

Outstanding duo lauded at South Asian diaspora event

NGO founder, veteran civil servant recognised for their contributions

Lim Min Zhang

Mr Fazle Hasan Abed, a senior corporate executive at Shell, was moved to action by the devastation wreaked by the 1970 Bhola cyclone that hit his homeland, Bangladesh.

In 1972, he founded Brac, which was then a relief operation called

the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, to help the South Asian nation recover from the natural disaster and the war of independence from Pakistan in 1971.

Today, Brac is one of the largest non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the world, with operations in 11 countries in Asia and Africa, employing about 100,000 full-time staff. It has advanced credit to almost eight million people and helped to school over a million children, among other efforts to alleviate poverty and empower communities.

For his contributions to society, the 83-year-old Bangladeshi was presented with the Outstanding Member of the South Asian Diaspora Award at The Shangri-La Hotel yesterday. The gala dinner marked the start of the two-day 4th South Asian Diaspora Convention, organised by the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS).

Mr Gopinath Pillai, chairman of ISAS at the National University of Singapore (NUS), said Mr Fazle's efforts in leading Brac helped to change the lives of many. "His contributions to

social development and his life mission to help the poor serve as an inspiration for the South Asian diaspora and the society at large," added Mr Pillai, Ambassador-at-large at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Mr Fazle was presented the award by Senior Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, who attended the dinner event along with more than 600 people.

Past recipients of the South Asian Diaspora Award included the late Mr S R Nathan, the former president of Singapore.

Veteran Singaporean civil servant J.Y. Pillay, 85, who was the longest-serving chairman of the Council of Presidential Advisers, received the Special Lifetime Achievement Award yesterday. Mr Pillay was the founding chairman of Singapore Airlines and also served as permanent secretary in the Finance, Defence and National Development ministries, as well as managing director of GIC and the Monetary Authority of Singapore.

A number of topics pertaining to South Asia and its diaspora are up for discussion at the convention at the NUS University Cultural Centre. These include the empowerment of women, business opportunities and challenges, infrastructure and smart cities, and technology in financial services.

Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security Teo Chee Hean will deliver the keynote address today.

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