



# AT THE SUMMIT

Diaspora Indian entrepreneurs from all over the world found a global platform that can help to catalyse more business growth worldwide

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INDIAN BUSINESS LEADERS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD made their presence felt during the Global Indian Business Summit (GIBS) in Singapore, a city which has been courting more business organisations to establish a presence in the republic as a launching pad to other parts of the region. Role models among the highly successful Diaspora Indian entrepreneurs were the toast of town when business leaders gathered at the Summit during the Global Entropolis Singapore in November last year.

Honoured at the inaugural Global Indian Business Awards during a gala dinner at the Raffles Hotel were Sonny Aswani of Tolaram Group (Estonia), Amit Lohia of Indorama Group (Indonesia), Gopinath Pillai of Gateway DistriParks (India) and Sunny Varkey of Varkey Group (Gulf and Middle East). "They were celebrated for their great ability to start a business, grow in the countries they are residing and expand their operations beyond their borders," said George Abraham,

chairman of The GA Group, who has been the driving force in making the Summit one of the most important meetings for business leaders in Singapore.

According to available data, Indians of South Asian origin are found in 136 countries around the world, and in 40 countries their population exceeds 50,000. While they make up more than 40 percent of the population in Fiji, Mauritius, Guyana and Suriname, there exist smaller minorities in Malaysia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Uganda, UK, US, Canada and Singapore. They are in business and the professions and have recently started taking part in politics as well.

"We in Singapore are pleased to note that in addition to our existing historical population of Indians, we have recently been able to attract a large number of young professional Indians in our search for foreign talent," said Zainul Abidin Rasheed, Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, who was the guest of honour at the

**ABOVE FROM LEFT:**  
Dino Varkey, Gopinath Pillai, George Abraham, Zainul Abidin Rasheed, Sonny Aswani and Amit Lohia



Trading), Kuwait (Development Enterprises Holding Company) and  
Singapore (EDB Investments) was inked to build a new petrochemical  
facility on Jurong Island.

The Global Indian Business Summit is one of the most highly  
anticipated events at Global Entrepolis Singapore, which was jointly  
presented by the Economic Development Board and the Singapore  
Business Federation.

The GIBS made its debut in 2006 and received overwhelming  
support from the business community not only in Singapore but  
the whole region. George Abraham recalled, "The first summit was  
a great success — it brought together Indian business leaders from  
around the world with representatives from so many countries. We  
also had an Indian component that year — the chief minister from  
Gujarat state came to address the participants, inviting them to invest  
in one of the fastest growing states in India.

"However, our aim is not just to promote investments in India,"  
he pointed out, "but to tap on the experiences and contacts of the  
Diaspora Indian entrepreneurs so that the opportunities that exist in  
those countries where they are established can be made available to  
others. For example, Singapore offers business opportunities in the  
neighbouring region. The Diaspora Indian entrepreneurs who come  
to GIBS can tap the links that Singaporean business people have  
with not only Indians, but also Chinese, Malaysians, Vietnamese  
and other people in the region.

"The unique point of the Summit is that it is a one-stop meeting  
point for Diaspora Indian businesses to network, create new business  
opportunities and learn from role models," said George Abraham.

He cited an interesting example. "A Singaporean Indian who went  
to a province in China shared at GIBS how he become entrenched  
in the province in the oil and gas business. He has been officially  
appointed by the province to attract investments there. As he explained  
the advantages for anyone interested to do business in that province,  
GIBS attendees who came from the Gulf region and Indonesia were  
fascinated by his story and discussed potential opportunities. In  
addition, Singapore itself is attractive because it has its own business  
networks — it is an Asian hub that makes it ideal as a launching pad  
into a bigger base using its connectivity in the region. These are the  
kinds of connections that we want to promote through GIBS."

Four outstanding businessmen were presented with the Inaugural  
Global Indian Business Awards for their ability to start a business,  
grow it in the countries they are living in and expand far beyond  
their borders.



Zainul Abidin Rasheed with VIPs and award winners



George Abraham, Dr Balaji Sadasivan, Indian High Commissioner S Jaishankar





**Gopinath Pillai:** Varied interests in Singapore, India, Mauritius and the UK



**Dino Varkey:** Strong in the Gulf and expanding to other countries

## GLOBAL INDIAN BUSINESS AWARDS

### *Gopinath Pillai*

**Executive chairman of Savant Infocomm and chairman of Gateway Distriparks Limited**

Gopinath Pillai is chairman of Gateway Distriparks. It has commercial operations at Navi Mumbai where its container handling capacity has expanded rapidly over the years. The company also has interests in the construction of warehouses and has received approval from Indian Railways for running container trains from its inland container depot at Gurgaon.

Pillai is also chairman of the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) and IT Services Cooperative and Singapore's non-resident ambassador to Iran. He has varied interests in companies incorporated in Singapore, India Mauritius and the UK. A trustee of NTUC Fairprice Co-operative, he served as its founding chairman from 1983 to 1993 and was formerly president of the National University of Singapore Society.

He is also executive chairman of Savant Infocomm, which has learning centres in Bangalore, Chennai and New Delhi. certification bodies. Pillai also has interests in companies incorporated in Singapore, India, Mauritius and the UK. He is also chairman of Windmill International and Director of KSP Investments and several other companies.

### *Sunny Varkey*

**GEMS Education and Welcare World Varkey Group (Gulf and Middle East)**

Dino Varkey represented his father, Sunny Varkey, the founder of the Varkey Group, which provides educational services in several countries. The successful Dubai-based entrepreneur, Sunny Varkey, is well known for making his money from providing elementary schools in the UAE besides having interests in healthcare services.

Varkey has developed an enterprising blend of business, customer service and innovation combined with high educational standards to form GEMS, an educational brand that has made global headway. GEMS manages a growing network of 75 international schools in Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, India and the UK, providing quality education to 75,000 students from around the world.

Varkey also has extensive interests in the vital healthcare sector, including a private hospital and Welcare World Healthcare Systems, a firm specialising in health care management and consultancy. In 2001, he received the highest recognition given in the UAE, the HH Sheikhha Fatima Welfare Prize, acknowledging his commitment and charitable contributions.





**Sonny Aswani:**  
Thriving in Estonia



**Amit Lohia:** From Indonesia to  
the world at large

## *Sonny Aswani* **Tolaram Group (Estonia)**

Sonny Aswani represents the Tolaram Group helmed by his uncle, Mohan Vaswani, chairman of the group, who laid the foundations of the company with his partner and group vice-chairman Vishamkar Adnani. Founded in 1948, the Tolaram Group started as a textile shop in Malang, Indonesia. It has since grown to own companies with interests in manufacturing food, paper and textiles, marketing and distribution, financial services and real estate and has expanded its reach to 12 countries.

"Our core strengths are an international outlook, a wide network, entrepreneurial flair and risk appetite for uncharted territories. The dynamism of a professional management team and agility of a lean organisation also enable us to respond swiftly to new opportunities," said Aswani. He manages the group's interests in the Baltics. Aswani, who has more than 15 years' experience in setting up and running businesses in Asia and Europe, has been credited with developing paper, textile, real estate and lifestyle businesses in Estonia. His vision is to make Tolaram "a leading private company operating successful and sustainable businesses in emerging markets".

## *Amit Lohia* **Indorama Group (Indonesia)**

Indorama started in Indonesia back in 1976 as a small spun-yarn manufacturing plant. Founded by ML Lohia, the group has grown to become a global manufacturer of diversified industrial products — polyolefins (polyethylene and polypropylene), polyesters and intermediates (purified terephthalic acid, PET resin, filament yarns and staple fibre), spun yarns, cement, fabrics and medical gloves. It has plants in seven countries — Indonesia, Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Nigeria and Egypt — and representative offices in the US, UK, and Singapore. Indorama's 2007 turnover and total assets were estimated at US\$1.6 billion and US\$2.2 billion respectively. Prakash Lohia is the group chairman.

Amit Lohia is the group managing director. He joined Indorama in 1995. Born in India, the 33-year-old has been credited with successfully implementing petrochemical projects for the group in various locations. An active member of the Indonesian business community, he belongs to several organisations including APSYFI (Indonesian Fiber Producers), API (Indonesian Textile Association), and ECAII (Economic Association of Indonesia & India). ■