

Women's rights a topic at event on South Asian diaspora

Fabian Koh

The empowerment of women will be a hot topic at an upcoming regional convention here on the South Asian diaspora.

It is the first time the topic will be broached at the South Asian Diaspora Convention, organised by the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) and into its fourth edition since 2011.

"There is a rising consciousness among women, particularly in South Asia, of their rights and various episodes and events that have taken place," said ISAS chairman Gopinath Pillai at a media briefing yesterday.

"I would say the position of women in India, or South Asia generally, is changing."

Given the ongoing evolution in women's rights, it is the "right time for us to capture that", said Mr Pillai, who is also Ambassador-at-large with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Hence, the empowerment of women is being included as one of the convention's seven key sessions.

Other topics pertaining to South Asia and its diaspora that will be discussed during the convention include business opportunities and challenges, infrastructure and smart cities, technology in financial services and trends in education technology.

The convention, themed "Vibrant South Asia - Innovative Diaspora", will be held at the University Cultural Centre, National University of Singapore, from Friday to Sunday.

The plenary session on Saturday, "Women Empowerment in South Asia", will begin with a keynote address by Ms Indraneel Rajah, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for Finance and Education.

This will be followed by a discussion by an all-women panel, moderated by Associate Professor Anju Mary Paul from Yale-NUS College.

More than 800 guests are expected to attend the three-day convention. Speakers include more than 30 of the region's policymakers, business leaders, academics and civil society leaders.

At the gala dinner on Friday, an Outstanding Member of the South Asian Diaspora award will be given in recognition of outstanding lifetime achievements in the recipient's field and in society. Past recipients of the award include the late former president S R Nathan in 2016.

For the first time, a Special Lifetime Achievement Award will be presented at the convention. The award is for a Singaporean of South Asian descent who has contributed significantly to his field or profession.

The convention will conclude with a cricket match on Sunday, featuring top South Asian cricket stars such as India's Zaheer Khan, Sri Lanka's T. M. Dilshan and Bangladesh's Abdur Razzak.

fabkoh@sph.com.sg