

**SPEECH BY PROF S JAYAKUMAR, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND COORDINATING MINISTER FOR NATIONAL SECURITY, AT PRAVASI BHARATIYA DIVAS (PBD) SINGAPORE PRE-CONFERENCE COCKTAILS, 9 OCTOBER 2008, 8.30 PM AT THE PACIFIC BALLROOM, PAN PACIFIC HOTEL**

Excellencies  
Distinguished Guests

I am delighted to welcome all of you to the *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* or PBD Singapore conference.

2 In January 2007, the Indian Government honoured Singapore and myself when it invited me to be the Chief Guest for the *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* held then in New Delhi. Dr Balaji Sadasivan, Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, who had attended several PBDs spoke highly of the value of these meetings and commented that each successive PBD was better organised and more substantive than the year before. When I attended the event, I realised how right he was. I was impressed by the scale and turnout as well as the quality of the discussions.

3 More importantly, the PBD brought together India and the other countries where people of Indian origin settled. There was clearly value in Indians outside India reconnecting with India. There was also value in India connecting to the countries where sizeable Indian communities exist and flourish.

4 During my meetings with Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, Minister of External Affairs Pranab Mukherjee, and Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs Vayalar Ravi, I proposed to them that they should consider convening PBDs outside India, from time to time. I was greatly encouraged when they reacted positively. Mr Mukherjee said they had been also considering the same idea. He understood that holding PBD in another country would bring Indians outside of India into contact with the Indian diaspora. I said that in that case Singapore would like to stake a claim and would offer to host it. We were therefore delighted when the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs suggested that Singapore could host the PBD this year. I am pleased that this is the first PBD being held in Asia, after the one in New York last year.

5 For us in Singapore hosting the PBD in Singapore has special significance given our excellent bilateral relations with India and Singapore's own special place in the history of the Indian diaspora.

6 The value that Singapore can bring to the Indian diaspora is our strong connections to key growing regions in Southeast Asia and East Asia. As a young nation made up of different ethnic groups, Singapore is uniquely aware of the synergies that come from the meeting of minds from different places and cultures. About 9% of Singaporeans are Indians. The Indian community in Singapore has made significant contributions to the socio-economic progress of the country. We continue to welcome the many Indian nationals who come to Singapore for purposes of work, study or leisure. They feel at home here because of cultural familiarity and Singaporeans do not see them as foreigners. As a multi-ethnic society, Singapore values the new ideas and vibrancy that visitors and stayers bring with them.

7 I would like to take this opportunity to thank the co-organisers of PBD Singapore, the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs of India and the Confederation of Indian Industry. I wish to thank also the Chairman and members of the Steering Committee for their guidance.

8 Those who have been in the thick of the organising process will agree that SMS Balaji played a pivotal role, including travelling to many countries to publicise this event and enlisting their support and cooperation. I am very sorry indeed that due to his recent surgery he is unable to join us. I am sure I speak on behalf of all of us in wishing him a speedy recovery.

9 Ladies and gentlemen, a lot of effort has been put in to organise this event in a relatively short time. We have an impressive list of speakers for all the sessions. I hope you all will find the Conference stimulating and your stay in Singapore pleasant and memorable. Thank you.