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Asian nations should avoid race or religion-based systems: Chun Sing

Success factors include how they seek out capable, committed future leaders

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ASIAN countries have to contend with being heterogeneous and avoid degenerating into a race-based or religion-based system, said Chan Chun Sing, Minister for Social and Family Development.

Key determining factors of success for Asian countries in the next 15 or 30 years, he said, include how they seek out future leaders who are not only capable but also committed and have a strong governance system in place.

"Very often when we talk about Asia in the evolving global order, we have great expectations and great hopes, and very often we will go away with rose-tinted glasses," Mr Chan, who is also Second Minister for De-

fence, said at a plenary discussion at the Stars Symposium yesterday.

"But some of the more fundamental issues that we need to look at is how Asia is able to bring forth a new generation of leaders to bring to fruition the potential in Asia. Otherwise, Asia and many parts of Asia will remain mired in the yesterdays and remain an underachiever."

He noted that most Asian countries, with the exception perhaps of Japan, are not homogeneous nations. Indonesia, for example, consists of more than 360 ethnic groups which speak more than 300 different languages.

At every stage of nation-building, the question is how to raise "a generation of people who will have the values to put forth the larger interests of the country before self and not be a mere representation of a certain parochial interest", Mr Chan said. "If we can do that consistently, then the concept of a nation-state will survive. Oth-

erwise, it is easy, by visceral and parochial interest, to degenerate back to race-based tribes."

In the same way, Asian countries need to nurture a new generation who will continue to buy into the idea of a nation-state despite the diversities, he said.

Addressing close to 100 participants who came from the business, government, non-government and media sectors, Mr Chan said that the success of a country goes beyond the availability of resources, favourable demographics and innovation. The critical enabler of a country is how its society brings out capable and committed leaders.

However, many countries do not have a system to generate future leaders, he observed.

The Stars Symposium, which ended yesterday, was held in Singapore for the first time after being hosted for the past six years in Switzerland. It has 1,000 past participants as alumni.