

# Getting closer to Singapore

A nine-point strategy to ensure India learns from the city-state's experience

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Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has just completed a two-day state visit to India, coming here after seven years, as well as seven months after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Singapore. Progress was made during the Singapore PM's visit, especially the agreement to set up a vocational skills training centre in Delhi. But there is a long bilateral agenda between the two countries which must not wait for high-level visits to happen.

First and foremost, trade and investment, which has multiplied since the CECA (the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement) was signed in 2005. But, the potential is way more than what has been achieved. Five thousand Indian companies are now located in Singapore, with another 1,000 on the way. Sadly, the CECA review has not been completed. This needs to be concluded to give greater momentum to economic ties. Singapore is a significant gateway for India and completion of the CECA review is important because it is a process to expand two-way trade and investment. A connected issue is for Indian companies to list on the Singapore exchange, which is worth considering. When the PM of Singapore returns to Delhi in December 2012 for the India-Asean 20th anniversary, the CECA review must be off the agenda.

Second, PM Lee spoke in Delhi that business seeks a transparent, stable, predictable environment. This is a very important pending agenda for India which needs to attract much higher levels of foreign and domestic investment. Singapore has achieved a hassle-free environment, with rapid decision-making and approval systems. India, for its own benefit, can adapt and implement Singapore's systems to give new confidence to investors. That's critical for reviving economic growth in India. Especially the use of information technology for paperwork to ensure transparency.

Third, Singapore is constantly introspecting and reinventing itself. There is a process for this — a process which India can adapt and implement so that innovation in all its aspects, from governance to social development, economy to infrastructure, can move ahead, in keeping with changing times. India's young population, both rural and urban, has high aspirations thanks to television and communications; a process of revisiting strategy and priority is crucial. This is a key area of future cooperation.

Fourth, there is no more important agenda for India than to build a new model of inclusive development for a multi-religious, multi-cultural society. Singapore has achieved this with deliberate steps for social inclusion and integration. The entire programme in India needs to be reviewed and adapted to the needs of different parts of India. Singapore's model can be seen as a pilot project, from which India can learn. Their success with low-cost housing is especially relevant to provide a home to every Indian family in the medium term.

Fifth, urban and rural habitats in India need special attention with regard to a "clean", "green" and a healthy environment. Again, Singapore's success through targeted planning is a useful example as India sees 1,000 new towns growing across the country. The triple agenda — "green, clean and healthy" — is critical. The water issue is integral to this area of focus and Singapore, with limited water, has achieved miracles.

Sixth, a huge challenge for India is human resource capacity building. C K Prahalad's estimate that 500 million people will need to be skilled by 2022 has been endorsed by the government. If so, the ability to provide quality education and skill-building for hundreds of millions, needs institutions like the ITE (Institute of Technical Education) of Singapore in each and every state of India. The collaboration for a first centre in Delhi must only be a beginning. India has to find a creative way of replicating ITE across the country.

Seventh, culture and civilisation, heritage and muse-



Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (right) with Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in New Delhi last week. Lee was on a three-day state visit to India. PHOTO: REUTERS

ums. Preservation and promotion of culture and heritage has to be high priority and India's track record is not satisfactory. This has a national, state and local dimension. Singapore has excelled and partnership would help India to raise its level of performance. There are a whole range of issues here, from training of personnel to preservation of monuments and archives to promotion of the arts and music. This is a big agenda.

Eighth, institutions are the backbone of society. A weak institutional infrastructure reflects a weak society. Conversely, a strong, sustainable institutional structure helps build a stable society. India started off with a network of excellent institutions but many are now in a state of disrepair. This, clearly, is a cause for concern as well as an area for learning and partnership. India does not need a ministry for institutions but, in all parts of society, a conscious effort to rebuild institutions. This is not rocket science, just simple rules and conventions to follow, as Singapore has done.

Finally, going beyond "what" to do, at which India is very good, to focusing on the "how", so that execution and implementation on-time and within-budget is assured — an area of Indian inadequacy in the gov-

ernment sector. The private sector, on the other hand, generally excels in on-time project management. And, the type of people required for the "how" are different from the policy makers who frame the "what". The need for the "how" is a cadre of managers and implementers. Singapore has shown the way in dealing effectively with both "what" and "how" — which should be a special area of future collaboration.

These are nine areas for attention for the India-Singapore relationship going forward — beneficial to both, but especially to India's aspirations to be in the frontline of global nations. Singapore is a small country with limited resources, especially people; but there are creative ways of tapping into the Singapore success story and transferring "technology" to talent rich India.

There are, of course, many other areas of cooperation: international relations, defence, air services (which need deregulation and freedom), science and technology, healthcare, life sciences, school education, higher education — to name just a few. The list is actually endless. This bilateral relationship is a dual carriageway offering much to both. It is a strategic partnership of immense potential between a "David" (5 million people) and a "Goliath" (1.2 billion). Awareness, acceptance and application are the ways forward, with responsibility for initiative and action lying with both government and non-government players.

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