US-China trade talks likely to succeed, says George Yeo

Beijing knows time is on its side, but rivalry with Washington will go on: Former minister

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Singapore perspectives 2019 conference

Asian helps manage tensions in region, say panellists

Artina Anaklu
Regional Correspondent

Asian is a useful tool in managing tensions in the region and trade relations between India and China is no exception. The Indian government has to make sure that the two countries stick to their agreement to resolve the issue of the Line of Actual Control in the Himalayas.

As a diplomat, Anaklu said that the Line of Actual Control in the Himalayas is a sensitive issue for both countries. India and China have been engaging in talks to resolve the dispute since 1993. Although the talks have been ongoing, there have been no significant breakthroughs.

Anaklu stressed the importance of maintaining a stable relationship between India and China. He noted that India and China are two of the largest economies in the world and that a stable relationship between the two countries would be beneficial to both nations.

Anaklu also mentioned the importance of the role played by the United Nations in resolving the dispute. He said that the UN has a key role to play in resolving the dispute as it is a neutral party in the conflict.

The Line of Actual Control in the Himalayas is a long-standing dispute between India and China. Since the 1962 war, the two countries have been engaged in talks to resolve the issue. The talks have been ongoing for over three decades, but there has been little progress.

Anaklu also highlighted the importance of the role played by regional organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in resolving the dispute. He noted that these organizations have been instrumental in bringing the two countries together to resolve the issue.

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Singapore Perspectives 2019 conference

S’pore’s success and unity key to its foreign policy: Vivian

Before country can navigate ‘dangerous new world’, it has to get domestic conditions right
Rachel Au-Yong
Political Correspondent

If Singapore is not successful or united, there would be no foreign policy to speak of.

But because it is, “we are in the happy position where... Singapore will never be intimidated or bought,” Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan said yesterday.

Referring to the current world order where many nations are embroiled in friction policies, he said answers to such problems do not lie in foreign policy.

“You better get the chain of causality right. Fix your domestic conditions first. Create a fair and just society, give everyone hope, equip every Singaporean with the skills needed so they know they have a fair chance of a better future. Then can we have good policies,” he added. “Once you have settled that, you can work out how you can navigate this dangerous new world that is unfolding.”

Dr Balakrishnan was speaking at a dialogue at the Singapore Perspectives 2019 conference at Marina Bay Sands, organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

On maintaining domestic conditions on foreign policy, he said the Cabinet spends “an enormous amount of time” working through the options. He then briefed other parliamentarians, including opposition MPs, about the next course of action.

“Based on my experience so far, no gap, no party politics has intervened with our pursuit of foreign policy,” he said.

“I’m going to my dammedest to maintain this bipartisan consensus... We cannot afford the kind of rancous-to-ing and fro-ing that often happens in many other countries. So it’s better to take the (opposition) somewhat into confidence, argue it privately, than to display disunity in Parliament,” he said.

The Workers’ Party has, on this front, played its part, he said.

During the dialogue, Dr Balakrishnan was also asked how Singapore can remain neutral in an ongoing politicalised race between the United States and China to develop and roll out the fifth generation of mobile communications, or 5G.

“We need the ability to say no from time to time in a principled and disciplined way,” he replied. “We can’t simply be more obliging lest because someone is a friend or in a position to exercise leverage against us. Once we compromise or oblige in an unprincipled manner, believe me, the next request will come in fast and furious, and people will expect you to compromise.”

IPS deputy director Gillian Koh asked the minister why the authorities did not name the state behind the recent Singlehealth cyber attack.

“The more relevant question is, given that this is the state of the world... what shall we do about it?” Dr Balakrishnan said.

Beyond technical steps such as encryption and Internet separations, which are already practised, he pointed to the need for more education: “The weakest link is still a human being, and you cannot take humans out of human systems.”

He added, “We decided that Singapore is not going to make us our own system... It may be of interest to the public but not in the public interest.”

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Be more connected to Asean to remain competitive: Panel
Joanna Seow
Manpower Correspondent

The need to understand Asean to seize the region’s geographical advantages and stay ahead appears lost on many Singaporeans, and this is a concern for Economic Development Board managing director Chong Kah Yong.

He noted yesterday that many students go abroad for exchange programmes and internships, but the interest is going places like Stanford University in the United States or universities in Europe, rather than those in Jakarta or Ho Chi Minh City.

The preference to work in certain cities even had a regional company’s chief executive declaring that he had given up on hiring Singaporeans as management trainees, turning to Malaysians instead because they are more enthusiastic and willing to accept lower wages and take on assignments in places with tougher living conditions, such as Africa and South America.

Recognising the remark, CapitaLand group chief executive Lee Chee Koon said he felt sad when he heard it.

Both men were on a panel discussing Singapore’s international economics position, during a session moderated by the Ministry of Communications and Information permanent secretary Gabriel Lim.

The session was part of the Institute of Policy Studies’ Singapore Perspectives 2019 conference. Explaining the importance of Asean, Mr Chng said: “We need to get to know Asean better because that’s how we’re going to make our living, by facilitating the connections in Asean.”

But Mr Lee lamented that it was not easy to convince Singaporeans to work in less popular countries, even though being more globally aware and connected will help them stay competitive in the job market.

“There’s no way we can teach hunger, but what we can do is to continue to tell among Singaporeans and the concept of being competitive, to encourage them to take the road less travelled, to deal with uncertainty,” he said.

One way to help them understand the challenge is to bring in more “global talent” with skill sets and experiences that will push Singaporeans to “evolve, to innovate and to improve”, he added.

There are four other areas Singapore has to work on to continue staying ahead, said Mr Chng.

These include understanding the opportunities digital technology brings to industries here and ensuring new jobs facilitate the building of an innovation society.

Despite global uncertainties, he is “cautiously optimistic” about Singapore’s prospects, owing partly to its advantageous position in Asean, giving it the promise to be the fastest-growing market in the world.

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