PM Lee: Use S’pore as springboard

By LOW MINMIN

COMMUNITIES from South Asian countries are urged to use Singapore as a springboard to engage with the rest of the world, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong yesterday.

At the inaugural South Asian Diaspora Convention held at Resorts World Sentosa, Mr Lee said that Singapore is well-positioned to do so, because it is at the crossroads of trade, talent and capital flow.

The country’s good legal system, transparent business environment and prevalent use of English makes it “a natural hub” for companies and talent to connect with one another, he added.

He was addressing some 600 delegates at the opening of the two-day conference organised by the Institute of South Asian Studies (Isas), which brought together academicians, business leaders and policymakers to speak on the theme of “Linking the South Asian Diaspora”.

Comprising emigrants or descendants from countries such as India, Bhutan and Sri Lanka, members of the diaspora are spread all over the world and engaged in a wide variety of industries, said Mr Lee.

Ambassador-at-Large Gopinath Pillai, chairman of Isas, said: “This prosperous community, with accumulated wealth in excess of US$500 billion (S$605 billion), can play a significant role in the economic growth of South Asia by connecting the region to global economic networks.”

While the diaspora is traditionally associated with brain drain, Mr Lee said that its members play a key role in building bridges between their adopted homes and their homeland.

He added that this is an important balancing act.

“If the diaspora focuses only on its links with its homeland, it may not be welcomed by the local community; if it becomes too localised, then it risks losing touch with its original culture and heritage... Either will compromise the diaspora’s effectiveness,” he said.

Other speakers at the conference include Dr Han Seung Soo, former prime minister of South Korea, and Mr Lee Kuan Yew, senior adviser to the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation.

The idea for the conference was mooted by President S R Nathan to bring together the diaspora community that is believed to have “immense influence” in integrating the region.

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Springboard: 跳板 tiào bǎn
Diaspora: 散居 sàn jū
Descendants: 后代 hòu dài
Brain drain: 人才外流 rén cái wài liú