

SINGAPORE PERSPECTIVES 2009

The Heart of The Matter

Monday, 19 January 2009
Island Ballroom, Shangri-La Hotel

PROGRAMME

(Draft as of 6 January 2009)

- 8.30 am – 9.00 am **Registration**
- 9.00 am – 9.10 am **Opening Remarks**
- 9.10 am – 9.30 am **The Big Picture**
- 9.30 am – 11.00 am **PANEL I: Can Singaporeans Afford a High-Cost Singapore?**

Prof Tommy Koh
Chairman
Institute of Policy Studies

Mr Peter Ong
Managing Partner
Gallup Singapore, Hong Kong, South-East Asia

Speakers:

Mr Inderjit Singh
Member of Parliament
Ang Mo Kio GRC &
Executive Chairman
Tri Star Electronics Pte Ltd

Mr Laurence Lien
Chief Executive Officer
National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre

Chair:

Mr Kevin Scully
Executive Chairman and Founder
NRA Capital Pte Ltd

As a manufacturing and service centre, the cost of doing business in Singapore is high relative to its neighbouring countries and on par with developed countries. Global inflation, recently the result of sharp rises in the prices of food and fuel, could push costs in Singapore up further. The question, therefore, is whether Singapore can afford to be a high-cost business centre like London or Zurich? Will a high-cost Singapore drive away investors and foreign employees and erode our competitiveness,

or can productivity be aligned with costs to maintain Singapore's competitiveness? More fundamentally, what will life be like for the ordinary man-in-the-street in a high-cost Singapore? What will be needed to help him cope? Last but not least, how will Singapore's relatively higher costs affect its businesses and citizens in situations of severe economic downturn as is currently the case – can the country react quickly enough to buffer these so as to avoid a downward spiral?

Question-and-Answer Session

[Audience Poll]

11.00 am – 11.30 am **Tea Break**

11.30 am – 1.00 pm **PANEL II: Can Singaporeans Remain Rooted?**

Speakers:

Assoc Prof Tan Ern Ser
Department of Sociology &
Vice Dean
Office of Student Affairs
National University of Singapore

Assoc Prof Eleanor Wong
Faculty of Law
National University of Singapore

Chair:

Dr Norman Vasu
Assistant Professor
S Rajaratnam School of International Studies
Nanyang Technological University

The AT Kearney / Foreign Policy Globalisation Index 2007 ranks Singapore as the most globalised among the 72 countries studied. Indeed, Singaporeans are exposed to educational and career opportunities as well as lifestyles elsewhere. More Singaporeans are living abroad for long periods of time or even permanently. At the same time, the rate of growth of the domestic population is slowing and there is an increased presence of foreigners who may be perceived, rightly or wrongly, as competitors rather than compatriots. Can highly mobile, cosmopolitan Singaporeans who are well aware of opportunities elsewhere remain rooted to Singapore? How do we ensure that? Has the influx of newcomers affected Singaporeans' sense of belonging, and if so, how? What would be the desirable ratio of born and bred Singaporeans to new citizens and PRs and a floating population of foreigners in Singapore?

Question-and-Answer Session

[Audience Poll]

1.00 pm – 2.00 pm

Lunch

2.00 pm – 3.30 pm

PANEL III: Can Singapore Preserve Its Hub Status?

Speakers:

Mr Manu Bhaskaran
Adjunct Senior Research Fellow
Institute of Policy Studies &
Director and CEO
Centennial Asia Advisors Pte Ltd

Dr Tan Chin Nam
Chairman
Media Development Authority

Chair:

Dr Tan Kim Song
Practice Associate Professor of Economics
Singapore Management University

Singapore has leveraged on its strategic location, good physical “hardware” as well as its political stability, human capital and organisational “software” to become a regional if not global hub in many respects - in communications, medicine, financial services and education, to name a few. However, Singapore’s competitive advantage may be easily eroded as countries in the region develop and seek to challenge Singapore’s hub status. Who are the competitors? What are the advantages that they have? How can Singapore preserve its hub status on the various fronts? What are the keys to staying ahead? The current global economic downturn presents a special challenge to Singapore’s hub status as businesses are cutting cost. How can Singapore preserve its hub status under such economic circumstances?

Question-and-Answer Session

[Audience Poll]

3.30 pm – 4.00 pm

Tea Break

4.00 pm – 5.30 pm

PANEL IV: Can Government Do Less and Singaporeans Do More?

Speakers:

Mr Philip Jeyaretnam
Partner
Rodyk & Davidson

Ms Debra Soon
Chief Editor
Mediacorp News

Chair:

Ms Mavis Chionh
Director (Legal & Compliance)
The Kind Exchange

In Singapore, the Government has had to intervene in the everyday lives of its citizens in many ways -- from littering and spitting to procreation and retirement, from creativity to censorship. Within the society, there is increasing demand for “more government” as well as “less government”. Do Singaporeans indeed have a sense of dependency on the Government to do everything for them? How has that come about? Can the Government take a step back and let the citizens step up? What are the political costs and benefits of doing so?

Question-and-Answer Session

[Audience Poll]

5.30 pm – 5.40 pm

Wrap Up

Amb Ong Keng Yong
Director
Institute of Policy Studies

5.40 pm – 6.00 pm

Your Say

[Announcement of Poll Results]

6.00 pm

End of Conference