

**Address by Professor Tan Eng Chye, NUS President,
at the 12th ISAS International Conference on South Asia
6 April 2018, 9.15 am, Grand Ballroom, Orchard Hotel**

Mr Ong Ye Kung, Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills), and Second Minister for Defence

Ambassador Gopinath Pillai, Ambassador-at-Large, and Chairman, Institute of South Asian Studies;

Mr Amitabh Kant, Chief Executive Officer, NITI Aayog;

Mr Syed Raza Ali Gillani, Minister for Higher Education, Punjab, Pakistan;

Excellencies;

Distinguished Delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very happy to join you on this occasion of the Institute of South Asian Studies' 12th international conference on South Asia. South Asia is one of the most dynamic regions in the world today. South Asian countries, bound by historical, religious, and cultural ties, present a rich and diverse landscape for international relations, and academic and research collaboration.

This conference is a good opportunity for me to reflect and present on our University's ties and dealings in South Asia.

From a Singaporean perspective, South Asia's proximity to our shores has naturally led to long-standing and multi-faceted relations between us. Singapore is home to a significant South Asian diaspora comprising businessmen, professionals, students, and workers. As a microcosm of the world, NUS staff and students come from across the world, and a significant number are from South Asia.

Over the years, economic and political ties between Singapore and South Asia have deepened, as have people-to-people exchanges. NUS has had the privilege of hosting eminent personalities from South Asian countries and their respective diasporas for public engagements in Singapore. In 2017, Mr Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, Afghanistan's President, addressed the NUS Society Dialogue. More recently, the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy hosted Mr Rahul Gandhi, President of the Indian National Congress for a public lecture. Through such engagements, our students gain direct insights from leaders in South Asia.

NUS serves as a bridge between South Asia, Singapore and the Southeast Asian region at large, through our many programmes, academic work and research.

Academic Programme on South Asia Studies

Nearly two decades ago, NUS established the South Asian Studies Programme (SASP) at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, offering bachelors, masters and doctorate qualifications. The South Asian Studies Programme, which is the only such programme in the ASEAN region, has attracted students from several different nationalities.

Research on South Asia

Several of our research institutes have been deeply involved in South Asia. The NUS Institute of South Asian Studies was established in 2004, as a research institute housed at NUS, dedicated to research on contemporary South Asia, and to communicate knowledge and insights about the region to policy makers, the business community, academia and civil society.

The Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy has also been actively involved in South Asia. The School's Centre on Asia and Globalisation has held six China-India Security Roundtables since 2011. The Asia Competitiveness Institute, a think-tank at the School, has produced publications which were submitted to India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi as well as the Chief Ministers of the States of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Punjab.

Bringing South Asia to NUS

NUS enjoys a strong reputation in South Asia, and we are a university of choice for many South Asian students. To give a sense of the numbers, NUS has nearly 5,000 alumni from India alone, and we have an active alumni chapter in New Delhi that was formed in 2003, organising events and reunions for alumni in the region.

South Asian alumni of NUS have gone on to work in many distinct professions across the public and private sectors. As of this year, the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, a graduate school of NUS training leaders in government and public policy, has graduated nearly 200 alumni from South Asia who are currently working in the government. Since 2005, the School's Executive Education arm has trained 3,000 leaders from South Asia in its short-term and executive courses, mostly from India and Sri Lanka, but also from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Bhutan amongst others. Five of the 18 official chapters of the LKYSPP are in South Asian countries, namely, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan.

The Singapore e-Government Leadership Centre (eGL) at the NUS Institute of Systems Science (or ISS) is also actively involved in providing executive leadership capacity-building programmes for public service officers in South Asia. For example, in March 2018, an MoU was signed between ISS and the Bangladesh government's ICT Division to deliver capacity-building programmes and undertake applied research in digital government, in support of the vision of 'Digital Bangladesh 2021'.

Bringing NUS Students to South Asia

Beyond bringing South Asian students to NUS, NUS also brings our students to South Asia. NUS offers many opportunities for semester-long student immersions and exchanges with various South Asian universities. Some of these institutions include IIT Bombay, the India School of Business, and the University of Delhi Lady Shri Ram College for Women, among others.

Additionally, NUS students also have opportunities to experience South Asia first-hand through shorter term programmes such as the Study Trips for Engagement and Enrichment, or STEER. One such STEER trip of 25 student-delegates travelled to Sri

Lanka in 2014. The theme of the trip was 'Reimagining Sri Lanka: Social Entrepreneurship and post-Civil War Reconstruction'. The delegation visited the University of Colombo and non-government organisations (NGOs) across 10 cities in Sri Lanka. NUS has organised 10 STEER trips, bringing hundreds of students to India, visiting cities such as Bangalore, Hyderabad, Udaipur and Ahmedabad.

Beyond the classroom, NUS also offers many experiential and practical learning opportunities in South Asia. Since 2014, the Centre for Future-ready Graduates has organized internships for NUS students to intern in India, with established Indian companies such as Infosys, the Tata Group, and Hindustan Unilever, as well as with educational institutions and civil society groups.

All these activities and opportunities for exchanges that I have highlighted above, have brought about rich multi-faceted interactions and promote ties between the youth of Singapore and of South Asia. South Asia is an important region, and NUS is actively involved in the region whether it be in education, social, people or research networks. NUS brings South Asia to Singapore, and we bring Singapore to South Asia.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to conclude by reiterating that as one of Asia's foremost universities, NUS seeks to create linkages and to promote interactions and knowledge sharing between Singapore and South Asia, to build networks for collaboration and growth.

On this note, I wish all speakers and participants a fruitful and enjoyable conference. Thank you.