Chan Chun Sing: Asean can learn from Middle-East woes

A region must have cohesion if it does not want to be a platform for proxy contests by major powers, he says

As for Singapore’s role in China’s next lap of development, Mr Chan pointed to the Belt and Road Initiative, saying that Singapore is looking at working with China in third countries, providing legal and financial expertise.

Nearer home, Singapore has been playing a role in China’s development. But as China’s needs evolved, so has Singapore’s relevance to it, he noted.

Singapore has gone from building the Suzhou Industrial Park in the earlier days of China’s development in the 1990s to the Tianjin Eco-city, initiated in 2007, which epitomised China’s desire for sustainable development, he said.

It has since gone beyond geographically bound projects to the Chongqing Connectivity Initiative to connect China’s less-developed western provinces to countries outside China in South-east Asia.

As for Singapore’s role in China’s next lap of development, Mr Chan pointed to the Belt and Road Initiative to build infrastructure linking China to the rest of Asia, Africa and Europe, saying Singapore is looking at working with China in third countries, providing legal and financial expertise.

“This is one area where Singapore can contribute to China, in its outward push in its connectivity to the rest of the world,” he said.

Another area that is of interest to China is how Singapore has continued to remain successful and cohesive with its diverse and multi-ethnic population. “China finds us quite interesting,” said Mr Chan. “They try to understand how we can keep a multi-ethnic, multi-racial society together, one that does not have a lot of common history (but is) united by a common vision, a set of values, meritocracy, incorruptibility, multiculturalism,” he added.

This is as China is also looking at ways to maintain its social stability amid disparate forces that threaten to pull its society apart.

As for Singapore, it needs to remain successful if it is to stay relevant to China and the rest of the world, he said. It is only when Singapore is successful that others will find it interesting.