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Headline: Banyan Tree chief opens up on ISA detention at ST Book Club

Banyan Tree chief opens up on ISA detention at ST Book Club

Olivia Ho

In a candid dialogue session, prominent entrepreneur Ho Kwon Ping opened up on his detention under the Internal Security Act four decades ago, in front of a record audience of 350 at the sixth edition of The Straits Times Book Club.

He described the decision to detain him as "wrong" but understood why it was taken.

The 66-year-old was discussing Asking Why, a collection of his speeches and writings, with ST associate editor and columnist Ravi Velloor at the National Library headquarters' programme zone yesterday.

The former journalist, who founded resorts company Banyan Tree Holdings with his wife Claire Chiang with whom he has three children, was detained for writing allegedly pro-leftist articles in the Far

Eastern Economic Review when he was 24.

Mr Ho, who is also the founding chairman of Singapore Management University, said that he does not begrudge the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew. "I think he was wrong to detain me, but he did it not for personal gain but for the vision of Singapore he wanted to create."

Ironically, he added, being detained was a boon for his grades.

After two months in solitary confinement, he was so happy to get access to books that he studied 18 hours a day and topped his entire faculty in the examinations.

During the session, Mr Ho said he wished that funding for the arts could be less politicised. The two most recent winners of the Singapore Literature Prize for English fiction, Sonny Liew and Jeremy Tiang, had state funding withdrawn or partially revoked for their books.

He questioned the need for Section 377A, which criminalises consensual sex between adult men, but is not actively enforced.

He also warned against a lack of diversity in the next generation of Singapore's political leadership.

"There would be much more resilience in the Government if more diverse views were expressed from different backgrounds, not just in terms of economic background but also education and professions. Otherwise you end up with a brilliant but brittle leadership."

Participants at the session said they appreciated Mr Ho's frankness. "His stories from his personal



Prominent entrepreneur Ho Kwon Ping discussing his new book Asking Why at the sixth edition of The Straits Times Book Club, moderated by ST associate editor Ravi Velloor, at the National Library headquarters' programme zone yesterday. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

Asking Why (\$35) is available from leading bookstores.

IN GOOD COMPANY this Sunday

Banyan Tree's Ho Kwon Ping says he is more jackfruit now than durian

life and what he stands for really resonated with me," said teacher Azra Shazeaa, 31.

The rebranded book club takes over ST's non-fiction book club The

Big Read Meet and runs every last Wednesday of the month.

The next session on Sept 26 will feature plastic surgeon Woffles Wu, who will speak with ST journalist Ly-

dia Lim on his memoir Life In Plastic. Readers can register at str.sg/oW2o.

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