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SMU launches Asia Ready Conversations with inaugural dialogue on India, China and the future of Asia

New initiative debuts with a fireside conversation featuring business leader and author Mr R. Gopalakrishnan

Singapore, 11 September 2026 – Singapore Management University (SMU) today launched Asia Ready Conversations (ARC), a new initiative that brings together students and thought leaders for conversations on the ideas and forces shaping Asia's future, with an inaugural fireside conversation featuring Mr R. Gopalakrishnan, CEO of Mindworks and author of 21 books on business and leadership.

Titled “India, China and the Future of Asia: Navigating Opportunity and Change,” the session saw Mr Gopalakrishnan in conversation with Professor [Themín Suwardy](#), SMU's Associate Provost (Postgraduate Professional Programmes).

With more than five decades at the helm of some of India's most influential businesses, Mr Gopalakrishnan brings a rare perspective on management, leadership and doing business in Asia. A professional manager since 1967, he has held senior leadership roles, including Chairman of Unilever Arabia, Vice Chairman of Hindustan Lever and director of Tata Sons.

Drawing on this breadth of experience and insights from his latest book, “Chanakya and Sun Tzu: A Business Lens on Trade, Thought and Travel”, co-authored with Nirmala Isaac, Mr Gopalakrishnan discussed how developments in India and China are reshaping Asia, and what this means for businesses, organisations and future leaders.

ARC is launched alongside [SMU's Asia-Ready Education Framework](#), part of the University's broader commitment to nurturing globally-agile, Asia-ready graduates equipped with the knowledge, experiences and perspectives needed to thrive and lead across the region. Together they support students as they progress from understanding Asia's diverse cultures, societies and economies, to gaining real-world experience through immersive opportunities, and ultimately developing deeper expertise through extended engagement in the region.

By bringing students into direct conversations with business leaders, policymakers and other regional voices, ARC complements their academics and experiential learning. It gives students the



MEDIA RELEASE

opportunity to engage with different perspectives, examine developments shaping the region and consider how these changes may influence their future careers and leadership.

Prof [Venky Shankaraman](#), Vice Provost (Education Strategy and Innovations) at SMU, said “Our aim is to help students make intentional choices throughout their time at SMU, so that their understanding of Asia is developed through a combination of academic learning, direct exposure and sustained engagement. ARC brings important perspectives into that journey, encouraging students to question assumptions and consider how developments across Asia will shape their work and leadership.”

The Framework is supported by the [Asia-Ready microsite](#), which brings together Asia-related courses, programmes, events, overseas opportunities and student experiences from across SMU. By providing a single gateway to these opportunities, the microsite makes it easier for students to identify experiences that match their interests and aspirations.

Mr Gopalakrishnan said: “India and China will play an important role in shaping Asia’s future. Future leaders must understand not only their economic development, but also the history, culture and ideas shaping how both countries engage with the region and the world. Conversations such as this can help students navigate that future with greater confidence.”

The inaugural session was held on Friday, 11 September 2026 at SMU Hall, SMU Yong Pung How School of Law, and was attended by close to 150 participants comprising students, faculty and members of the SMU community.

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About Mr R. Gopalakrishnan

R Gopalakrishnan studied physics at Kolkata University and engineering at IIT Kharagpur, and attended the Advanced Management Program at Harvard Business School. A professional manager since 1967, he has served as Chairman of Unilever Arabia, Managing Director of Brooke Bond Lipton and Vice Chairman of Hindustan Lever, as well as director of Tata Sons and several Tata companies. He is currently an independent director of Press Trust of India (PTI). He is also a columnist for financial papers and has authored 21 books since 2007.

About Singapore Management University (SMU)

Established in 2000, Singapore Management University (SMU) is recognised for its high-impact, multi-disciplinary research that addresses Asian issues of global relevance, and for its interactive, collaborative and project-based approach to learning. Home to over 13,000 students across six schools and two colleges, SMU offers bachelors, masters and PhD programmes across Accountancy, Business, Economics, Information Systems, Integrative Studies, Law and Social Sciences, as well as executive development and continuing education programmes. SMU graduates are consistently ranked among the most employable in Singapore, and command one of the highest mean starting salaries. Through its city campus, SMU enjoys strategic linkages with business, government and the wider community in Singapore and beyond. www.smu.edu.sg