



Above: The book *India On Our Minds* was launched yesterday.  
Left: Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong speaking with its contributing authors (from far left) Yale-NUS College president Tan Tai Yong; MCI senior adviser, international affairs and former high commissioner to India Karen Tan; Singapore's former ambassador to India See Chak Mun; and Dr Uma Rajan at the launch.  
ST PHOTOS: JASON QUAH

# Singapore an early believer in India's potential, says PM Lee

Speaking at launch of book on bilateral ties, he also says Asean hopes for deeper alliance with Delhi

Lim Min Zhang

In the early 1990s, under the leadership of then Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, India started to liberalise and restructure its economy, unshackling its growth.

Singapore was an early believer in India's immense potential, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong yesterday, noting that his predecessor Goh Chok Tong had sparked an "India fever" back then.

Emeritus Senior Minister (ESM) Goh had urged Singapore to trade more with and invest in India.

Economic ties have deepened steadily since, with Singapore's investments in India increasing five-

fold between 1995 and 2000, said PM Lee, who made his first visit to the subcontinent in 1992, when he was Deputy Prime Minister.

He made the point at the launch of a book on Singapore-India relations, titled *India On Our Minds*, at the National University of Singapore (NUS) in Kent Ridge.

The Prime Minister noted the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (Ceca) was subsequently signed, and a Strategic Partnership established in 2015, which coincides with the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and Singapore.

The partnership reflects the two countries' deep cooperation in defence, finance, culture and other areas, he added.

Today, India is a major player on the world stage, said PM Lee, wielding significant influence at international fora.

"Debates on the major strategic issues of the day – climate change, WTO (World Trade Organisation) reform, security in the Indo-Pacific – are not complete without India at the table and playing a constructive role."

Like many other countries, India is suffering the economic fallout from Covid-19, but its long-term future remains bright and promising, said PM Lee.

And as Singapore starts its term as coordinator of Asean-India dialogue relations next year, it looks forward to deepening the partnership between the regional bloc and

New Delhi, he added.

One move Singapore hopes India will take is to revisit the merits of joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, he said, referring to the 15-country trade pact signed last month.

He further said that the book is a "timely reminder that to Singapore, India will always be a valued friend and partner".

"I know these sentiments are reciprocated by our Indian friends, too. I look forward to working with Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi and his government to keep our relationship forward-looking, enterprising and substantial."

The 380-page book features 50 essays by Singaporeans, including Senior Minister Tharman Shanmug

garatnam and president of Yale-NUS College Tan Tai Yong.

The book is edited by Ambassador-At-Large Tommy Koh and the Institute of South Asian Studies' senior associate director Her-  
naikh Singh.

It retails at \$28 in paperback and \$39 in hardback without GST.

In its foreword, ESM Goh noted that the two countries' trading and cultural links go back centuries.

Today, Singapore's ties with India are strong, substantive and broad-based, he wrote.

"I 'infected' Singapore with a 'mild India fever'. The fever did not become full blown but I never lost faith in India," he said.

He added that the country can exercise a moderating influence in the ongoing strategic rivalry between the US and China.

Professor Koh said at the launch that the book has not shied away from sensitive issues, like Ceca.

"It would not be wrong to say the book contains 50 love letters to India. I should, however, inform High Commissioner (to Singapore Periasamy) Kumaran, that some of the letters are written by loving critics of India," he added.

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