

IPS Director Janadas Devan's Opening Remarks

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the third IPS-Nathan Lecture series. The S R Nathan Fellowship for the Study of Singapore was established in 2014 to pay tribute to our sixth and longest-serving President, Mr S R Nathan.

Mr Nathan passed away last August but the legacy of his contributions to Singapore, to the development of Singapore, and his selfless dedication to public service shall remain with us for a long time. It lives on among generations of public servants he has led, trained, and sometimes whipped into shape. Two of them, at least, are here – many others too, including the previous S R Nathan Fellow and the current S R Nathan Fellow, both of whom served under President Nathan. And of course, he left his mark among Singaporeans from all walks of life, whom he had helped or inspired with his kindness and generosity. We are proud to be the custodians for Mr Nathan's legacy.

This Fellowship aims to promote research and discourse on public policy and governance. It is designed to be held on the university campus and it seeks to advance public understanding and stimulate discussion on issues of critical national interest, particularly among young Singaporeans and students. We raised about 6 million dollars, including the matching grant from the government to endow this Fellowship. I'd like to thank individuals as well as corporations, including those who give to IPS annually as part of the Corporate Associates Programme, for their support and generosity in funding this Fellowship.

As it so happens, the first three S R Nathan Fellows, Mr Ho Kwon Ping, who's also here, Bilahari, and Mr Peter Ho, were all personal choices of Mr S R Nathan. When we established the Fellowship, we asked him who he would like us to consider and he gave us these three names, so we are fulfilling his wish. The fourth will be IPS' choice.

So Peter has been cursing me for the past half hour for "arm-twisting" him. It's actually not my fault; it's at Mr Nathan's behest that he does this lecture. Now, Peter has had a remarkable career in the public sector. He began in National Service, and in the military, he was an SAF scholar, and he was posted to the then-nonexistent Navy. One day, he was called up by none other than Mr Lee Kuan Yew. He and now Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean were told,

you're going to the Navy. And he ended up there and then later became head of the Civil Service from 2005 to 2010, and held Permanent Secretary appointments at the Ministry of Defence and Foreign Affairs, as well, as the Prime Minister's office.

He's currently Senior Adviser to the Center for Strategic Futures and Chairman of the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Singapore. Just last year, as all of you know, he was the only recipient of the Distinguished Service Order at the National Day Awards.

Peter has a capacious and – my Research Assistant put down – devious, strategic mind. As Head of Civil Service, he is well known for having pushed hard and relentlessly for what we now call a Whole-of-Government approach, and for a more deeply networked approach to strategic planning and policy implementation. He insisted on making long-term investments to develop the special mindset and capabilities necessary for strategic anticipation and risk management. Peter got ahead of the future.

Besides having been named by S R Nathan himself, Peter – in fact, all three S R Nathan Fellows also happen to be very old friends of mine. Peter, as it so happens, is the oldest among them. I think I've known him since we were 10 or 11? He's looking askance right now – this is where I bring out baby photographs. We were classmates and before our paths diverged. Believe it or not, he was a very sweet young man. Very gentle. (Lee) Tzu Yang was also a classmate of mine and he will confirm that Peter was actually a very sweet young man. He has now grown to have, as my Research Assistant tells me, a devious strategic mind!

The title of his lecture series is The Challenges of Governing in a Complex World and he will begin by hunting black swans and taming black elephants. Without further ado, Peter, I invite you to deliver your lecture.