Headlines: Philanthropists should adopt a higher profile

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By: Andrea Soh

IN order for the philanthropy scene in Asia to grow to the next stage, philanthropists here should adopt a higher profile. This will help educate and encourage more people to give as well, panellists said yesterday on the second day of the Credit Suisse Philanthropists Forum 2012.

"Our culture and society suggest that giving is something that we keep quiet about," said Keith Chua, advisory board chairman of Asia Centre for Social Entrepreneurship and Philanthropy at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Business School.

But publicity has a role to play in the philanthropy world, he added. "(It is) not so much to fly your flag or raise your profile, but really to communicate the place of philanthropy. When we talk about the examples of philanthropists that we can look to, they become a source of encouragement and they can also bring about others to participate in it."

Similarly, for Stephen Riady, president of the Lippo Group, a large conglomerate in Indonesia, coming across the places that had been named after his father in countries such as United States, Indonesia and Singapore for the contributions that he made, serves as a reminder to keep giving.

"My father has been an example to me. Some of the places in Indonesia and China that he gave to, like libraries, started putting his name (on the buildings). The purpose of that was to remind the next generation to continue giving," he told BT.

Dr Riady hopes to inspire the next generation to do the same. Places that have been named after him include the arts centre at the Singapore American School and the library at St Joseph's Institution International.

"We are so limited (in our resources) - whether you give $25 million or $50 million, it's still small compared to the needs of Singapore and the region. Our function will be to raise a bit of profile, to encourage others to also donate," said Dr Riady, who attributed his Christian faith and the desire to become a channel of blessing as the reason behind his giving.
The importance of publicity to advance the cause of philanthropy notwithstanding, Dr Riady cautioned that the motive should still take precedence. "You give with the heart, not just for the publicity. That's very important."

The businessman yesterday donated $25 million to NUS in support of its University Town and Yale-NUS College. This was made through the newly established Stephen Riady Group of Foundations, which comprises 11 foundations in Singapore and Hong Kong.

The institution will focus on giving to causes in Singapore - to return to the society where he has lived for 20 years in all - and education, Dr Riady said.