

Welcome Address at AAU-APRU Presidents' Roundtable

**by Professor Shih Choon Fong
President, National University of Singapore and
Chair, Association of Pacific Rim Universities
Thursday, 30 June 2005, 7 pm, The Istana**

Your Excellency Mr S R Nathan
President of the Republic of Singapore and Chancellor of NUS and Mrs Nathan

Dr Tony Tan
Deputy Prime Minister and Co-ordinating Minister for Security and Defence
and Mrs Tan

Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam
Minister for Education

Mr Chan Soo Sen
Minister of State for Education

NUS Pro-Chancellors

Mr Ridzwan Dzafir

Dr Andrew Chew

Mr Ngiam Tong Dow and

Dr Cheong Siew Keong

Mr Wong Ah Long
Deputy Council Chairman, National University of Singapore

Professor Mark Wrighton
Chair, Association of American Universities

Professor Vachaspati Upadhyaya
President, Association of Indian Universities

Presidents and delegates from the Association of American Universities,
Association of Pacific Rim Universities and Association of Indian Universities

Distinguished Guests and Friends

Ladies and Gentlemen

Opening Courtesies

Good evening.

Let me first welcome our friends from the Association of American Universities (AAU), the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) and the Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU) to Singapore. It's always a warm welcome to tropical Singapore, but I hope that our welcome is warm in more ways than one.

Many have travelled thousands of miles to participate in this first-ever joint AAU - APRU Presidents' Roundtable and APRU's 9th Annual Presidents Meeting. Thank you, everyone, for joining us at this Welcome Dinner as well as the Presidents' Roundtable and Annual Presidents Meeting. We are happy that you are able to celebrate NUS' first centennial with us. NUS is a hundred years old today because of the efforts of a small group of local citizens who raised \$87,000 to establish Singapore's first medical school in 1905. This group of exemplary individuals was led by Mr Tan Jiak Kim.

I would also like to acknowledge the role of some special people in the making of these events. I appreciate the strong support of AAU Chair, Chancellor Mark Wrighton; AAU Past Chair President John Casteen; AAU President Dr Nils Hasselmo and AAU Executive Vice President Dr John Vaughn. APRU Chairman Emeritus, President Steve Sample, has been instrumental in bringing AAU and APRU together for collaboration, and I must thank Steve for leading the way and for always being willing to offer his advice and guidance whenever called upon. We are also happy that AIU President Vice-Chancellor Vachaspati Upadhyaya is here with us this evening. I am grateful to AIU Secretary-General, Dr Dayanand Dongaonkar, for helping to galvanize AIU's participation in our meetings. APRU Secretary-General Dr Lawrence Loh and his team at the APRU Secretariat and NUS have worked very hard over the last year to coordinate arrangements and put together the Presidents Roundtable and the Annual Presidents Meeting. Let us show our appreciation for all their efforts with a round of applause.

Meeting on a Small Island

In April 2004, I had the privilege and pleasure of giving a plenary address, entitled "Notes from a Very Small Island", at the annual business meeting of the AAU in Washington DC. It was then that I proposed a joint Presidents Roundtable where AAU Presidents and Chancellors would come to Singapore to meet their APRU counterparts from China, Japan, and other countries.

Today, one year later, we are meeting on the small island of Singapore. This is truly a landmark event. The series of dialogues starting tonight between AAU and APRU will enhance channels for dynamic interaction and engagement across the Pacific. On this historic occasion, we are delighted that our friends from AIU have also been able to join us.

Working Towards Multilateral Collaboration

At the 2004 AAU Spring meeting, I urged AAU to proactively engage Asia, particularly since this continent will be a key growth region in the 21st century and new focal points of higher education are expected to emerge.

AAU and APRU have a window of opportunity before us to anchor our leadership position and continue to exert a global influence by working together and developing multilateral initiatives across the Pacific. In order to ensure that our universities endure and remain relevant to society, we need to give attention to fostering global alliances in education, research and enterprise, and building global learning communities.

This gathering of university presidents and chancellors from distinct economies across Asia, Australasia and the Americas offer a diverse economic and cultural platform to explore ideas for multi-lateral collaboration. There is a Chinese adage “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a first step”. Let us take the first step towards greater dialogue and collaboration among our institutions in Asia and across the Pacific.

People say that we should work first and play later. We shall do the reverse. This evening, let us enjoy ourselves first. Tomorrow, bright and early, we’ll get down to business.

Before ending my remarks, I must put right an earlier remiss. Some years ago, at a dinner event, I complimented the wife of a distinguished colleague that behind a great man, there is a great woman. I was promptly reminded by Dr Tony Tan: “...there is a greater woman behind every great man”. Looking at the table hosted by President Nathan, I already notice several greater halves – Mrs Nathan, Mrs Mary Tan, and Mrs Sharada Upadhyaya, including my wife Lily. Let me take this opportunity to acknowledge the spouses, husbands included, behind all the great minds here.

I suppose your applause suggests that I have redressed my earlier lapse in recognizing the significant role of spouses.

In closing, I would like to thank President Mr Nathan and Mrs Nathan for hosting this delightful dinner. Their presence this evening has made it a special occasion for all of us, one that will be cherished for a long time.

Thank you and good night.