



Ethnic Xchange Symposium

Going for Growth

Expanding Ethnic Enterprises



Ministry for
**Ethnic
Communities**

Te Tari Mātāwaka

ABOUT THE SYMPOSIUM

Ethnic Xchange 2025 (EX25) continues the Ministry for Ethnic Communities’ commitment to empowering ethnic entrepreneurs, innovators, and businesses to thrive. Building on the success of the Ministry’s inaugural business symposium in 2024, EX25 explores and spotlights Ethnic Communities’ contributions to New Zealand’s economic growth.

The theme for 2025, ‘Going for Growth: Expanding Ethnic Enterprises’, focuses on strengthening global connections through the innovation, talent, and networks of New Zealand’s Ethnic Communities.

EX25 brings ethnic business leaders, entrepreneurs, and innovators together with researchers, government officials, mainstream business representatives, investors, and international delegations. Together, these connections spark collaboration across sectors not only within New Zealand but also with international markets.

More than an event, Ethnic Xchange is a call to action. Unlocking the full potential of Ethnic Communities requires a collective effort, where everyone plays a part in shaping a more connected and competitive New Zealand economy.

Supported by:



SCHEDULE

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| 08:00 | Registration |
| 09:00 | Opening – Ziena Jalil |
| 09:10 | Keynote speech – Prasanna Gai |
| 09:30 | Panel: From red tape to red carpet Hon Nicola Willis, Hon Mark Mitchell, Hon Chris Penk, Moderator: Ziena Jalil |
| 10:30 | Morning break and networking |
| 11:30 | Panel: Global traders and innovators Sam Park, Nga Blanchard, Sunit Prakash, Qaiser Rashid, Moderator: Joshua Tan |
| 12:30 | Lunch break and networking |
| 1:30 | Panel: Global voices, local impact – Diplomacy and diaspora in economic growth Her Excellency Ms Mazita Marzuki – High Commissioner of Malaysia, His Excellency Mr Phan Minh Giang – Ambassador of Viet Nam, Her Excellency Ms Neeta Bhushan – High Commissioner of India, Moderator: Ziena Jalil |
| 2:30 | Presentation: Progress from EX24 Simon Bridges, Kathleen Morrison, Dave Ananth |
| 2:45 | Panel: Breaking barriers – The stories of ethnic women entrepreneurs Dr Angela Lim, Bineeta Nand, Alliv Samson Moderator: Ziena Jalil |
| 3:15 | Afternoon break and networking |
| 3:45 | Breakout sessions: New Zealand as an investment hub <i>Main Room</i> Matthew Prichard, Simon Ansley, Scott Tasker, Vikram Gera, Moderator: Alistair Crozier Beyond ethnic evidence – Unlocking the potential of ethnic businesses <i>Crystal Room 1</i> Amanda Reid, Shamubeel Eaqub, Moderator: Dr Lisa Meehan AI insights – Using AI to power growth <i>Crystal Room 2</i> Knight Hou, Husain Al-Badry, Dr Ming Cheuk, Moderator: Madeline Newman |
| 4:30 | Closing remarks – Mervin Singham |
| 4:45–5:30 | Networking |

*Accurate at time of printing. Subject to change.

SPEAKERS & MODERATORS

Host, MC & Keynote speaker

Mervin Singham

Chief Executive, Ministry for Ethnic Communities

Mervin is a vastly experienced public servant and previously led the Office of Ethnic Affairs. Prior to becoming the new Ministry's first Chief Executive, he was the Executive Director at the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions.



Ziena Jalil

Executive leader

Ziena is an award-winning executive leader, keynote speaker, and emcee with over 20 years' experience spanning diplomacy, business, and public-sector leadership across New Zealand and Asia. A former New Zealand trade commissioner to Singapore, she has held senior regional roles in Hong Kong, Singapore, and India. She is currently Deputy Chief Executive – Strategy and Executive Operations at Hato Hone St John, and an Advisory Board Member of the New Zealand Asia Institute.



Prasanna Gai

Member, Reserve Bank Monetary Policy Committee

Prasanna is Head of the departments of Economics, Accounting & Finance, and Property at the University of Auckland. He serves on the Monetary Policy Committee of the Reserve Bank of New Zealand and the Board of the Financial Markets Authority. Prasanna was educated at the Australian National University and Christ Church, Oxford.



Panel: From red tape to red carpet

Key ministers outline how the Government is backing ethnic entrepreneurs through regulatory reform, investment attraction, and innovation support. Ministers will share actions taken to reduce red tape, improve immigration and skills pipelines, and position ethnic enterprises as drivers of New Zealand's economic growth.

Hon Nicola Willis

Nicola Willis is the Minister of Finance, Minister for Economic Growth, and Minister for Social Investment. Prior to becoming a Member of Parliament in 2018, Nicola held several senior management roles at Fonterra. She served on the boards of Export NZ and policy think-tank. The New Zealand Initiative. Nicola was a senior advisor to Prime Minister Rt Hon. John Key during his first term in government, and prior to that, a researcher for Rt Hon. Bill English. She lives in Wellington with her husband, Duncan and their four children.



Hon Mark Mitchell

Mark Mitchell is the Minister of Corrections, Minister for Emergency Management and Recovery, Minister for Ethnic Communities, Minister of Police, and Minister for Sport and Recreation. He is the Member of Parliament for Whangaparaoa. In 1989, Mark joined the New Zealand Police and was a member of the Dog Section and Armed Offender's Squad. After leaving the Police, Mark relocated overseas and launched an international business career, including the start-up of his own security company.



Hon Chris Penk

Chris Penk is the Minister for Building and Construction, Minister for Land Information, Minister for Small Business and Manufacturing, Minister for Veterans, Associate Minister of Defence, and Associate Minister of Immigration. He is also the local Member of Parliament for the Kaipara ki Mahurangi electorate in Auckland's rural north and northwest.



Ziena Jalil (moderator)

Refer to page 3 for Ziena's bio.

Panel: Global traders and innovators

Ethnic entrepreneurs share how they have scaled internationally through innovating in global trade and by building on their own cultural capital and ethnic professional networks.

Sam Park

Chief Operating Officer, Park Group

Sam is Chief Operating Officer of Park Group, parent company of Kōrure and Kōrure Pets. With expertise in operations and strategic growth, she drives innovation, oversees international expansion, and ensures seamless supply chain integration. Her leadership has positioned Park Group as a leading force in natural health, advancing wellness through sustainably sourced New Zealand supplements.



Nga Blanchard

CEO, NZiFOCUS, Business Partner, PIHMS, ExCo, ANZBC

Nga is a Viet Nam-born entrepreneur who has been based in New Zealand since 2003. She leads NZiFOCUS, representing the Pacific International Hotel Management School (PIHMS) across Southeast Asia, and serves on the ASEAN New Zealand Business Council board. With a background in fashion, education, and international trade, Nga is passionate about empowering future-ready leaders through global partnerships and her upcoming Human Skills Development Program.



Sunit Prakash MNZM

Justice of Peace, Chartered IT Professional New Zealand – Co-founder, New Zealand Centre for Digital Connections with India

Sunit has 30+ years in global IT service management. Sunit champions diaspora led innovation. Sunit also runs the successful webinar series ‘Connecting the Dots’ to foster collaboration between Kiwi-Indian professionals and overseas markets. Sunit and his wife Lalita Kasanji are the first Indians honoured for IT services in New Zealand.



Qaiser Rashid

Managing Director, Gem Training Services Limited

Qaiser Rashid is an entrepreneur, investor, founder, and board director. Over the course of his career, he has worked across a variety of industries, gaining hands-on experience in business development, training, and people leadership. His work is shaped by a practical understanding of how individuals and organisations grow - what helps them thrive, and what holds them back.



Joshua Tan (moderator)

Executive Director, ExportNZ | ManufacturingNZ

Joshua is Executive Director of ExportNZ and ManufacturingNZ, advocating on domestic and international policy issues affecting New Zealand’s exporters and manufacturers. He serves on the NZUS Council, Asia New Zealand Foundation Leadership Network, and New Zealand International Business Forum, contributing to strategic dialogue and global engagement across trade, manufacturing, and international business.



Panel: Global voices, local impact – Diplomacy and diaspora in economic growth

South and Southeast Asian Heads of Mission in New Zealand discuss opportunities for global collaboration, investment trends, and the ways ethnic entrepreneurs can strengthen bilateral economic ties.

Her Excellency Ms Mazita Marzuki High Commissioner of Malaysia

Ms Mazita Marzuki is a senior diplomat with proven leadership and negotiation skills, experienced in driving political, economic, and social initiatives. She is skilled in strategic planning, organisational improvement, and people development. Ms Marzuki is well-connected across ministerial, royal, and business circles, with a strong record of turning challenges into opportunities and advancing national interests through innovation and diplomacy.



His Excellency Mr Phan Minh Giang Ambassador of Viet Nam

Mr Phan Minh Giang commenced his term in New Zealand on 16 April 2025 during the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries, which coincides with the elevation of ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in February 2025. He believes that the Viet Nam-New Zealand Comprehensive Strategic Partnership opens up a new chapter of broader and deeper cooperation between the two countries, thus bringing about more practical benefits to the two peoples.



Her Excellency Ms Neeta Bhushan High Commissioner of India

Ms. Neeta Bhushan joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1994. As a career diplomat, she has served in several countries, including Japan, Bangladesh, Germany, the UAE, and the U.S. She has been serving as the High Commissioner of India to New Zealand since September 2022. In addition, she is accredited as the High Commissioner to Niue, the Cook Islands, Vanuatu, and Samoa.



Ziena Jalil (moderator)

Refer to page 3 for Ziena's bio.

Presentation: Progress from EX24

The heads of business councils and chambers share the highlights of the past year, including new partnerships, opportunities and initiatives that support ethnic businesses and economic growth.

Simon Bridges

CEO, Auckland Business Chamber

Simon is the CEO of the Auckland Business Chamber and Chairperson of the NZ Transport Agency. Simon also holds several positions on corporate boards. Simon is a former National Member of Parliament for Tauranga and served as the Leader of the Opposition, and a senior Cabinet Minister, overseeing Energy and Transport portfolios.



Kathleen Morrison

Chair, ASEAN New Zealand Business Council

Kathleen is the Chair of ASEAN New Zealand Business Council. She is also a commercial and civil litigation partner. She uses her strong commercial acumen to assist a broad range of commercial clients, from high-net-worth individuals to directors, shareholders, and corporates. She has previously acted for various government agencies, and is a legal advisor to a tech innovation hub.



Dave Ananth

President of the NZ Malaysia Business Association

Dave is an Auckland-based tax lawyer with 35+ years' experience, an Honorary Advisor at the Auckland Business Chamber, and President of the NZ Malaysia Business Association. A former magistrate, and an Ernst & Young Malaysia director, he advises on tax, commercial law, and strengthens NZ-ASEAN business and diplomatic ties.



Panel: Breaking barriers – The stories of ethnic women entrepreneurs

Ethnic women entrepreneurs share how they overcame challenges to build successful businesses. The findings of a report highlighting the achievements and resilience of ethnic women entrepreneurs and the barriers they face are revealed.

Dr Angela Lim

CEO and co-founder, Clearhead

Dr Angela is trained as a paediatric doctor. She completed research at Harvard and has more than 15 years at the forefront of using technology to innovate healthcare delivery, including being an early pioneer in using AI to deliver mental health support in 2018. Clearhead is an innovative workplace wellbeing Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) provider that ensures personalised mental health care is accessible to everyone 24/7.



Bineeta Nand

KPMG New Zealand

Bineeta helps businesses stay safe. She leads KPMG's Ethnicity Network, which has a pivotal role in advocating for ethnic representation and inclusion within the corporate world. Through this work, she continues to drive meaningful conversations around diversity of thought, and uses her professional skills and energy to make a difference in our communities.



Alliv Samson

Chief of Staff and Strategy and Co-Founder, Kami

Kami is the leading Kiwi EdTech company transforming classroom collaboration. Used by over 45 million users worldwide, Kami was named one of TIME's 100 Most Influential Companies in 2022. A University of Auckland graduate, Alliv drives global growth and mentors emerging entrepreneurs.



Ziena Jalil (moderator)

Refer to page 3 for Ziena's bio.

Breakout session: Beyond ethnic evidence – Unlocking the potential of ethnic businesses

Discover what the data and evidence tell us about ethnic businesses in Aotearoa New Zealand, including barriers and opportunities they face.

Amanda Reid

Chief Executive Officer, Business and Economic Research Limited (BERL)

Amanda is CEO at BERL, a leading New Zealand economic research consultancy. She specialises in economic analysis, strategic research, and stakeholder engagement, focusing on the Māori economy and labour market. Her research examines barriers and enablers to labour market and business participation, and their impact on inclusion.



Shamubeel Eaquib

Economist, Eaquib & Eaquib, on behalf of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE)

Shamubeel is an author, media commentator and a thought-leading public speaker. He graduated with Honours in Economics from Lincoln University and is also a Chartered Financial Analyst Charterholder. He has over two decades of experience as an economist in Wellington, Melbourne and Auckland in leading international banks and consultancy (ANZ Bank, Goldman Sachs JBWere, New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER), Sense Partners and Simplicity).



Dr Lisa Meehan (moderator)

Director of the New Zealand Policy Research Institute at AUT

Dr Lisa is an applied economist of Chinese and New Zealand European heritage. Her research uses large-scale data to explore diversity, labour markets, and equity, to generate insights to inform policy and practice.



Breakout session: New Zealand as an investment hub

Industry insiders discuss New Zealand’s unique value proposition to international investors, highlighting the country’s economic strengths, innovation ecosystem, and strategic advantages.

Matthew Prichard

Board Chair, KPMG

Matt is the Board Chair at KPMG and World Vision NZ, and has 30+ years’ experience leading and delivering advisory and audit work in New Zealand and overseas. Married to Leanne and a father of five, Matt’s passionate about championing Māori sector engagement, and believes in using professional skills and energy to make a difference in our communities.



Simon Ansley

Investment Director, Invest NZ

Simon is the Director of the Greenfield team at Invest NZ, helping large greenfield and expansion projects access capital. Simon and his teams at Invest NZ / New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (NZTE) have helped more than 500 New Zealand companies or projects successfully raise capital.



Scott Tasker

Chief Customer Officer, Auckland Airport

Scott leads the Customer, Marketing and Aeronautical Commercial Divisions. He initially joined Auckland Airport in 2015 as an air services Business Development Manager. Scott has been a member of the Leadership Team since 2017, initially as General Manager Aeronautical Commercial, and from 2022 as Chief Customer Officer.



Vikram Gera

Chairman, India Oceania Business Association (IOBA)

Vikram is the Chairman at India Oceania Business Association (IOBA) and advises business houses for investments in inbound and outbound. He has successfully handled various domestic as well as multinational clients (including the Fortune 500 companies) in the areas of taxation and other regulatory matters.



Alistair Crozier (moderator)

Executive Director, New Zealand China Council

Alistair has served as Executive Director of the New Zealand China Council since March 2022. He previously worked in China, Viet Nam and Papua New Guinea as a New Zealand diplomat. Alistair has also worked as the Christchurch Mayor’s Chief of Staff and for the Asia New Zealand Foundation.



Breakout session: AI insights - Using AI to power growth

Explore how ethnic businesses are harnessing the power of AI to drive innovation, growth, and global competitiveness.

Knight Hou

CEO and co-founder, Relab

Knight co-founded Relab in 2017, scaling it from a two-person startup to serving nearly 40% of New Zealand's real estate market. His customer-obsessed approach to solving fragmented property data earned Relab the 2021 Property Council New Zealand Innovation Award. Knight also lectures at the University of Auckland.



Husain Al-Badry

Managing Partner, Seen Ventures

Husain is the co-founder of Seen Ventures, an innovation studio on a mission to help shape a future where everyone can win in the age of AI. He has over two decades of experience in building software and using disruptive tech to innovate business models locally and globally.



Ming Cheuk

Chief Technical Officer and co-founder, ElementX

Ming Cheuk is the Chief Technical Officer and co-founder of ElementX. From applying AI in his PhD research to guiding enterprises today, Ming bridges technical depth to real-world impact with secure, scalable AI solutions.



Madeline Newman (moderator)

Executive Director, AI Forum New Zealand / Te Kahui Atamai Iahiko o Aotearoa

Madeline joined the AI Forum New Zealand as Executive Director three years ago. She has extensive experience in strategy, transformational change and helping people to see the potential that innovative technologies bring.



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Auckland University of Technology (AUT)

is one of the world's best modern universities. Home to 27,000 students, it is New Zealand's most diverse and inclusive university. AUT's 60 research centres, institutes and networks deliver leading research – from artificial intelligence to robotics, and ecology to public health. As a contemporary university, AUT is connected to an extraordinary range of organisations worldwide, sharing expertise and resources, collaborating on ground-breaking research, and connecting students with industry leaders and employers. Visit www.aut.ac.nz for more information.



KPMG New Zealand

provides comprehensive audit, tax and business advisory services to private and publicly listed companies, government, public sector organisations, and not-for-profits. KPMG blends international reach with local expertise, leveraging technology and innovation to help clients navigate today's dynamic business environment. KPMG is purpose-driven, focusing on fuelling the prosperity of New Zealand for the benefit of all New Zealanders. They're passionate about helping businesses succeed, the public sector to achieve more, and communities to grow. Find out more at www.kpmg.com/nz.



For almost 170 years, the Auckland Business Chamber

has been helping businesses succeed. Part of a global network of over 13,000 Chambers of Commerce, the Chamber connects, supports, and advocates for businesses across the region. Through employment programmes, international trade services, networking events, and policy influence, the Chamber works to make it easier to do business in Auckland. Learn more about the chamber at www.aucklandchamber.co.nz.



The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

acts in the world to build a safer, more prosperous, and more sustainable future for New Zealanders. We engage with countries and with regional and multilateral organisations to shape outcomes that reflect New Zealand's values and advance New Zealand's enduring national interests. We remove or reduce barriers to trade and investment, secure and defend access to overseas markets, and support New Zealand exporters. Visit www.mfat.govt.nz for more information.



THANK YOU

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to join us at Ethnic Xchange. We would like to specifically acknowledge those who travelled to be here today, from throughout New Zealand and from overseas.

Thank you to all our speakers for sharing your expertise, advice and stories, and to our Master of Ceremonies and moderators for guiding these important critical conversations. Warm appreciation to our sponsors Xero, KPMG, AUT, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ministry for Women, and Auckland Business Chamber.

Let's ignite a bold, opportunity-rich business ecosystem where Ethnic Communities continue to benefit New Zealand's economic future!

Join the conversation →

Make some noise and tell the world what you thought about Ethnic Xchange, why it was important for you to attend, what connections you made and what you learnt today. Tag us on social media, use the hashtag #EX25 and let us know what you thought about the symposium by taking our short survey.



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