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Boao Forum a key platform for China

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The Boao Forum for Asia is currently underway in Hainan, China. The forum was founded by 26 Asian and Australasian states with the aim of promoting regional integration. It is now into its 13th year, and has become a key event on the regional calendar.



Briefing for members of the press ahead of the Boao Forum for Asia. (Photo: Boao Forum for Asia website)

SINGAPORE: The founding of the Boao forum was driven by China, and some observers said that it serves largely as a platform for China to gather global leaders to discuss how China should develop.

But as China grows in economic stature, the forum is also seen as evolving into one for leaders to also discuss how China can help the world.

Huang Jing, a professor from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, said: "It's a window for China, or a door for China, to get out -- because we know that a potential problem, or a central source of problems between China and the outside world is China's internal political system.

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"It's not very compatible with the mainstream international community. So by (having) communication and consultations like these, not only can the outside world know China better, China can know the outside world better."

Singapore's Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong was elected into the forum's board of directors in 2010, and has been actively involved in the forum over the years.

The board also includes other former prime ministers and established businessmen in the region like India's Ratan Tata and Hong Kong's Victor Fung.

Experts have said that it is important for Singapore to be represented at forums like Boao. Annie Koh, an associate professor and vice president of business development & external relations at the Singapore Management University, said: "ESM (Goh) being represented on the board of the Boao forum -- I think it's a very good thing because in many ways, he can shape the dialogue, he can shape the topics for discussion.

"And you know, Singapore actually punches way above our weight. Even in all the World Economic Forums that I attend or speak at, Singapore is cited as an example of -- almost like -- an economic miracle, with no natural resources and only human capital."

Assoc Prof Koh added: "The Boao forum, I think it's China's voice. China would like to have its own voice, letting the global market know how China is progressing through its different economic cycles, its political transformations, and even its social and community voices. "So as an alternative, and not exactly as a replacement to the World Economic Forum, they have done this quite well, and quite successfully."

However as the discussions at international forums tend to be dominated by bigger world powers, experts said it is also important for Singapore to set the agenda -- by hosting its own forums.

One such example is the Shangri-La Dialogue, an inter-governmental security forum.