

PM Visits Vietnam

SINGAPORE'S Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong visited Vietnam in September for the 10th anniversary of the Vietnam-Singapore Industrial Park in Binh Duong province. The trip was at the invitation of Vietnamese PM Nguyen Tan Dung.

During his visit, PM Lee signed a commemorative plaque and witnessed the signing of a commitment letter to launch the second phase of the industrial park.

Since the signing of the Framework Agreement on Vietnam-Singapore Connectivity last December, the friendly relations between the two countries have been demonstrated in many fields, especially in economics and trade.

During his meeting with PM Dung, PM Lee noted that while there were already some joint projects in port and power generation, there

was potential for Singapore companies to be involved in more infrastructure development projects, which were now a priority area for Vietnam as its economy expands.

He said: "What's important is not just one or two projects but a continuing momentum of activities to carry our relationship forward as your economy grows and as it integrates into the Southeast Asian and Asian economies."

PM Dung expressed Vietnam's hopes to strengthen cooperation with Singapore by supporting Singaporean enterprises to invest in such fields as energy, insurance and telecommunications in the country.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong met Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung at the Reunification Palace in Ho Chi Minh City.



Foreign Minister Visits Cuba and Panama



L-R: Director of PSA Ng Chee Keong, Panama Ambassador to Singapore H.E. Eduardo Real and Minister for Foreign Affairs George Yeo at Miraflores Locks, Panama Canal.

IT was a packed September schedule for Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr George Yeo, in two interesting locations in far-flung Central America.

First, in Havana, Cuba, he called on a few Ministers including Minister of Economy and Planning Jose Luis Rodriguez and Minister of Foreign Trade Raul de la Nuez, as well as members of the Cuban business community. They had a good exchange of views on economic development. Mr Yeo discussed with Minister of Public Health Jose Ramon Balaguer on possible healthcare cooperation. Mr Yeo also had bilateral meetings with his counterparts at the 14th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

After Cuba, Mr Yeo made an official visit to

Panama and met the President of the Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Agriculture Diego Eleta. They discussed further bilateral economic cooperation within the framework of the Panama-Singapore Free Trade Agreement, as well as areas for Singapore to share its experience, such as education and research & development in biotechnology. Mr Yeo also had good discussions with Ministers including First Vice President and Foreign Minister Samuel Lewis Navarro at a dinner hosted by the ethnic Chinese community in Panama.

Separately, Mr Yeo had met Panamanian President Martin Torrijos at the 14th NAM Summit. He welcomed the proposed visit to Singapore by President Torrijos next year.

DPM's Wife Visits Laos

SINGAPORE has been extending more assistance to Laos in the field of rehabilitation.

On August 31, students of the National Rehabilitation Centre (NRC) in Vientiane, Laos, received a special visitor – Mrs Lalitha Jayakumar, wife of Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister, Prof S Jayakumar.

A medical doctor herself, Mrs Jayakumar was shown around the centre to understand its operations. She was on an official visit at the invitation of the Lao Standing DPM, Mr Somsavat Lengsavad.

The NRC, established under the Lao Ministry of Public Health in 1964, was originally set up to produce prosthetic limbs for war veterans and victims. Currently, it houses a Special School for the blind and deaf, a cerebral and spinal neuron unit, a prosthetic and orthotic workshop and a wheelchair workshop.

Under the Singapore International Foundation's Singapore Volunteers Overseas Programme, a Specialist (Rehabilitation) Team has been working with the NRC since October 2004 to upgrade the skills of its health professionals in the treatment of patients with neurological and spinal injuries.

Accompanied by Mrs Bounkonmany Lengsavad, Mrs Jayakumar was hosted to a warm reception by the NRC Director, Dr Thongchanh Thepsomphou, with his staff and 70 students.

At the prosthetic and orthotic workshop, they were briefed on the process of fabricating devices such as arm, leg and knee attachments, as well as corsets and orthopaedic shoes.

The visitors also witnessed how deaf and blind students at the Special School follow the general education curriculum using sign language and Braille respectively.

The centre's visually impaired students, showed how active they could be, putting on a performance of Lao and English songs, including current English hits such as 'Take Me To Your Heart', which were received enthusiastically by the audience.

Concluding her visit, Mrs Jayakumar presented some sports equipment and stationery to the students – tokens of appreciation for her visit and of Singapore's continued support.



Mrs Jayakumar presenting sports equipment and stationery for the students to Dr Thongchanh Thepsomphou, Director of the National Rehabilitation Centre.

SCP COURSES FROM JAN TO MAR 2007

Course	Aeronautical English – Meeting ICAO Requirements (SCPTA/SIDSTEC)
When	8 January – 26 January 2007
Closing	18 December 2006
Agency	Singapore Aviation Academy
Course	Aircraft Accident Investigation – Organisation Factors and Major Issues (SCPTA/SIDSTEC)
When	5 February – 9 February 2007
Closing	18 December 2006
Agency	Singapore Aviation Academy
Course	Airport Certification (SCPTA/SIDSTEC)
When	5 March – 9 March 2007
Closing	15 January 2007
Agency	Singapore Aviation Academy

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Goodwill Tourists

TO many people, spending your days labouring at some remote village may seem far from the ideal vacation.

Yet, there is a rising trend that sees more Singaporeans taking time off from work to volunteer overseas. Some even quit well-paying, cushy jobs to do so.

The Singapore International Foundation (SIF) has reported a ten-fold rise in numbers of people joining its Singapore Volunteers Overseas Programme since the tsunami disaster that hit Asia in December 2004.

The SIF was established in 1991 to enhance Singapore's globalisation efforts. It is a not-for-profit organisation that plays a unique role in actively engaging Singaporeans in international volunteerism. SIF forges people-to-people links, and helps to shape national identity and a sense of what it means to be Singaporean in a borderless world.

In the past, the foundation dispatched about 700 professionals abroad over a period of 13 years. In the last financial year alone, more than 360 professionals went on volunteer assignments overseas. Another 420 will go by the end of this financial year.

Unlike youth expeditions which are school projects, these stints take a longer period and are meant solely for professionals who would like to use up their vacation time or who had quit their jobs.

Traditionally, these stints have been harder to commit to, but since late 2004 when the SIF started to arrange short-haul trips (up to three weeks) that could be completed during vacations, more Singaporean professionals have ventured

out of their comfort zones to volunteer overseas.

These "goodwill tourists" pay anything between \$1,500 and \$2,000 for airfares, lodging and meals, just like they would for a "normal" holiday, usually in the remote areas of China, Nepal, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and India. Once at their destinations, volunteers travel mostly on foot, have simple meals and stay at modest lodgings sometimes without basic sanitary facilities.

Instead of sightseeing, shopping and eating, they volunteer technical knowledge, soft skills and labour to contribute to making life better, in areas as diverse as early childhood and maternal education, information technology and language training, nutrition, public hygiene, community healthcare and rehabilitation of disadvantaged children and the disabled.

Typically, these volunteers are professionals holding white-collar jobs, ranging from teachers to businessmen in their late 20s to 50s.

"It's not a sacrifice. It's ten times more fulfilling than my holiday in Tuscany last year," said Ms Shirley Lim, a general manager for a trade exhibition company who spent 15 of the 24 days of her annual leave last year teaching in a school in Nepal.

Civil servant Khwaja Ismail Sudderuddin, 64, has been on week-long projects to Afghanistan twice in the past 18 months. He was part of a United Nations effort to teach project management to Afghan civil servants. "There has been virtually no development in the country for the past 25 years, which is why the officials are now eager to learn and catch up," he said.



Mercy Relief (an independent charitable non-governmental humanitarian organisation) volunteers sorting out the books to be sent to Lebanon.