

**SPEECH BY AMBASSADOR BILAHARI KAUSIKAN,
THE INSTITUTE OF POLICY STUDIES' 2015/16 S R NATHAN FELLOW FOR
THE STUDY OF SINGAPORE**

Let me begin by thanking IPS for appointing me the 2nd S R Nathan Fellow. It was a great honour. I owe a lot to the late Mr Nathan – he was my first boss and to some of us in MFA forever The Boss -- I hope these lectures have at least in some measure done justice to his memory.

I must admit that when Janadas first snookered me into giving these lectures, I felt somewhat aggrieved because it seemed too much like hard work. It was indeed hard work. But in retrospect I must thank him for forcing me out of my natural state of sloth and making me crystalize and organize what would have otherwise remained random musings in various bars around the world. So thank you, Janadas.

I want also to thank Andrew Yeo my research assistant whose quiet, patient, polite but persistent reminders about deadlines overcame my natural proclivity for procrastination. Andrew has had a remarkable if unconventional career – I will not embarrass him by recounting it – he should be an inspiration to all young Singaporeans and his story deserves to be better known. But it is *his* story to tell. I am happy to have met and worked with you, Andrew. Thank you, you helped much more than you modestly think you did.

Of course, I would be amiss if I did not acknowledge the meticulous and painstaking efforts of Lynn and Fern who turned these lectures into something resembling a book. Thank you, Lynn and Fern.

Finally, I want to thank Mr Wong Kan Seng for agreeing to be Guest-of-Honour today.

I set out the intent of these lectures in the Preface and I hope the texts of the lectures speak for themselves. I do not want to repeat what I said. But let me make two points which I think bear emphasis or which I did not sufficiently stress in the lectures.

First, I alerted Singaporeans to the possibility of external attempts at influence. Diplomacy is not always polite and not always conducted by diplomats. Recently China has made the point more memorably than I could ever have done. I am referring to the noisy kerfuffle between Global Times and our Ambassador in Beijing when he attempted to correct its misrepresentations of our foreign policy. We should not get rattled because that is the purpose of the whole incident. This was not the first time such noises have been made; it will not be the last time.

We of course want a good relationship with China as we want a good relationship with all countries. In fact our relationship with China is on the whole quite good. But

S R Nathan Fellowship for the Study of Singapore
Launch of Dealing with an Ambiguous World
18 October 2016

the basis of a good relationship cannot be the expectation that we must subordinate our national interests to the interests of a bigger country merely because it is bigger, whether the bigger country is China, our neighbours or the US – with whom we have had some very noisy episodes too -- or any other country. After all, almost every country is bigger than Singapore. If we accept subordination on the basis of size, where will it end?

There is bound to be disagreements from time-to time even in the best of relationships. We are a sovereign country and while we respect the interests of other sovereign countries, it is not unreasonable to expect the same respect for *our* interests. I do not want to dwell on the matter, but the first step for Singaporeans to deal with such incidents is to be aware of and understand the game.

Second, although I alluded to this during the lectures, I did not sufficiently stress a trend that seems to be emerging as a feature of the post-Cold War world, the causes of which are I think structural and therefore this trend is not going to go away anytime soon.

Donald Trump in the US, Brexit in the UK, the rise of extreme right-wing movements in Europe and closer home, the election of President Duterte in the Philippines and President Joko Widodo in Indonesia, are I think all manifestations of the same global phenomenon. There are other examples.

I do not mean to suggest that they are all exactly the same. Clearly they are all *not* the same. Mr Trump is channelling the dissatisfactions of the white, non-college educated lower-middle and working classes who had hitherto only grumbled in dives but have now found a public voice, ironically that of a billionaire. Brexit exposed the fecklessness of the British ruling class whether of the 'Stay' or 'Leave' camps, although much more so the latter. The European right-wing movements are a consequence of the arrogance of the European political elite who were so blinded by the splendour of their own vision of Europe that they brushed aside the concerns of their electorates. The Philippines and Indonesia have their own particular political dynamics.

And yet they all have something in common and are all drinking from much the same political well. They represent the rise of outsiders: populists tapping on nostalgia for an imagined past or the emotions of those caught on the wrong side of globalization's inequalities; sustained by and stoking anti-foreign sentiment. They all display different degrees of insistent nationalism. They all represent a certain disillusionment with the established political order.

I mentioned the Philippines and Indonesia to underscore that this is not just a western phenomenon. China too is not exempt. If you have not yet read an article about the neo-Maoist movement that has emerged in China that appeared in the weekend edition of The Financial Times of 1-2 October, I recommend it to you. Neo-Maoism taps much the same sources of popular discontent.

S R Nathan Fellowship for the Study of Singapore
Launch of Dealing with an Ambiguous World
18 October 2016

Can Singapore buck this trend? Some political parties and their fellow travellers have tried to fan and ride the trend, but as our last General Election demonstrated, without success. Anti-foreigner sentiment in Singapore is troubling but still manageable; not costless but still in a relatively mild form. Our system is not dysfunctional and a majority of Singaporeans still have faith in the government. This is not to be taken for granted and we must work hard to keep it so.

In the meantime, this phenomenon is part of the external complexities that we must navigate. Let me conclude with a few words about the US, the Philippines and Indonesia and how developments in these countries could affect us.

It is increasingly difficult to see how Mr Trump can chart a path to the 270 Electoral College votes he needs to become President. His election is highly improbable through not yet impossible. But the popular vote may well be close, the mood he represents is not going to disappear on the 9th of November and America will remain a divided and distracted country for some time. A President Clinton cannot be the same as Secretary of State Clinton and this will have an influence on the US-China adjustments that are underway. Developments in post-election US and a post-Brexit EU whose protectionist instincts may well be enhanced without the UK's moderating influence could act and react on each other with strategic consequences for our region.

President Duterte will visit China very soon. He hopes to cut a deal on the SCS. A deal is not a bad thing – a lowering of tensions cannot be bad – but it has to be a deal that does not compromise fundamental principles important to both claimant and non-claimant states. We shall see. In the meantime, the abrupt change of course by the Philippines under has left ASEAN adrift on the SCS. It will be some time before ASEAN regains equilibrium and forges a new minimal consensus on this issue. But ASEAN is more than just the SCS issue and ASEAN's broader and more fundamental purposes remain valid. We should not give up on ASEAN.

We are fortunate that Pak Jokowi although part of the same global phenomenon, is not extreme and friendly. Of course he is a nationalist, which Indonesian is not? Who is not? I am a nationalist and so I am sure are you. Nationalism in itself is not a bad thing. That Pak Jokowi is a nationalist who wants the best for his people but is not part of the traditional Indonesian political elite and is himself from a relatively humble background, is probably a good thing.

Let me give you one example. Pak Jokowi is the first Indonesian leader that I can recall since the haze first started in 1997, to whom it has occurred – sincerely occurred -- that the main victims of haze are not Singaporeans or Malaysians or Bruneians but ordinary Indonesians who live in the affected areas and whose health and livelihoods have grievously suffered from the environmental devastation. He wants to do the right thing for his people and has begun to act to alleviate their situation. Relations with neighbours are always complicated – there will always be

S R Nathan Fellowship for the Study of Singapore
Launch of Dealing with an Ambiguous World
18 October 2016

issues -- but let us hope that this is the beginning of the beginning of an end to at least this issue.

I see Janadas and some of my colleagues looking nervous, so I shall stop talking. I thank all of you for being here and remind you that I spoke this evening, as I did during the lectures, only as a Nathan Fellow and a pensioner.

Thank you.