

Press Release

For Immediate Release

Economic integration remains an essential foundation for global prosperity and progress

Singapore's Senior Minister of State Dr Koh Poh Koon stresses the need for an open and rules-based multilateral trading system during meeting of senior government officials of Commonwealth member states in Singapore

Singapore, 29 May 2019 --- The Commonwealth Secretariat, United Kingdom (UK), and the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) at the National University of Singapore (NUS) organised a two-day Asia-Pacific Consultation for Commonwealth member countries in Singapore, on 28 and 29 May 2019.

Dr Koh Poh Koon, Singapore's Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry, graced the opening session yesterday and delivered a keynote address. He noted that "Given the current backdrop of rising populism and protectionism, it is even more critical for Commonwealth countries to continue to come together to signal our joint commitment towards upholding the open and rules-based multilateral trading system." Dr Koh added that "Economic integration remains the essential foundation for global prosperity and progress, and allows us to better address the global challenges of the future."

In his welcome remarks, ISAS Chairman and Ambassador-at-Large at Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Gopinath Pillai, highlighted the importance of the meeting taking place at a time when tensions over global trade prospects were high following the United States-China trade war. Dr Brendan Vickers, Adviser and Head, International Trade Policy, Commonwealth Secretariat, reflected on the global trade context and the important role of the Commonwealth in carrying forward an open and cooperative trade agenda. Highlighting the importance of the consultations, he noted that the meeting brought together the regions of Asia and Pacific and their member countries for an interactive dialogue and discussions on trade and development issues of mutual interest.

Organised in the Asia-Pacific for the first time, the participants in the consultations included 35 senior government officials from several Commonwealth member countries and Pacific Island States, namely, Bangladesh, Brunei, India, Kiribati, Malaysia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and the United Kingdom. Speakers and resource persons included distinguished academics, private-sector representatives and practitioners from Australia, Bangladesh, India and Singapore, as well as UNCTAD, the Commonwealth Small States Office in Geneva and the Commonwealth Secretariat, UK.

The agenda for the meeting covered a broad range of topics, ranging from improving physical connectivity through multi-modal mega-infrastructure projects in the region, to the benefits of digitisation and the sustainable use of the oceans or blue economy, all framed by the need for more effective and targeted Aid for Trade to build productive and supply capacities. The overall objective of the meeting was to assess how Asia-Pacific countries could better harness trade policy to improve their global connectivity and integration, including through more meaningful participation in regional and global value chains.

The meeting witnessed intensive engagements among the participants on various subjects of the agenda and focused on sharing of country experiences and concerns.

In his closing remarks, Professor C Raja Mohan, Director, ISAS, emphasised the importance of maintaining the momentum of the discussions and working further on the issues deliberated at the sessions.

At the end of the two-day meeting, the Commonwealth Secretariat and ISAS agreed to collaborate on the outcomes of the consultations.

While in Singapore, the delegation will visit the ITE College Central tomorrow to understand the importance the Singapore government places on technical education. As part of its visit to the ITE campus, the delegation will tour the Maritime Hub, Aerospace Hub and the ITE Epitome, which showcase the capabilities, products and services of the ITE colleges in Singapore.

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