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Headline: Education critical for S'poreans to thrive in digital age: Vivian

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Education is critical in helping young Singaporeans thrive in a turbulent world of technological revolution, said Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan yesterday.

"We don't ever want to be in a position where our young people are afraid of technology, afraid of the future, afraid of competition," he said at the Singapore Management University.

Stressing that foreign policy begins at home, he said teachers are crucial in developing students' skills, giving them hope that their future remains bright, and instilling shared values and a sense of ownership in the country.

"You get education done right, you pre-empt fractious domestic politics. Then a small place like Singapore can be positioned optimally to ride this new technological wave."

He was speaking on the theme, "Singapore's foreign policy: Staying together in a turbulent world", at a

dialogue jointly organised by the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The event is part of a series featuring 4G leaders on the Singapore Together movement, where the Government partners Singaporeans to shape the nation.

Addressing 280 educators, Dr Balakrishnan said there is a chain of causation among three confluence global trends. Turbulence from technological revolution has led to fractious domestic politics, which has, in turn, produced a fractured world order.

The key difference between today's technological revolution and the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries is the speed and scope of change, he said.

"Because of this (exponential change), there is deep existential anxiety in societies and countries all over the world," he added.

"These frustrations, anger and anxiety have been channelled towards easy scapegoats - globalisation, free trade, immigrants, the global elite."

It has also played out in the form of



Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan speaking to educators on the theme, "Singapore's foreign policy: Staying together in a turbulent world", at a dialogue jointly organised by the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at the Singapore Management University yesterday. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

United States-China rivalry, he said.

Although both sides signed a phase one trade deal earlier this month, fundamental issues concerning technology transfers, intel-

lectual property protection, state-owned enterprises and market access remain. "If the eagle and the dragon don't get along, Singapore can be in a lose-lose position."

On top of maintaining close ties with the major players, Singapore must preserve the capability to defend itself so that it can "never be bought or intimidated", he said.

It must also guard against misinformation and foreign interference in the digital age, he added. "Democracy - one man, one vote, the clash of ideas - cannot function effectively in a post-facts world, because it takes away the common shared frame of reference within which debates and arguments can be made."

He urged teachers to help young Singaporeans develop critical thinking and historical awareness, adding that education will be a stronger bulwark against misinformation than anything the Government can legislate.

Acknowledging that some Singaporeans are anxious and opposed to free trade, he assured them that the Government will always prioritise their interests.

"But the only way for us to do so is not to build walls, not to become xenophobic and not to create disension and envy - but in the long run, to prepare our own citizens to be competitive, valued and confident members of an open, globalised world."

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