awful lot of money, time, effort, to put this up. And I hope more and more Singaporeans will make it a habit to go to the museum, take the children to the museums, just like going to the library, you know? At least once a year.</p> <p>That's it? Okay, well I hope it was worth the while of sacrificing your Saturday afternoon. Thank you very much.</p>
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**About the speaker**

Arun Mahizhnan is Special Research Adviser at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore. He has been with IPS for 28 years, and concurrently an adjunct faculty member at the Nanyang Technological University for much of the time. He has previously held senior positions in the public and private sectors. He has been a member of the board or committees of many government and non-government institutions. He has also been deeply involved in cultural and arts developments in Singapore.