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SINGAPORE — President S R Nathan has launched his first book — on his early life as a labour relations officer for a seafarers’ union.

The title of President Nathan’s inaugural book, Why Am I Here, is a question one would constantly ask in life, said the author.

“The cover of the book is very revealing, grey and gloomy. It is into that uncertain world that I went in to do the job I did,” said Mr Nathan, who was persuaded by Professor Bernard Tan from the Centre for Maritime Studies to publish the book.

Of the seamen he encountered back then, Mr Nathan said: “They were rough, sometimes very crude with their manners, but they had a very strong sense of camaraderie, of concern.”

He believes the younger generation can gain from reading his book.

“If they read it, they will get to know many lessons of how human tragedy can disrupt a family, how some human problems are formidable ... and how important it is for us to show a sense of compassion and concern for others.”

Mr Nathan’s contributions to Singapore span many areas — from his role in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Defence Ministry, serving as envoy to Washington and Kuala Lumpur and now as Singapore’s President. But for his next book, Mr Nathan said he wants to focus on his work in the National Trades Union Congress and he hopes the book can be published next year to coincide with its 50th anniversary.

Next year is also when the Presidential Election is due — so will Mr Nathan contest again?

He said: “Well, next year must come before I can tell you that.”