

PRESS RELEASE

20 April 2011

South Asian Diaspora Convention to be launched in Singapore

Landmark event aimed at linking the 30-million-strong global South Asian diaspora

Members of the South Asian diaspora worldwide will gather in Singapore in July to interact and network at the first South Asian Diaspora Convention. This high-profile event is expected to draw over 500 delegates.

Organised by the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), an autonomous research institute within the National University of Singapore (NUS), the convention will bring together intellectuals, policymakers, and business and industry leaders to celebrate the success of the diaspora, spread worldwide. The South Asian diaspora numbers almost 30 million globally.

The inaugural South Asian Diaspora Convention will be held on 21 and 22 July 2011, at the Resorts World Sentosa, Singapore. The theme for the convention is 'Linking the South Asian Diaspora'. The event will be a major gathering of eminent members of the global South Asian diaspora from the United States, Europe, the Middle East and South Asia. About 20 per cent of the participants are expected to be C-level executives, and other high net-worth individuals from the South Asian diaspora.

The convention is supported by government agencies including Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Trade and Industry, International Enterprise Singapore, Singapore Tourism Board, Economic Development Board and Monetary Authority of Singapore. The convention also has the strong support of Singapore and Asian chapters of alumni of premier institutions of learning such as Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Alumni Association, Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Alumni Association, Stanford Alumni Association and INSEAD, South Asian Alumni.

Distinguished speakers at convention

The convention draws prominent speakers from the South Asian diaspora worldwide, non-South Asian scholars from various countries, as well as top-level government leaders, ambassadors and academics from Singapore.

The distinguished speakers include Mr Richard Armitage, former Deputy Secretary of State, United States; Dr Han Seung Soo, former Prime Minister of South Korea and Senior Advisor, Kim and Chang; Mr Shahid Javed Burki, former Finance Minister, Pakistan and former Vice-President, World Bank; Mr Parag Khanna, author and Senior Research Fellow, American Strategy Program, New America Foundation; Mr Minoru Makihara, Senior Corporate

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Advisor, Mitsubishi Corporation; Dato' Sri Anthony F. Fernandes, Group CEO and Director, Air-Asia Bhd; Mr Jignesh Shah, Chairman and Group CEO, Financial Technologies (India) Ltd; Mr Shekhar Gupta, Editor-in-Chief, The Indian Express Group, India; Mr Sohel F. Rahman, Chairman, Beximco Ltd, Bangladesh; and Dr Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, Professor of Political Science, Lahore University of Management Sciences, and political activist, Pakistan.

Key speakers from Singapore are Professor T N Srinivasan, Yong Pung How Chair Professor, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Singapore; and Samuel C. Park, Jr. Professor of Economics & Professor of International and Area Studies, Economic Growth Center, Yale University; Mr Philip Yeo, Chairman, SPRING Singapore and Special Advisor for Economic Development, Prime Minister's Office, Singapore; Mr Ho Kwon Ping, Chairman, Singapore Management University; Mr Piyush Gupta, CEO, DBS Group Holdings & DBS Bank; and Ms Chong Siak Ching, President and Chief Executive Officer, Ascendas Pte Ltd.

(Please refer to Annexe 1 for full list of confirmed speakers)

Moderators at the convention include Professor Kishore Mahbubani, Dean, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore; and Ambassador-at-Large, Professor Tommy Koh.

Top level support from Singapore government

The event will be officiated by the Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr Lee Hsien Loong. His Excellency Mr S R Nathan will be Guest-of-Honour and Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, Special Guest, at a Gala Dinner to be held on the evening of the first day.

On 22 July 2011, there will be a dialogue with Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, which will be moderated by Professor Kishore Mahbubani.

Ambassador Gopinath Pillai, Chairman of ISAS and Chairman of the South Asian Diaspora Convention Organising Committee said: "The convention is intended to provide a platform for the far-flung diaspora to come together and interact."

Ambassador Pillai emphasised that the convention will approach the South Asian diaspora, not from the historical or cultural points of view, but from a very current political-economic standpoint. Hence the theme for the first day is 'Resurgent South Asia'.

He added: "We felt that Singapore would be a convenient venue for the diaspora to meet, exchange views and interact as well as explore the possibility of how Singapore can be a springboard for dialogue between South Asia and the rest of the world. That is why on the second day we have as a theme 'Singapore: The Springboard for South Asia'.

Professor Tan Tai Yong, Director of ISAS, said that: "Singapore has been actively promoting activities related to the global South Asian Diaspora for some years. It has hosted international meetings, as well as cultural and artistic events linked to the Diaspora. The Encyclopaedia of Indian Diaspora is an example."

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“Launched by President S R Nathan in 2006, the encyclopaedia enjoys a worldwide circulation including a French edition. The book is one of the things that has helped Singapore become the hub for the South Asian Diaspora world,” added Professor Tan.

The convention will also provide opportunities for private networking sessions. An exclusive informal networking event for foreign delegates will be held at Singapore’s latest attraction, ArtScience Museum at Marina Bay Sands.

The global convention will position Singapore as a gateway and hub for international commerce and business connections. The convention hopes to provide a conducive and congenial environment for the delegates to network and discuss topics of mutual interest. Participants will have the opportunity to forge binding relationships, enabling them to capitalise on the growth of South Asia as a region.

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