

IPS Director Janadas Devan's Opening Remarks

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the fourth 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. His selfless dedication to public service continues to inspire generations of leaders to work for a better tomorrow for Singapore.

This Fellowship aims to promote greater discourse on public policy and governance. Held on the university campus, the IPS-Nathan lectures seek to advance public understanding and stimulate discussion of pertinent national issues, to engage the minds of young Singaporeans, including students.

IPS managed to raise 6 million dollars, including the matching grant from the government to endow this Fellowship. I would like to thank again, the individuals as well as corporations, who generously donated to the Fellowship.

Mr Lim Siong Guan, our fourth IPS-Nathan Fellow, has had an outstanding career. He has held Permanent Secretary appointments at the Ministry of Defence, Education and Finance, as well as, the Prime Minister's Office. He was Head of Civil Service from 1999 to 2005. Then, he was Chairman of the Economic Development Board from 2006 to 2009 and Group President of GIC from 2007 to 2016.

As Head of Civil Service, Mr Lim was known to push for innovative policies and practices which enhanced the overall performance of the service. He would often ask his staff: "How can I help you to do your job better?" Innovation has to be a capability, in his mind, that could be harnessed by every single public officer, not just by those at the top, so that his or her ability to contribute to the whole is even greater.

Currently, apart from teaching at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Mr Lim continues as advisor to the Group Executive Committee of GIC, as well as serve on the Board of Trustees of the Singapore University of Technology and Design, and as Senior Fellow of the Civil Service College.

IPS-Nathan Lectures
Can Singapore Fall?
Lecture I – The Accidental Nation, by Lim Siong Guan
12 September 2017

When the history of Singapore is written, we customarily have a litany of all the people to whom Singapore owes its foundation. The names on the litany will be quite familiar, you will hear Mr Lee Kuan Yew's name, and Dr Goh Keng Swee's name, and the rest of the founding generation. In our system, there is the political leadership but there is also the civil service, the public service, who are unelected but who bear a great deal of responsibility. You do not hear of their names, with as much regularity as you hear the names of all the great political leaders that Singapore has had. But actually, there are a core number of people, whose contribution to Singapore are as great as those of the political leadership. Their numbers are few, they include people like Mr Hon Sui Sen, who later ended up in the cabinet. They include people like Mr Howe Yoon Chong, who also ended up in cabinet. People like George Bogaars, J.Y. Pillay and so on. Mr Lim belongs to this very select group of people, who have served the country beyond the political service, beyond the political arena. We owe a tremendous amount to this small group of men. They have so far been men, mostly, but there are many more women who are now permanent secretaries. And I am sure, in due course, there will be women. This is by way of an excuse for the four IPS-Nathan lecture fellows, we have not had any woman. But I hope to be able to announce, at the end of this lecture series, that the next fellow, should be a woman.

Mr Lim's lecture series is titled, provocatively, "Can Singapore fall?" and he will begin with the story of Singapore as the Accidental Nation. Without further ado, let me invite Mr Lim to deliver his first lecture.