

Remarks by Guest-of-Honour

Professor Tommy, IPS Special Adviser and Chairman of Centre for International Law, National University of Singapore at Launch of “The Migration of Indian Human Capital: The Ebb and Flow of Indian Professionals in Southeast Asia by Dr Faizal bin Yahya (IPS) and Ms Arunajeet Kaur (ISEAS)

1. Dr Faizal is a Research Fellow of IPS. In 2008, he published his first book, entitled: Economic Cooperation Between Singapore and India. Dr. Faizal’s research interests are: human capital, ethnic minorities, multiculturalism, and regional linkages in Asia.
2. Ms Arunajeet Kaur is a PhD student at ANU and a Research Associate of ISEAS. Ms Kaur’s research interests are: the Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia, the Sikh identity, flow of professional Indian immigrants, and the political marginalization of Indian minority communities.

Migration and the Human Story

3. The first point I want to make is that migration is an essential part of the human story. Let me explain what I mean.
4. I want to refer your attention to a 2007 book written by a good friend, Nayan Chanda. The book’s interesting title is “Bound Together: How traders, preachers, adventurers and warriors shaped globalisation”.
5. Nayan Chanda wanted to know where his ancestors came from. He sent a DNA sample, swabbed from his inner cheeks to a genographic project, launched in 2005 by the National Geographic and IBM. He was given a serial number. He did not tell the project his name or his ethnic identity. Several weeks later, the results of his DNA analysis were posted on the National Geographic website.
6. His report identified him as an Indian. He was told that his M168 marker in his Y chromosome can be traced back to an African man who lived 31,000 to 79,000 years ago. His M168 marker was succeeded chronologically by M89, M201 and finally M52. His ancestors had left Africa, crossed the Red Sea, to the Arabian peninsula and eventually ended up in India. Many people in the Middle-East carry the M89 marker and the M201 marker is found among people in Anatolia and Central Europe. His ancestors acquired the M52 marker when they arrived in Western India and is, today, almost a national marker. However, some Indians, in the north, carry a different marker, the M20, showing that their ancestors had reached India after a detour through Central Asia. This could explain the striking physical differences between Northern and Southern Indians, the so-called Aryans and Dravidians.
7. What is the moral of Nayan Chanda’s family history? The moral is that we are all the descendants of African ancestors and that migration is an essential part of the human story. From the beginning of human story, people have left home in search of better opportunities or simply in order to survive.
8. Let me now turn to my second point. My second point is that, historically, there have been many waves of Indian emigration to the world. According to “The Encyclopaedia of the Indian Diaspora”, there have been four waves of emigration by Indians to the world. They are: (i) pre-European epoch; (ii) 19th century and the recruitment of the Indian indentured labourer; (iii) mid-20th century and the emigration of Indians to Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand; and (iv) the diaspora of the “twice-banished”, made up of people from the former colonies of Indian settlement, in the West

Indies, East Africa, Fiji and Mauritius to the West. I don't know whether Faizal and Arunajeet agree with this analysis or not.

9. The new book by Faizal and Arunajeet makes contributions to the literature. It suggests that, in addition to the four waves of Indian emigration described in the Encyclopaedia, there is a fifth wave. The fifth wave consists of the movement of talented Indian professionals and knowledge-workers, in search of better opportunities, to the West, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. I am not sure whether we should describe this new wave as emigration or mobility. The reason is that, unlike the past, not all of the Indian professionals working abroad intend to emigrate and to give up their Indian citizenships. Let me cite an example, Dr. Amartya Sen. He has lived in the UK and the US and taught at some of their best universities for most of his adult life. Yet, he remains an Indian citizen. He is an example of a new class of Indian talent which is working in the West but have not emigrated to the West.
10. I want to make another point. The point is that we live in an increasingly borderless world. This trend was first spotted, many years ago, by the Japanese thinker, Dr. Kenichi Ohmae, in his pioneering book, *The Borderless World*. This increasingly borderless world is also an English-speaking world. The American management guru, Gary Hamel, wrote a best-selling book entitled *The War For Talent*. In a less dramatic manner, Harvard Business School Professor, Rozabeth Moss Kanter, makes the same point in her book, *World Class: Thriving Locally In The Global Economy*. Brainpower, not manpower, drives the new economy. Brainy people who are English speaking and highly educated are in great demand. India produces many such people. And, as long as the opportunities and the quality of life in India are not equal to those in the West or in the Middle-East or Southeast Asia, Indian talent will work abroad. In a smaller way, talented young Singaporeans are beginning to opt to work in London, New York, Paris and elsewhere in the West, rather than to come home as my generation did after studying in the West. This is a global phenomenon and I suspect there is not very much that we can do about it. We can only hope that eventually most of these young Singaporeans will choose to come home. The reassuring news is that there are many more talented people who wish to come to work in Singapore than those who wish to leave.
11. Let me conclude by making a few comments on some of the authors' conclusions. I agree with their conclusion that of the four countries studied, i.e. Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore, Singapore is the most welcoming and the easiest to relocate to for Indian transnationals.
12. However, I do not agree with the authors when they stated, on p.179, that Singapore's policy-makers focus too much on attracting foreign talent and too little on how to discourage talented Singaporeans from leaving Singapore. We cannot tell talented young Singaporeans that they shouldn't work in the West and it is their patriotic duty to come home. This is a free world and it is perfectly legitimate for young Singaporeans, who wish to prove themselves in the West, to be allowed to do so. If they succeed, they can help to link Singapore to centres of excellence in the West. I hope, of course, that many of them would eventually choose to return to Singapore.
13. I also do not share the authors' concern that, if the present "trend continues, in the long term, Singapore will be a nation of migrants without a sense of rootedness and, as can be seen, the majority of foreign talent from India will not sink in roots in Singapore and will return to India as the Indian economy develops". I think the core of Singapore will always be formed by Singaporeans. I think we should not fear immigrants. We should welcome them and acknowledge their contributions even if some of them will use Singapore as a transit station to the West. We should remember that we are all the

children or grandchildren of immigrants. We should have confidence in ourselves, in our nationhood and our values and ethos. We should inspire the new immigrants to embrace our values and ethos and to become proud Singaporeans. We can all play a part. We should befriend the new citizens and help them to imbibe the values and ethics of Singaporeans. We should not leave this matter only to the government.

Thank you.

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