

Bridging of the Minds

Bridging of the Minds is a new initiative of the Federation of Malayalee Associations of Americas (FOMAA). Its objective is to promote “knowledge exchange” between Kerala and North America.

Malayalees began immigrating to North America in significant numbers in the 1970s. A large number of Keralites who came to the United States and Canada in the '70s and '80s were healthcare professionals. A second wave of immigration from Kerala occurred in the 1990s, when thousands of information technology professionals came to North America.

In Kerala, both waves of emigration were seen as “brain drains” because of the large-scale loss of technical skills and knowledge. But now, with the Malayalee population that came in the '70s reaching retirement age and those that came in subsequent decades at the height of their professional careers, FOMAA sees a unique opportunity to turn that “brain drain” into a “brain gain” by facilitating the reconnection of these highly talented and trained groups to Kerala through the Bridging of the Minds initiative.

Here are some of the activities that FOMAA is planning under Bridging of the Minds:

- When Malayalee professionals from North America visit Kerala, they will share their expertise with professionals in Kerala in the same field through training sessions and seminars.
- Promote online and other virtual interactions between Malayalee professionals in North America and their counterparts in Kerala. For instance, brain surgeons in North America can constantly share their expertise with colleagues in Kerala through an online forum, listserv and video conferencing.
- Connect students/professionals that are looking for higher education/training opportunities with the right institutions and professionals.
- Create a resource bank of experts in various fields. They can serve as experts for government and nongovernmental organizations in Kerala.
- Encourage children born in the United States and Canada to visit Kerala and spend time there as part of an initiative known as “Know Kerala.”

FOMAA’s partner in Kerala on Bridging of the Minds is the Kerala International Center, a reputed think-tank headed by Hon. Ambassador T.P. Sreenivasan. Hon. Shashi Tharoor, Hon. K.P.S. Menon and Justice Hariharan Nair are members of the Center’s Board of Trustees.

As a part of this initiative, FOMAA held the Professionals Summit of Keralites 2011 at Sheraton Suites in Chicago on June 11, 2011, in association with North America-based professional bodies such as AKMG, KITA, MEANA, NAINA, ISWA, IPC, MRA and MEGA.

Speakers included Ambassador T.P. Srinivasan, P.Chandrasekharan IPS, Dr. M.V. Pillai, Dr. Ann Kalayil, Dr. Javad Hassan, Dr. Tojo Thachenkery, Dr. Sreedhar Kavil, T.D. Sivakumar, Antony Satyadas, Dr. Narendra Kumar, Dr. Arvind Pillai, Dr. Solymol Kuruvilla, George Joseph, Santhosh Kurian, Johnson Myalil, Tissy Najravellil, John Titus, Varghese Chacko, P.S. Nair, Vinson Palathingal and George Koshy.

Mr. George Abraham was the chairman and Mr. Gladson was the co-chair of the conference. The event was inaugurated by Hon. Ramesh Chennithala.

On January 14, 2011, FOMAA organized the second conference of the Bridging of the Minds initiative in Kerala. It was held at the Mammen Mappillai Hall, Kottayam during the 3rd International Convention of FOMAA. Ambassador T. P. Sreenivasan, who is also the Vice Chairman of the Kerala Educational Council, served as the moderator. Waste management, health care and education cooperation under the framework of the recent US-India education agreement were the subjects discussed at the conference. The panelists included:

VD Satheesan, MLA; Dr. Prem Nair, Director, Amrita Institute; Dr. Jose Chacko Periyapuram, Chief Cardiac Surgeon, Lisie Hospital; Rod Proto, Waste Management Expert (USA); Dr. AKB Pillai, Columbia University; Sunny Kallur, Kottayam Municipal Chairman; George Abraham, Former UN Chief Information Technology Officer and President of Kerala IT Alliance; and Dr. Jacob Eapen, Washington Hospital Healthcare System, California, were the panelists.

FOMAA President John Uralil presided over the conference and General Secretary Benoy Thomas delivered the introductory remarks. Treasurer Shaji Edward proposed the vote of thanks. The conference was received well by the participants, which included students from various campuses, members of the academia and media and a number of politicians.

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