

experience singapore

A newsletter of the
Singapore Cooperation Programme

April - June 2012
ISSUE 43

**STAND UP,
REACH OUT**
THE RISE OF YOUTH
VOLUNTEERISM IN
SINGAPORE

**SINGAPORE
CALLING**
WHY MORE
NGOS ARE
HEADING HERE

KEEPERS OF THE PAST

A LEGACY OF
HISTORY IN
CLAN HOUSES

館樂劇部
外粵曲教唱班
胡慧芳



新會縣

321

岡州互助會

百國東道廣立業思

建共蘇合羣愛國



Dear readers,

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this new issue of *Experience Singapore*. It contains a variety of articles ranging from what's new and upcoming to something more traditional, as well as how Singapore is reaching out as a responsible global citizen.

Our opening story examines one aspect of how Singapore is reinventing itself. Already known as the 'Garden City', Singapore has recently unveiled plans for a 'City in a Garden'. Beyond the 101-hectare Gardens by the Bay in the downtown Marina area which are due to open next month, the northern, eastern and western regions of Singapore have been earmarked for new Destination Parks designed based on Singaporeans' feedback. Find out more about these Destination Parks in the **Scene SG** page.

For all its bustling modernity, Singapore still treasures its history. Join us as we take **A Peek Into The Past** to explore Singapore's iconic Chinese Clan houses. In addition, learn more about Singapore's appeal as a regional hub for NGOs in **Home Base: Singapore**, and also what inspires an increasing number of Singapore's youths to go **Beyond Borders** in their volunteer work.

In **Joining Hands**, we outline Singapore's assistance efforts after Thailand suffered its worst flooding in 50 years in late 2011. In addition, in the Lower Mekong, Singapore is working with the United States to assist the subregion in areas such as public health, education and economic development. You can read more on this partnership in our features on **Reflections**, where we will also feature details of how Singapore is sharing its developmental experience with Myanmar through technical assistance.

My team and I hope you will enjoy this issue of *Experience Singapore*. Please keep your very interesting letters and emails coming, and do let us know if we can make any improvements.

Sudesh Maniar

Director
Public Affairs Directorate
Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore

KEEP IN TOUCH!

Share with us your memories, photos and views of your experience in Singapore under the Singapore Cooperation Programme. Email us at mfa@mfa.gov.sg. Three writers stand a chance to win an exclusive goodie bag with colourful publications on Singapore!

Our congratulations to the three lucky writers whose letters are featured in this issue — you have each won an exclusive goodie bag with souvenirs of Singapore Airshow 2012!

Experience Singapore is a publication of the Public Affairs and Technical Cooperation Directorates of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore. The Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) is administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore, and is aimed at sharing Singapore's developmental experience with other developing countries.

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QUOTES FROM READERS' LETTERS

"I always look forward to this magazine as it has lots of information about Singapore which makes me a bit nostalgic. I would always treasure my experience in beautiful Singapore and the hospitality of the people. Thank you from the bottom of my heart."

Maria Helen V. Aragon
Philippines

"I have many fond memories of my stay in Singapore in March 2007. The skillful presentation of the training programme by the Tourism Management Institute of Singapore needs to be applauded. The content and subject matter is still relevant today in an ever-expanding tourism world. What caught my attention was the discipline, precision, the cleanliness and the drive of the Singapore nation to be leaders in their field."

John Carolissen
South Africa

"I receive on a regular basis a copy of *Experience Singapore* for which I am very thankful to you as it enables me to keep in touch with the developments happening in your wonderful country."

Janick Jaunbocus
Mauritius



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SINGAPORE

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COLOUR ME GREEN

Singapore, The Garden City, is about to get even greener.

As part of ongoing efforts to improve the living environment, three "Destination Parks" will be developed in the Northern, Eastern and Western regions of the island.

The parks — to be developed within three to five years — will offer recreational features not usually found in public parks. These include giant slides and adventure playgrounds. The public will have a major role in shaping these parks, with the National Parks Board planning to seek views through roadshows and focus-group sessions.

While plans for the three parks are being firmed up, Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park re-opened on March 17 after more than two years of redevelopment. It now has a meander-



Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park

Photo: Ealbert Ho

ing river with landscaped banks and gentle slopes.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, speaking at the reopening of the park said: "We're building more parks like Bishan Park, Destination Parks in other parts of Singapore... whether you're downtown, in the Marina Bay which is very beautiful or whether you're in the neighbourhood... we'll be able to have nature, we'll have active, beautiful and clean waters."

T4 TO TAKE OFF

The Budget Terminal will make way for a brand new Terminal 4 (T4) at Singapore's Changi Airport.

The six-year-old no-frills Budget Terminal will close on Sept 25. Work on T4 will start in 2013 and is expected to be completed by 2017.

T4 will offer travellers even better retail and dining options and will

be designed to enable more efficient passenger processing. It is expected to handle 16 million passengers a year — more than twice the seven million passengers the current Budget Terminal can. It will cater to continued air traffic growth at Changi Airport, which is a major air hub. In 2011, a record 46.5 million passengers made use of Changi Airport.

TALKING POINT

"Singapore is like New York in so many ways. Both are crossroads of commerce and home to many cultures. Both are energetic, restless, and forward-looking, constantly in motion, and constantly rebuilding themselves."

— New York City mayor Micheal Bloomberg, who accepted the 2012 Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize on March 21 in Singapore. The World City Prize, given out every two years and named after Singapore's First Prime Minister, aims to discover "impactful and innovative" solutions that can be "scaled and replicated" elsewhere.



Photo: Corbis

MOST COMPETITIVE IN ASIA



Singapore is Asia's most competitive city and third in the world, after economic and financial hubs New York and London, according to a new index published by the Economist Intelligence Unit.

The inaugural Global City Competitiveness Index defines competitiveness as the "demonstrated ability to attract capital, business, talent and visitors". It measures cities across eight categories of competitiveness and 31 individual indicators. The categories include economic strength, financial maturity, global appeal and physical capital.

Singapore rated highly in categories of physical capital, financial maturity, institutional effectiveness and global appeal.

In response to the ranking, Mr Leo Yip, chairman of the Singapore Economic Development Board said: "Our strong attributes of trust, knowledge, connectivity and liveability have underpinned our ability to attract investments, business, talent and ideas."

SINGAPORE BY NUMBERS

13.2 million

The record-breaking number of people who visited Singapore in 2011.

117,700

The number of new workers who joined the job market in 2011.

S\$6.5 million

The amount of money to be disbursed to 26 arts companies under the National Arts Council's Major Grant scheme this year; a 26 per cent increase from the previous year.

During his medical trip to Zambia, Dr Chua Yao Dong attended to patients at the community clinic in the village of Chitungulu.



BEYOND BORDERS

EFFORTS TO INSTIL THE SPIRIT OF VOLUNTEERISM IN SINGAPORE YOUTHS HAVE SEEN SUCCESS. *EXPERIENCE SINGAPORE* FINDS OUT WHAT INSPIRES THESE YOUNG VOLUNTEERS. WORDS BY FAIROZA MANSOR

It wasn't that long ago that Dr Chua Yao Dong went on his first medical mission trip — to Zambia in southern Africa — but the 27 year-old has already lined up similar trips to China and India for May and August this year.

"The experience was eye-opening and immensely humbling," said Dr Chua of his four-day trip last October. The project was organised and carried out by Global Clinic, a Singapore based group of medical and dental volunteers who pay their own way to provide healthcare in the developing countries.

The 12-man team comprising doctors, dental surgeons and a medical aide hauled medications, surgical instruments, emergency resuscitation equipment and an ultrasound machine to the village of Chitungulu, 230 km from Lusaka, the capital of Zambia.

The village had a community clinic — staffed by a government doctor — which served the district of Lundazi where about 11,000 people lived. At this clinic, Dr Chua

and the team attended to 1,000 patients and performed about 300 dental procedures as well as 28 minor surgeries.

"I appreciated how the villagers were content despite having so little material possessions," said Dr Chua, who graduated from the National University of Singapore (NUS) Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine in 2009.

"I was also inspired by the humility and spirit of service of the local village doctor and his wife. He was a city doctor who had been posted to Chitungulu, and he hadn't taken any leave for years. His wife assists him, and she is nurse, midwife, and nutritionist to the villagers. She even picked up microscopy skills to better contribute to the clinic."

Like Dr Chua, more and more Singaporean youths are committed to reaching out to the less fortunate and less privileged beyond Singapore's shores. The National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre conducts surveys on volunteerism biennially, and its 2010 survey showed that more youths in Singapore have gone into volunteer

work, with the highest proportion of volunteers — 36 per cent — in the 15 to 24 age bracket. In 2008, the proportion of volunteers in this age group was 23 per cent.

This increase is a result of the government's schemes and programmes aimed at fostering the giving spirit in youths, according to Singapore's Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports Vivian Balakrishnan.

The Youth Expedition Project (YEP), administered by the National Youth Council and funded by the People's Association, is one such programme. Since its inception in 2000, the YEP has helped to fund volunteer trips to ASEAN countries, as well as to India and China, for 15 to 35 year-olds. More than 21,000 youths have been involved with the YEP over the past decade.

One of Singapore's top schools, Raffles Institution (RI), for example, was given funding of \$300,000 from April 2011 to March this year to carry out volunteer trips. More than 200 students from Year 5 and 6 applied for the 120 available places in the



Raffles Institution student Samantha Cheong (first in the back row), conducted science classes in Cambodia as part of the Youth Expedition Project.

YEP, said the RI's Assistant Department Head of Community Education, Mr Lee Chee Keong.

Student Samantha Cheong did not only obtain a coveted place in the programme to Phnom Penh, Cambodia in November 2011, but was also appointed one of the Team Expedition Leaders. Now in Year 6, the 18 year old RI Students' Council member and her schoolmates worked closely with Riverkids Organisation — which helps children and families in danger of abuse and trafficking — to carry out community surveys in four main slum locations. The RI students also conducted science classes in English through translators who were mostly Cambodian undergraduates.

"Being involved in the YEP has helped me to be more mature in my thoughts," said Ms Cheong, the youngest of three siblings in her family.

"I learnt to see beyond grades and materialistic possessions. But the biggest lesson I have learnt is the value of loving others who are different from me, and of friendship beyond cultural boundaries."

Like Dr Chua, there's also no turning back for Ms Cheong. She is already planning to return to Cambodia for two weeks this December.

Medicine undergraduate Melody Long was 17 when she first participated in a humanitarian mission to Cambodia. Since then, the 24 year-old

has returned to Cambodia twice, and has also volunteered in Khao Lak and Chiang Mai in Thailand, as well as in Batam, Indonesia.

In 2009, Ms Long went on a three-week medical mission trip to Oddanchatram in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu despite her parents' initial concern. The trip was a project by Linking Hands, a voluntary welfare organisation that links volunteers for medical missions with relevant overseas organisations.

At Oddanchatram, Ms Long, who will graduate from the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine this year, assisted in various medical procedures including the delivering of babies.

"It was fascinating to see how medicine is being practised in very resource-strapped places and also very inspiring to see how the doctors tirelessly care for patients and their



LEFT: Melody Long (far left), was inspired by the dedication of the local pediatricians working in the neonatal ICU at a hospital in Oddanchatram, India. ABOVE: In her capacity as a medical student, Ms Long also assisted in the delivering of babies.

families," said Ms Long. Like Dr Chua and Ms Cheong, she is undaunted by the language barrier in the countries she volunteers in.

Besides the YEP, Global Clinic and Linking Hands, there are other also avenues for youths to volunteer abroad, the Singapore International Foundation (SIF) among them. Since its establishment in 1991, the SIF, a non-profit organisation, has programmes for volunteering in overseas communities in areas including healthcare, education, the environment, arts and culture. Through its Singapore International Volunteers programme, it has supported more than 1,600 Singaporeans who have volunteered overseas.

In January last year, Singapore hosted the 21st International Association for Volunteer Effort Youth Volunteer Conference. Addressing it, Mr Teo Ser Luck, Singapore's Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Community Development, Youth and Sports, said, "The global youth presents a significant force for good, and youth volunteerism can be part of the solution to many problems faced by the world."

And in their own way, Singaporean youths are certainly playing their part.



IN SINGAPORE

Intricate calligraphy etched into the multi-layered wooden beams supporting the roof of the Ying Fo Fui Kun or the Hakka Locality Clan Association.



A PEEK INTO THE PAST



Located at Telok Ayer Street and established in 1822, the Ying Fo Fui Kun is the first Hakka clan association in Singapore. Its front façade is influenced by traditional Hakka walled villages.

Amidst Singapore's skyscrapers, Chinese clan houses with their well-preserved old-world interiors serve as time capsules of the country's early days. These welfare organisations emerged in the 19th century when migrants from China flocked to Singapore, hoping to find work. In those days, these associations addressed the welfare of the migrants from the various regions of China — namely those of Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese and Hakka descent.

Today, there are still 200 or so clan associations, with most of them clustered in the neighbourhood of Chinatown. These have become valuable research centres and spaces that preserve Chinese history and culture. Registered as members of the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations, these associations continue to play host to traditional festivals and cultural events, and offer authentic cultural experiences to bystanders and tourists alike.



An ornamental moulding of a flower vase, located at the main entrance of the Ying Fo Fui Kun, symbolises peace.



This neo-classical building is the Kong Chow Wui Koon or the Cantonese Locality Clan Association. Located at New Bridge Road, the association is where many aspiring martial arts students convene to pick up traditional martial arts such as Shaolin Kung Fu.



The Ee Hoe Hean Club, located at Bukit Pasoh Road, used to be an exclusive men-only club and was a meeting place for significant political movements. It was gazetted as a Heritage Site by the National Heritage Board of Singapore in 1995.



Kung Fu master at the Kong Chow Wui Koon, Mr Leong Kwok Khuen, is also the fourth-generation disciple of famous Wushu master Wong Fei Hong.



The Kong Chow Wui Koon houses an impressive collection of lion heads used for traditional lion dances.



A public gallery called the Pioneers' Memorial Hall is located on the ground floor of the Ee Hoe Hean Club. It chronicles the life and contributions of Chinese pioneers in Singapore, including prominent businessman and philanthropist Tan Kah Kee.

FLOOD-GATES OF FRIENDSHIP

Singapore was quick to respond when Thailand appealed for assistance in the aftermath of the nation's worst flooding in 50 years.

WORDS BY FAIROZA MANSOR

In July 2011, Thailand was hit by unusually heavy seasonal monsoon rains which triggered severe flooding across the country. About one third of Thailand's 76 provinces were affected, with farmland destroyed and tens of thousands of people forced to evacuate. By November, more than 500 people were reported to have lost their lives, making the floods Thailand's biggest natural disaster since the 2004 tsunami when more than 5,000 people perished and over 7,000 were displaced.

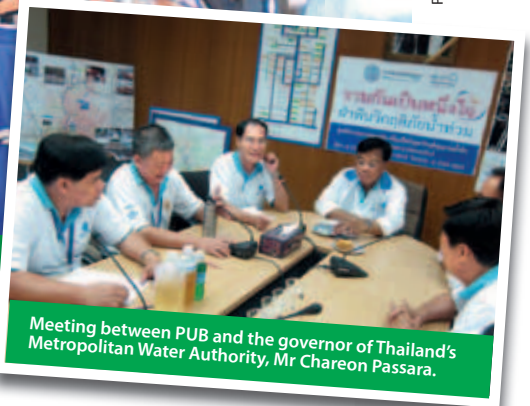
In Bangkok, the central business, retail and residential districts remained dry but some industrial parks north of the capital were submerged by floodwater. Several major roads had to be closed and there was a shortage of drinking water in communities isolated by the floodwaters.

RESPONDING QUICKLY

The situation prompted the country's Metropolitan Water Authority (MWA) to write to the Singapore Government last November to seek advice, support and assistance in treating water which could have been contaminated. Singapore's national water agency Public Utilities Board (PUB) responded quickly,



The Water Safety Plan Workshop was held in Bangkok by PUB, Singapore's national water agency, from 22 to 24 Feb 2012.



Meeting between PUB and the governor of Thailand's Metropolitan Water Authority, Mr Chareon Passara.

Photos courtesy of PUB

assembling and dispatching a team within 48 hours. The four-member PUB team was in Bangkok from 10 to 12 November 2011 to carry out an assessment of the type of assistance needed.

The team brought along test kits to facilitate the testing of water at the Bangkhen Water Treatment Plant which supplies two-thirds of Bangkok's water requirements. They also brought back samples of the water for further testing at Singapore's Water Research & Analytical Laboratory.

Mr Lee Mun Fong, Deputy Director, Water Supply (Plants) Department at PUB, who was part of the team, told *Experience Singapore*: "The key officers in MWA saw the benefits of having a rigorous water safety plan and have also followed up to form a committee to develop their own water safety plan further."

PUB also delivered 48 on-line turbidity sensors and two on-line pH sensors to the MWA on 24 November 2011. The turbidity sensors monitor the clarity of the water in the Bangkhen Water Treatment Plant, while pH sensors measure the degree of acidity and alkalinity of the water to ensure good quality control.

MWA had also requested that PUB

conduct a Water Safety Plan Workshop for its various departments to highlight the need for a water safety plan. The three-day workshop was held in Bangkok from 22 to 24 February 2012 and attended by about 250 MWA staff.

At the workshop, PUB also shared its operational experience in implementing Singapore's water safety plan.

OTHER RELIEF RENDERED

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT

- US\$100,000 seed money to kickstart Singapore Red Cross' South East Asia Floods Appeal
- US\$115,000 worth of relief supplies
- 45 motorised boats, sandbags, bed sheets and blankets

SINGAPORE RED CROSS

- S\$100,000 presented to Thai Red Cross in Bangkok on 12 Oct 2011
- 18 inflatable electric boats
- 960 cartons of bottled water

HOME BASE: SINGAPORE

EXPERIENCE SINGAPORE FINDS OUT WHY SINGAPORE IS EMERGING AS AN NGO HUB.

WORDS BY **GENE KHOR**

A strategic location, stable economy and strong talent pool are some of the reasons why a number of international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have made Singapore their base.

These were key factors in the country's favour when NGO Earth Hour was evaluating a shift for its official headquarters from Sydney, Australia where it had been based since 2007. Earth Hour eventually moved to Singapore in early 2012.

"Moving here makes total sense geographically. [Singapore is] great for communications... and it's got great people who can work for us," Earth Hour executive director and co-founder Andy Ridley said at a press conference in February to announce the move.

According to the Economic

Development Board (EDB), more than 130 NGOs currently either have their headquarters or a branch office in Singapore — a number that has jumped almost four-fold since 2005. These include environmental and humanitarian groups, industry associations as well as philanthropic foundations and corporate social responsibility organisations, such as Habitat for Humanity International and the Asian Venture Philanthropy Network from the United States and Singapore respectively.

Among the earliest environmental groups to set up base in Singapore was World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) from Switzerland, in 2006. In the coming months, two others — BirdLife International and Fauna & Flora International from the United Kingdom — will also be opening regional offices here.

"Singapore represents one of the strongest Asian economies whose regional role is of increasing importance," Dr Isabelle Louis, Director of WWF's Asia-Pacific Programme, had said when WWF came to Singapore.

"The growing interest in environmental conservation and corporate social responsibility, and the opportunities for more strategic multinational and regional approaches for wider transformational actions, are some of the reasons why we are here."

This growth in NGOs can at least partly be attributed to the resources offered by the International Organisations Programme Office (IOPO). Set up in 2007, it is a multi-agency initiative led by the EDB that provides assistance and information to organisations looking to establish a presence in Singapore. Said Mr Kenneth Tan, EDB's Assistant Managing Director, when the IOPO was launched: "People are eager to give back to society and they are keen to partner and contribute to reputable international organisations. This is where we feel Singapore can be an attractive base for IOs in Asia."

LIGHTS OUT!

Parts of Orchard Road, Singapore's internationally-known shopping strip, went dark for an hour from 8.30 pm on 31 March 2012 as the city-state joined 149 cities around the world to celebrate Earth Hour.

About 1,500 Earth Hour ambassadors outside shopping mall Ngee Ann City Plaza lit LED candle lights to form the message "60+ SINGAPORE" to encourage people to go beyond having non-essential lights off for more than 60 minutes. Other local landmarks, such as the Marina Bay Sands hotel, also showed their support by turning off non-essential lights.



Photo: WWF SG

TIES THAT BIND



United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (above, right) with Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs and for Law K Shanmugam in Washington, DC. Both countries signed two Memorandums of Understanding during Minister Shanmugam's visit to the American capital as part of his introductory visit to the US as Foreign Minister.

"Very consequential" is how United States (US) Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has described the relationship between the US and Singapore. And both countries are now leveraging on this relationship to help developing countries help themselves.

Under a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), Singapore and the US will send their development experts to the Lower Mekong region to provide training in areas such as public health, information communications technology, sustainable development, English language training, education and economic development.

"They will team up to give health workers the tools they need to fight infectious diseases, to help improve trade capacity, work to boost tourism, [and] share best practices with teachers, humanitarian and disaster relief workers, police and firefighters," said Mrs Clinton, who signed the MOU on the Singapore-US Third Country Training Programme with Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs and for Law K Shanmugam on 1 February, 2012 in Washington, DC.

Mr Shanmugam, who was

appointed Foreign Minister in May 2011, was in the American capital as part of his introductory visit to the US. He was warmly welcomed by Mrs Clinton at a meeting where both officials agreed to broaden and deepen current areas of bilateral cooperation in an already excellent and long-standing bilateral relationship.

Mr Shanmugam and Mrs Clinton also signed a second MOU on the Establishment of an Institutionalised Strategic Dialogue. The agreement

"We believe that the US engagement in Asia has been a pillar, the foundation, for peace and prosperity in the region. And therefore, we welcome that."

Singapore Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Law K Shanmugam

calls for senior officials from both sides to meet annually to review various issues affecting the two countries.

"When you look at the (US-Singapore) free trade agreement and our military-to-military Strategic Framework Agreement, those are two very strong pillars of our relationship. By adding this formal declaration of a Strategic Partnership Dialogue, we are tying it all together," Mrs Clinton said.

"We look to Singapore not only on a bilateral level, but also regionally and globally. And we often are very interested in what Singapore has to say about political issues as well as strategic considerations," she added.

To further reaffirm ties that are, in the words of Mr Shanmugam, "very strong", "broad-based", and "deep", the leaders signed a Joint Vision Statement on New Political Framework, which outlines the two countries' shared beliefs, goals and mutual commitment to security.

"The United States-Singapore strategic partnership will be rooted in enhanced political and economic dialogue aimed at meaningful cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region....

"We look forward to continued cooperation on economic, political, military, environment, security, education and cultural exchanges that benefit our countries, the Asia-Pacific region and globally," the Statement said.

Noting that the US has played "a very significant role" in Asia, Mr Shanmugam said: "We believe that the US engagement in Asia has been a pillar, the foundation, for peace and prosperity in the region. And therefore, we welcome that."

FURTHER BOOST FOR SINGAPORE-MYANMAR RELATIONS



Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs and for Law K Shanmugam (right), and his Myanmar counterpart, U Wunna Maung Lwin, signing a Memorandum of Understanding in Singapore on 30 Jan 2012. Looking on are Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (behind, right), and Myanmar President U Thein Sein.

Singapore is sharing its developmental experiences with Myanmar, a long-time friend, as the country prepares to open up politically and economically.

It will provide Myanmar with technical assistance in three broad clusters — economic development, human resource development and public administration — because Singapore believes that this is a good way to support the Myanmar government in line with its priorities .

To underline Singapore's commitment, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the Singapore-Myanmar Technical Cooperation Programme was signed on 30 January 2012 by Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs and for Law Mr K Shanmugam, and his Myanmar counterpart U Wunna Maung Lwin during the State Visit to Singapore by Myanmar's President U Thein Sein.

To support the Myanmar government's economic plans and reforms, training courses to be offered in the

Economic Development cluster will include Economic Planning and Development, Trade Facilitation and a Basic Law Programme.

To help efforts to build a base of skilled workers, Singapore will offer Technical and Vocation Education Training, English language and Information Technology in the Human Resource Development cluster.

In the Public Administration cluster, customised study visits to Singapore will enable senior Myanmar officials to learn about Singapore's systems and policies.

Minister Shanmugam told the Singapore Parliament in February 2012 that Singapore wants to work with Myanmar to ensure successful outcomes under its 2014 ASEAN Chairmanship. Some training courses and relevant briefings to Myanmar officials to support the country's preparations for its ASEAN Chairmanship in 2014

will also be offered. He expressed hope that Singapore would be able "to develop more links with Myanmar as the country opens up economically and politically".

Singapore and Myanmar, which established diplomatic relations 46 years ago, enjoy good bilateral relations. President Thein Sein met Singapore leaders, including President Tony Tan and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong during his State Visit in January 2012. The leaders noted that Singapore and Myanmar have excellent ties at both government-to-government and people-to-people levels.

Apart from technical assistance, Singapore also contributed US\$5 million worth of humanitarian assistance to Myanmar in the wake of the devastating Cyclone Nargis in 2008, which included sending a Singapore medical team and building a hospital, tube-wells and shelters.

THE WAY TO MORE FREE TRADE

THE FINER POINTS OF A FUNCTIONING TRADE SYSTEM WERE STUDIED DURING A COURSE ORGANISED BY THE SINGAPORE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT.



Photo: Wilson Pang

Visiting Qian Hu Fish Farm, one of the world's biggest ornamental fish exporters.

To understand how businesses can benefit from efficient trade facilitation, 14 course participants visited the Qian Hu Fish Farm in the western part of Singapore. They were in Singapore from 30 April to 4 May 2012 to attend the course on "Overcoming Challenges in Implementing Trade Facilitation Reforms: Strategies and Lessons for the Commonwealth Countries".

At the farm, they learnt how Qian Hu became one of the world's largest ornamental fish exporters. The company currently exports over 500 species and varieties of ornamental fish to more than 65 countries.

"It'd be good for our companies to learn how [Qian Hu] has managed to make do with Singapore's limited resources," said Mr Diamond Chikhasu, Principal Trade Officer in the Malawi Ministry of Industry and Trade. "It would be beneficial for our businesses to understand what economic and trade links were made, and how they've been maintained."

The participants learnt how governments can simplify processes, improve security and lower the costs of complying with international trade regulations and procedures. The

course examined good practices in public and private sector collaboration, provided practical knowledge on successful trade facilitation reforms, and identified implementation bottlenecks.

"What's impressive is that there's a mutual understanding between the private sector and [Singapore] customs," said Mr Adrian Njau from Tanzania, who is a Trade Economist in the

East African Business Council. "Sometimes you only need to change one or two things about the procedures, like introducing or taking away areas of documentation [to streamline processes] and it doesn't have to cost a lot of money either," said Mr Njau.

For Mr Thammita Arachchige Lalitha Weerasinghe, Deputy Director in the Sri Lanka Customs, the course served to reinforce the changes already made in his country.

"We hope to emulate the Singapore model [of trade facilitation] by bringing more of our processes online in the future. It would reduce administration time, paperwork, lower the chances of forgery, and make it easier for both us and our trade partners."

The course was organised under the Singapore-Commonwealth Third Country Training Programme, which is a platform for Singapore to work with the Commonwealth Secretariat to provide technical assistance to Commonwealth developing countries.

During the course, Commonwealth Secretariat officials also shared with participants their experiences in helping other Commonwealth member countries on trade facilitation reforms.

SCP ROUNDUP

2 APR TO 22 JUN 2012

25 mid-level and senior Vietnamese officials attended the 13th "International English for Administrators" course conducted by the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. During their three-month stay, the Vietnamese officials had a chance to understand various aspects of Singapore more deeply through visits to our heritage sites (such as Kampung Glam, Little India and Chinatown), and government agencies. They also learnt more about the Singapore community by visiting non-governmental organisations such as the Red Cross Society, and attending briefings on Singapore's charity and community self-help efforts.

16 TO 19 APR 2012

26 officials from South Asia and Southeast Asia attended a four-day seminar organised by the Singapore Civil Service College (CSC) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on "Results Management for Public Sector Excellence — Disaster Risk Management". At this seminar, the participants learnt about results management, performance monitoring and reporting. Participants learned from the experiences and best practices of Singapore and the ADB. The seminar also covered strategies and initiatives on preparing integrated disaster risk plans that incorporate results-based public sector management. Participants also learned to apply performance management techniques to enhance human resource strategies, and benefitted from in-depth discussions on development results indicators.

23 TO 27 APR 2012

Public housing is more than just about building structures for people to live in. This is something that the Singapore Housing & Development Board (HDB) is keenly aware of, with over 50 years of experience in building public housing. HDB shared this wealth of knowledge with 15 representatives from the Mongolian Housing and Financial Corporation, the Governor's Office of Ulaanbaatar City, and the Ministry of Roads, Transportation, Construction and Urban Development in a customised five-day Public Housing training course. Topics covered in the course included the planning and development of HDB estates, creating sustainable living environments, and maintaining community relations. The delegation also visited the Punggol New Town and HDB Building Research Centre.

For more information on the Singapore Cooperation Programme, please visit www.scp.gov.sg