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## APRU ends pandemic hiatus with first physical meeting at NTU Singapore and highlights urgency to collaborate through international university networks

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*The 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Presidents' Meeting 2022 was the first international in-person meeting for many university presidents worldwide.*

The **Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU) Annual Presidents' Meeting 2022** wrapped up in Singapore on July 9th, marking an important milestone as university leaders from at least nine countries gathered together in person as our societies began to open up.

This press release features multimedia. View the full release here:  
<https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20220712005731/en/>



More than 100 presidents, university delegates, higher education leaders, and guests from around the world gathered at the 26th APRU Annual Presidents' Meeting hosted by Nanyang Technological University Singapore, which kicked off on 6 July 2022. Themed "Reconnecting in a Sustainable World", this APM is the first in-person

Hosted by **Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore**, under the theme "Reconnecting in a Sustainable World", the three-day event saw more than 100 presidents, senior university administrators, and private sector representatives in attendance.

Over six sessions, the participants addressed

meeting of APRU since 2019. In the 3-day meeting, speakers and panelists addressed critical sustainability and climate change issues, how to prevent the next pandemic, and the urgent need to collaborate in a post-COVID-19 world. More: [www.apru.org](http://www.apru.org)

critical sustainability and climate change issues, how to prevent the next pandemic, and the

urgent need to collaborate in a post-COVID-19 world suffering from an alarming trend of international rivalry.

The meeting ended with a firm commitment by the university presidents to pool together their resources by combining the formidable scholarship, research, and innovation on our campuses to help shape a cleaner, safer, more equitable, sustainable, and prosperous world to secure the 21<sup>st</sup> century for future generations.

### ***Opening of Annual Presidents' Meeting 2022***

[APRU](#) is a network of 60 leading universities linking the Americas, Asia, and Australasia. APRU has members in very diverse contexts, so it is well-positioned to offer relevant expertise from around the region.

**NTU Singapore President Professor Subra Suresh** said in his opening remarks: "For the first time since 2019, this in-person meeting brings together presidents of some of the world's leading research-intensive universities from around the Pacific Rim. As we gather at this pivotal moment, let us pledge to create a roadmap for compelling action-oriented cooperation and make a positive contribution in a transformed world."

### ***Fireside Chat with Mr. Piyush GUPTA***

**DBS Chief Executive Officer Piyush Gupta** discussed sustainability issues, suggesting that universities and businesses like DBS should explore co-creation and research to combat climate change. They should also partner to train the workforce in the sustainability field by providing grants, for example. "The private sector and the corporate world are serious about putting money behind these big issues. Just the motivation of being able to fund some research helps businesses and universities come together," Mr. Gupta said.

The subsequent meeting's sessions highlighted a wide range of critical concerns. They were held under the themes Responses to Crisis in a Diverse Region; Sustainability and Climate Change; Preventing the Next Pandemic; and Reconnecting: The New Urgency for Collaboration. Panelists representing different regions shared their experiences building resilience against the challenges (See [event rundown](#)).

## ***Responses to Crisis in a Diverse Region***

The biggest challenge to many universities has been the pandemic over the past few years. **Provost and Executive Vice President Kwang-Jae Kim, POSTECH in Pohang, Korea**, explained that POSTECH had taken steps to expand the university into a Metaversity—a combination of the words, Metaverse and University. “We decided to introduce virtual reality work through VR technologies in some undergraduate classes. We provided VR devices to all freshmen students for the lab classes in physics, so students can experience the experimental scenes using the VR devices just as if they were participating in the actual experiment,” Prof. Kim said. “In addition, we provided experimental kits to students. We sent the kits to their homes so the students could do the actual experiments themselves at home by just following the VR directions. And we built a specially designed classroom with a VR-AR augmented reality and mixed reality capabilities.”

**Chancellor Gary S. May, the University of California, Davis in the United States**, identified several substantial commonalities in the responses to various crises we discussed between the different regions while finding some notable differences. “The concept of the Metaversity I thought was very interesting. For one of our panelists, that is inclusive of activities like eSports and campus sharing. Regarding the climate change crisis, we talked about our various activities in the evolution toward carbon neutrality and how we're addressing the UN sustainability goals. Finally, on the aging demographic crisis, we heard about attracting international students to the university and internationalization at home as possible solutions to that particular situation,” Prof. May, said.

“In the spirit of thinking about actionable responses from the APRU community... We've collected a lot of data over the past few years particularly relevant to the pandemic and (we should think about) how can that data be shared for productive and constructive solutions to potential new crises, including perhaps the next pandemic.”

“We all agree that APRU is an important network...(On) the idea of building standards for education, now we have lots of micro-credentials; we have online distance learning and whatnot. Many universities are engaging with all these education techniques, and there is no one standard. Should we have one under the umbrella of APRU? That's a question that (we) probably have to answer.” **Vice-Chancellor Mohd. Hamdi Abd. Shukor, Universiti Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia** added.

## ***Sustainability and Climate Change***

On July 8<sup>th</sup> the panelists discussed advancing the climate change agenda. In a few

On July 6, the panelists discussed advancing the climate change agenda. In a few snapshots taken from the meeting's many insightful exchanges, **President and Vice-Chancellor Joy Johnson, Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada**, zoomed in on universities' moral obligations to protect the vulnerable in surrounding communities. She recalled that 2021 was a devastating year for her province. British Columbia experienced an extreme heat wave where temperatures exceeded 40° C. 619 deaths were attributed to a weather phenomenon known as the "heat dome". Prof. Johnson noted that these deaths occurred among the elderly and the homeless - vulnerable populations. In addition, recently released research suggests that a billion sea creatures were killed due to the heat.

"I do believe that the president's role is to try being a beacon of hope in this time because it does feel a little bit dark...Climate change is very much on our mind, and I believe that universities have a moral obligation to think about our commitments, given that we have the people, the infrastructure, the research, and the engagement capacities," Prof. Johnson added.

For his part, **Executive Vice President, International Affairs, Toshiyuki Kono, Kyushu University in Fukuoka, Japan**, illustrated how universities could continue to lead by example. He described Kyushu University's new campus, explaining how it manages to embrace both its history and its future. The site was already mentioned by Chinese literature in the 3rd Century AD. "We kept the green areas, groundwater, landscape, and historical remains, but this campus is also designed for next-generation technologies with comprehensive research centers," Prof. Kono said. "We have established three priority areas: decarbonization, medicine and health, and environment and food. And specifically, decarbonization is one of the significant research areas we wish to focus on in our cooperation with the APRU network. Last year, we also established the Research Center for Negative Emissions Technologies. Professor Shigenori Fujikawa, one of the star researchers at our university, developed 30 nanometer-thin sheets so that we could collect CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere. He's trying to make social implementation. If it can be implemented properly, you can collect CO<sub>2</sub> everywhere worldwide. He named it a ubiquitous negative emission. The idea is that carbon-neutral is not enough, the time doesn't wait. So we must collect the CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere and make it negative."

"We have been very active in the area of hydrogen research. And this research focuses on fundamental methods of hydrogen production, storage, transport, and utilization...Our main Ito Campus has installed an Ene-Farm energy generation system, contributing to Toyota's 2021 hydrogen fuel vehicle Mirai and its hydrogen station. The campus is the testing ground for hydrogen energy; this is a long-run

project. We are committed to achieving a sustainable energy society by advancing our hydrogen research and education.” Prof. Kono added. “Last but not least, we were privileged to host a [five-week webinar series](#) on sustainability in the framework of APRU. This webinar series focused on the realization of a decarbonized society to combat climate change. It brought together a diverse group of experts and researchers focusing on early career researchers, to exchange ideas and explore potential cross-disciplinary collaborations to develop solutions.”

### ***Preventing the Next Pandemic***

The panelists also investigated what universities can contribute to preventing the next pandemic by addressing issues of global governance, as well as improved public health strategies and the sharing of intellectual property on biomedical discoveries.

The [APRU Presidential Working Group](#) provided an update on how their concerted efforts have played a role in helping APRU members demonstrate global leadership in preventing the next pandemic. According to **President and Vice-Chancellor Santa J. Ono, The University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada**, “the working group is focused on bringing together resources and presenting recommendations for action in the following areas:

- assembling scientific research assets in biomedical technology and therapeutics for APRU’s 60 member universities as a major global resource for responding quickly to the next pandemic;
- implementing strategies for combating the infodemic through science and media literacy and other initiatives, taking into account diverse cultural settings;
- and compiling a handbook on pandemic crisis management in various societies, which record lessons from COVID-19 while looking to future requirements in a world increasingly affected by inequality and climate change.”

**Prof. Rocky S. Tuan, Vice-Chair of APRU and Vice-Chancellor and President of The Chinese University of Hong Kong in Hong Kong, China**, identified social and cultural determinants of public health strategies. Nine APRU member universities looked at more than 90 different sources of studies published in highly reputable journals, such as The Lancet, Nature, PNAS, etc., and studies performed in different parts of the world. “Further analysis shows that resistance to intervention was relatively strong in individualistic societies. Whereas conformism was relatively common in societies high in collectivism and subordination to the powerful others,” Prof. Tuan said. “What is the strategy forward? When it is an endemic disease, we should increase trust

in science and public institutions and develop efficient global epidemic watch and alert systems. We should promote early compliance with interventions through effective communications when it is an epidemic disease. And once you go to post-pandemic, you can talk about post-pandemic public education to increase pandemic awareness and strengthen civic values. These strategies are helpful in all societies. But particularly important in individualistic societies.”

“What should APRU do? I can think of a number of things such as exchanging ideas and information, consulting each other in terms of best practices, enhancing and developing scholarly and research collaborations, and enriching student experience,” Prof. Tuan added.

The group will convene a major international symposium in November 2022 during the APEC Leaders’ Week and APEC CEO Summit week. **President Bundhit Eua-arporn, Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand**, expressed confidence that the forum will help universities across the globe to build international cooperation, develop new knowledge on challenges facing the region and contribute to social and economic advancement.

“This platform will also provide opportunities for participants from all sectors to share their experience in their preparation for handling new challenges, especially during this period of uncertainty, in which mutual collaboration is needed more than ever,” Prof. Eua-arporn said.

### ***Reconnecting: The New Urgency for Collaboration***

Finally, panelists shared their unique experiences and visions of how higher education institutions may work together to address imminent regional and global issues and shape a sustainable future.

“Last year at UQ, we launched our Global Development Impact Plan to coordinate our global development expertise better and help address shared challenges and affect social change. As part of this plan, we articulated our focus on helping to build the global capacity of people and organizations to achieve their sustainable development goals. We believe we can make a difference in agriculture and food sciences,



Quotes delayed at least 20 minutes

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