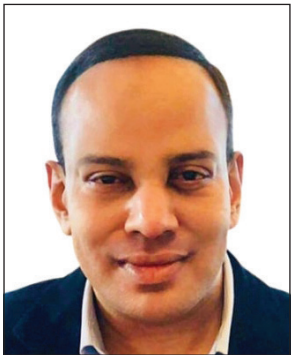


ASIAN VIEWPOINT

A game changer? President Donald Trump's gift to Singapore

BY DERWIN PEREIRA



The road from America to Singapore may well lead through a golf course. That seems to be true of Dr Anjani Kumar Sinha, better known as Anji Sinha, whom US President Donald Trump has nominated as America's next Ambassador to Singapore. His nomination is currently awaiting confirmation by the US Senate, where the Republican Party, under Trump's leadership, holds a majority.

A shared passion for golf brought the two men together in South Florida in a friendship that, going back to at least the early 2010s, has blossomed into respect and admiration. Sinha is believed to be a member of the Trump-owned Mar-a-Lago Club or Trump International Golf Club in South Florida. The exclusivity of a golf course allows players to engage one another with a degree of ease and familiarity that may not always be possible off the course.

Golf has often served as a quiet diplomatic channel. In 1997 and 2000, rounds of golf played between Singapore's former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and US President Bill Clinton provided a relaxed setting for private discussions. These informal interactions helped ease tensions between the two countries and ultimately led to the initiation of the US-Singapore Free Trade Agreement.

The American dream

Where does Sinha fit into the trajectory of US-Singapore relations? Though the US Ambassador-designate tends to keep a low profile, enough is known about him to understand why he is a strong choice for the role.

Sinha, an American orthopaedic surgeon in his mid-70s, hails from Bihar, India. He earned his Doctor of Medicine degree from Mahatma Gandhi Medical College. In 1972, he relocated to New Delhi, where he held residency roles at Safdarjung Hospital, affiliated with the University of Delhi and the Central Institute of Orthopaedics.

Sinha migrated to the US in 1979, and he and his wife, anesthesiologist Kuntala Sinha, became American citizens in the mid-1990s. While in America, he had the opportunity to intern at the internationally respected Mount Sinai Medical Center and later at the Long Island Jewish Medical Center.

Their journey reflects the American Dream realised by Indian professionals who leveraged their homegrown professional expertise to build new lives abroad. Like many other countries, America has benefited from the influx of highly skilled Indian immi-



Dr Anji Sinha (front row, second from right), nominated as the next US Ambassador to Singapore, has forged strong ties with ReNew Power, an Indian renewable energy company and the first Indian firm to be listed on Nasdaq

grants who contribute significantly to the host country's professional and economic landscape.

In the US, Sinha established himself as an orthopaedic surgeon with a practice in New York. He is licensed to practise at Hudson Regional Hospital in Secaucus, New Jersey, and Brookhaven Memorial Center in Patchogue, New York. In the early 2020s, he briefly practised in Palm Beach, Florida, where he also resided intermittently.

While building his medical career, Sinha ventured into entrepreneurship and built durable ties with ReNew Power, an Indian renewable energy company, the first Indian company to be listed on the Nasdaq. These business-minded qualities likely appealed to Trump, a businessman with a strong focus on enterprise and negotiations.

In the US, Sinha and his wife Kuntala raised a new generation of elites. The Sinhas have two US-born children — daughter Pooja (born in 1981) and son Sumeet (born in 1983). Pooja attended Dartmouth and Harvard Universities, while Sumeet attended New York and Columbia Universities. For the Sinhas, the Ivy League became a family tradition. A reliable source who has known Sinha for more than a decade says that he is very proud of what his family has achieved in the US.

But even as he excelled in his adopted country, he remained connected to his roots. He is related to Yashwant Sinha, a member of the prestigious Indian Administrative Service who later served as the country's Minister for Finance and Minister for External Affairs. In the US, Sinha's amiability and humility earned the affection of the Indian ethnic community. According to an American medical practitioner who has known him well for over 15 years, his refusal to boast about his close relationship with Trump is a true reflection of his character. His discretion would have endeared him to Trump, who is known to be wary of name-droppers.

Sinha's connection with Trump runs deep. He has made multiple political donations to Trump and Trump-aligned political action committees, beginning with the 2016 and 2024 presidential campaigns. He is known for his ability to navigate effectively across political lines, building relationships with both Republicans and Democrats.

Sinha, a well-known astute investor, purchased an apartment on Trump Park Avenue — a property he still owns and where his son, Sumeet, is currently believed to reside. A lawyer specialising in renewable energy, Sumeet previously lived in India and was a lawyer for ReNew Power between 2017 and 2018. ReNew Power is led by Sumant Sinha, a high-net-worth Indian national who is the son of Yashwant Sinha.

Deal-making diplomacy

What would Sinha's ambassadorship, if confirmed by the Senate, mean for US-Singapore relations? Quite a lot, in fact.

Trump is often seen as a transactional president. He does not like lofty rhetoric or vague diplomatic gestures. As a businessman who brought his formula for success and aversion to failure into the rough-and-tumble of American politics, Trump now seeks to make international deals as President.

He approaches foreign policy through the same lens: international relations as business negotiations, with a clear focus on outcomes that benefit the US. Under this approach, America's interactions with the world are not just diplomatic—they are deals. And the goal is simple: the US wins.

America cannot win without reliable allies and partners, and Singapore is one of its most trusted partners. During the Cold War, both America and Singapore were on the same winning side of history. Both correctly calculated the strengths and the weaknesses of the Soviet Union.

They understood that communism was a doomed economic system and that whatever political and international system rested on dysfunctional economics was doomed as well.

The end of the Cold War with the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991 confirmed the soundness of that shared judgment and the steely logic of history.

Cold War 1.0 was a clash between capitalism and communism. Cold War 2.0 is unfolding from within the capitalist system itself. The rise of authoritarian China has upended America's hope of integrating it into a democratic, liberal international order. The US, long a champion of democracy as the guiding principle in global affairs, now faces a sobering realisation: in today's world, preaching democratic values is no longer enough.

What's needed is a new approach — one that abandons outdated assumptions and instead speaks the language of modern power: economics. In this emerging order, influence will be shaped less by ideology and more by economic strength, strategic partnerships, and pragmatic engagement with rising rivals.

Singapore understands this dynamic well. It has long been recognised that a nation's professed values depend on its economic and military ability to uphold them. In fact, military strength depends on economic capacity. For that reason, the partnership between America and Singapore forged during Cold War 1.0 remains just as relevant, and arguably more vital, today in Cold War 2.0.

The forms have changed. The substance has not. But form gives shape to substance. In this new era, diplomacy must operate with the mindset of a global marketplace. Just as buyers and sellers engage in commerce despite ideological, religious, or personal differences, nations must do the same in international relations. A market functions properly only when participants respect its rules — when no one destroys it or exploits it for short-term gain.

To say this is not to suggest for a moment that China is about to set fire to the global marketplace: Why should it, when it is expanding its presence within it? The point to be made is this: America, China and India must work toward a new model of global stability, one rooted in shared economic interests and mutual benefit.

This need for a new model of global stability is where business acumen, paired with professional excellence, becomes vital. Diplomats must think like entrepreneurs — advancing their nations' interests as skilled advocates in a complex international market.

Sinha would be a leading advocate for US businesses in Singapore and Asean. As an entrepreneur, he understands the role that America's economic vitality plays in sustaining the global economic order. Singapore, an international trading hub, understands that role instinctively. The Republic would be a natural home away from home for him.

Strengthening ties

Singapore is a pragmatic nation-state. It is not swayed easily by ideological shifts or waves of populism. Increasingly, America will come to view itself in the same way. There will be some international friction over the degree to which America pursues its economic strategy of punitive tariffs and demands for military burden-sharing among its allies. However, what remains true is that no country can afford to ignore America.

The thought of taking America for granted simply does not occur to Singaporeans. They know the strategic geography of world affairs only too well.

In that context, Sinha's ambassadorial appointment would bode well for both his nation and Singapore, and for the global geo-economic landscape which they inhabit. His ancestral ties to India, an increasingly influential power, will also help the US strengthen its relations with India.

Wayne Curtis Weldon, who served for two decades in the US House of Representatives on the Armed Services and Homeland Security Committees as Vice-Chairman and several other sub-committees, was one of the principal architects of the US-Singapore Free Trade Agreement.

He says: "It is a very good omen for President Trump to appoint a confidante, someone he trusts, to countries of great importance. Singapore will be dealing with an ambassador who has a close relationship with the President. You must understand that the President is a businessman who wants concrete results. The aim is to maximise this special strategic partnership with Singapore, which is critical to US national interests. It will be a win-win for both sides."

Weldon adds: "Singapore is one of the few countries that have a deep understanding of Asia and has also forged very close ties with all the key institutions in the United States. It will help President Trump, through his new Ambassador, to assess the power shifts in a very important region where there are two great powers — China and India. Ambassador-nominee Sinha, who still has very strong links in India, will also be expected to be an important channel to strengthen ties with New Delhi. We want a good read of not just China but India as well. The Ambassador will have a bird's eye view of Asia from Singapore."

Precisely. All that remains is for Sinha to take up his post in Singapore. And rest assured, he will not find any shortage of golf courses. **E**

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