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By HUANG LIJIE
ARTS CORRESPONDENT

SINGAPORE writer Amanda Lee Koe, 27, has trumped seasoned authors to win the English fiction award in the Singapore Literature Prize.

Her book, *Ministry Of Moral Panic*, which was published last year, is her debut collection of short stories. It was praised by novelist Meira Chand, a judge at the awards, for offering "a fresh, and refreshing, and original voice in Singapore writing".

The book - which includes a series of fictional diary entries by Maria Hertogh, over whom the 1950 racial riots in Singapore erupted, and a story about the Merlion reimagined as a "sarong party boy" - was a unanimous pick by judges.

It beat lawyer-writer Claire Tham's novel *The Inlet*, O Thiam Chin's collection of stories *Love, Or Something Like Love*, and Audrey Chin's novel *As The Heart Bones Break*.

Ms Lee Koe, who is pursuing a master's degree in fiction writing at Columbia University, was absent from the awards ceremony last night at the Regent Hotel, but she told *The Straits Times* over the phone from New York City: "I'm super happy that the deci-

sion was unanimous because I think my book is perceived to be a little more risky and risqué than most, so I feel it is a progressive win and it opens up dialogue about what Singapore fiction is or can be."

The biennial prize, began in 1992, is organised by the National Book Development Council of Singapore, with the support of the National Arts Council. The guest of honour at the ceremony was Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Lawrence Wong.

A total of 16 authors were recognised this year, with the prize revamped to include new categories of awards. The total prize purse has also increased.

In previous years, the prize had four categories, one in each of the four official languages - Chinese, English, Malay and Tamil - with fiction and poetry judged together. The winner of each category received a \$10,000 cash award.

This year, the prize includes non-fiction works. Each of the three genres - fiction, non-fiction and poetry - in the four languages, is also a separate category. With 12 categories, the total prize purse is \$120,000.

However, a total of only \$106,000 in prize money was given out this year as the categories for Tamil poetry, Chinese non-



Columbia University student Amanda Lee Koe (above) beat seasoned authors to win the English fiction award at the Singapore Literature Prize yesterday. Her book *Ministry Of Moral Panic* is her debut collection of short stories. Others who triumphed yesterday include joint English non-fiction award winners (from left) Josephine Chia, Lim Siong Guan and his daughter Joanne Lim. Mr Lim, a former head of the civil service, wrote his winning book with his daughter.
ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

tion and Malay non-fiction did not have winners. Instead, awards of commendation and merit, valued between \$1,000 and \$5,000, were presented.

The English non-fiction and poetry awards both had joint winners.

The winning poetry works were *Sonnets From The Slingish* by Joshua Ip and *The Viewing Party* by Yong Shu Hoong.

The non-fiction award went to *Kampong Spirit Gotong Royong: Life in Potong Pasir, 1955 To 1965* by Josephine Chia, and to *The*

Leader, The Teacher & You, by former civil service head Lim Siong Guan and his daughter Joanne Lim.

Mr Lim, 67, said: "The win was unexpected but I am very happy that the judges found the content of the book to be useful and have

its draw." A Chinese version of the book - about his diverse experiences and insights on leadership, distilled from a 37-year career in the public service - will be published at the end of this month.
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