

IPS-Nathan Lecture Series | 18th S R Nathan Fellow | Shawn Lum
Lecture I | Director's Opening remarks

Welcome Ladies and Gentlemen to the 18th IPS-Nathan Lecture Series.

1. Our 18th S R Nathan Fellow for the study of Singapore is Dr Shawn Lum, Senior Lecturer at The Asian School of the Environment, Nanyang Technological University. Trained as a botanist and ecologist, Dr Lum has devoted much of his career to studying the resilience and long-term viability of fragmented and disturbed forest remnants — work that is especially salient in highly urbanised landscapes such as ours.
2. Beyond academia, Dr Lum has long been active in the conservation community. He served the Nature Society (Singapore) for decades, including as Vice-President and President. He has worked closely with academic institutions, government agencies, NGOs and schools, and continues to advise on biodiversity and environmental management.
3. It is therefore fitting that Dr Lum's lecture series examines the place of nature in Singapore's development journey. Singapore has transformed itself, we like to boast, from a Garden City into what we now describe as a City in Nature. This evolution presents an enduring paradox. In a land-scarce nation, conserving biodiversity and protecting green spaces can compete with pressing economic and other needs. At the same time, a city with diminished nature may well become less liveable and less resilient.
4. In today's lecture, titled "*Singapore, Biodiversity and a Thriving City*," Dr Lum will examine the state of biodiversity in Singapore and explore how we might reconcile these competing imperatives.
5. The second lecture will turn to the relationship between nature and society — considering how biodiversity shapes human well-being and social outcomes.
6. The third and final lecture will widen the lens to Singapore's regional and global role, asking how a small state might play a role in advancing conservation beyond its shores.
7. I would like to thank Ms Audrey Tan, Assistant News Editor for Environment at *The Straits Times*, for moderating today's Q&A session. Her extensive experience covering environmental issues at *The Straits Times* will greatly enrich our discussion.
8. The S R Nathan Fellowship for the Study of Singapore was established in 2014 to pay tribute to our sixth and longest-serving President, the late Mr S R Nathan. The Fellowship aims to promote greater discourse on Singapore's public policy and current affairs.
9. We raised around S\$5.9 million dollars, including a matching grant from the government, to endow this Fellowship. I would 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 and supporting IPS.

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10. To conclude, I wish to thank Dr Lum in particular for accepting the role as our 18th S R Nathan Fellow. He is unusual — not quite the same as fellows we have had before. We have had bankers, the President of SMU, and Philip Yeo, so he is quite different, and I am sure a refreshing change, judging from the crowd that turned up to listen to him. His scholarship, civic engagement, and long-standing commitment to biodiversity make him uniquely placed to guide us through these important questions.