

experiencesingapore

Singapore Garden Festival

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Peter Cheok, Sales and Marketing Director for Far East Flora Pte Ltd, with the winning design 'Blowin in the Wind'.

PM Visits Middle East

WHEN Qatar opened its doors to Asia at the 15th Asian Games in the Qatari capital of Doha last December, it offered warm hospitality from a beautiful country.

For Singapore, bilateral ties with Qatar and the Middle East had been warming for some time. Most recently, just prior to the Asian Games in November, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong visited Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

While in Qatar, Mr Lee met with the Amir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Heir Apparent Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, Prime Minister Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, other members of the Qatari royal family and Cabinet, as well as leading Qatari businessmen.

Mr Lee also witnessed the signing of a Double Taxation Agreement and a Memorandum of Understanding on setting

up a Regional Training Centre in Doha for the Asia-Middle East Dialogue (AMED). AMED, inaugurated in Singapore in 2005, is an ongoing multi-dimensional process which aims to bring the countries of the two regions closer together.

In Saudi Arabia, Mr Lee called on King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud at the Royal Court in Riyadh and Crown Prince Sultan Abdul Aziz Al-Saud. The leaders noted the strengthening of bilateral relations in recent years, including the high-level visits made by Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong in February 2005 and by Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew in March 2006.

Mr Lee also thanked the Crown Prince for Saudi Arabia's support in launching negotiations for the Singapore-Gulf Cooperation Council Free Trade Agreement. He also met with leading Saudi business leaders and members of the Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Mr Lee was accompanied by Minister for Foreign Affairs George Yeo, Minister for the Environment and Water Resources Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister of State (Finance and Transport) Lim Hwee Hua, Minister of State (Trade and Industry) Lee Yi Shyan, government officials and a business delegation.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, seen here chatting with King Abdullah via an interpreter, told the King that he hoped the Singapore business delegation would find fruitful projects for mutual cooperation.



A Common Language for Vietnam

THE English language forms a shared bond between Singapore and Vietnam. This was reaffirmed when Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo visited Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam's capital, last December.

Accompanied by grassroots leaders from Aljunied, his political ward in Singapore, Mr Yeo attended a "Vietnam-Singapore Friendship Nite" reception, jointly organised by the Singapore Consulate-General in Hanoi and the Union of Friendship Organisations of Ho Chi Minh City. The event celebrated the growing friendship between the two countries.

Mr Yeo addressed over 300 guests, including members of the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) alumni of the English language course taught at the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Over 200 senior Vietnamese government officials



Foreign Minister George Yeo meeting with Le Hoang Quan, Chairman, People's Committee, Ho Chi Minh City, on 18 December 2006.

have attended the course so far.

Singapore is one of Vietnam's top investors and trading partners. Mr Yeo's speech highlighted the Framework Agreement on Singapore-Vietnam Connectivity signed two years ago to boost bilateral cooperation. Ho Chi Minh City is host to over 500

Singapore companies, and an estimated 2,500 Singaporeans live and work there. Some 4,000 Vietnamese students are studying in Singapore.

During the visit, Mr Yeo also met Mr Le Hoang Quan, Chairman, People's Committee and Mayor of Ho Chi Minh City.



Lt-Gen Ng Yat Chung (far left) speaking to the team, which included five technicians from ST Aerospace, at Changi Air Base. The team spent two weeks helping Indonesian authorities in the search for the missing Adam Air jetliner.

Singapore Helps in Search for Indonesian Airliner

WHEN Adam Air Flight KI-574 disappeared from radar screens in bad weather on 1 January 2007, it had 96 passengers, including three Americans, and a crew of six on board. It went missing halfway through its routine flight

from Surabaya on the central island of Java to Manado on Sulawesi in Indonesia.

Indonesia's National Search and Rescue Agency deployed nearly 3,000 soldiers, police and civilians to comb Sulawesi's dense

jungles, while sonar-equipped ships and aircraft scoured the surrounding seas. An intensive search of the island failed to uncover any sign of wreckage, leaving search teams and investigators guessing about the jet's fate.

Subsequently, a US National Transportation Safety Board team arrived along with representatives from Boeing and the Federal Aviation Administration, and a US Navy oceanographic survey ship 'Mary Sears', to aid in the search.

Singapore provided aerial surveys and deployed four sets of equipment to detect the aircraft's underwater beacon locator and track down its "black box" flight recorder, as well as six navy personnel to help operate the sensitive equipment.

Some headway was made only a week later, when Indonesian navy ships using sonar devices found large metal objects at three locations on the seabed at depths of 500 to 1,800 metres in waters southwest off Mamuju. Shortly after, a fisherman snagged part of the plane's tailfin in his nets just 300 metres offshore and eight kilometres south of the port of Pare-Pare.

With the combined efforts of the international search party, the black boxes of Flight KI-574 were eventually located by USNS Mary Sears on the ocean floor near Pare-Pare.



Head of the SRCs relief team, Mr Kek Siew Kok (right), filling food and emergency supplies before going to Johor.

Singapore NGOs Help Johor Floods

IN December 2006, Johor saw the harshest rains in nearly 40 years. Massive flooding occurred in many Malaysian states, with low-lying areas of Johor the worst-hit.

At the height of the flood, more than 100,000 people in Johor were placed at relief centres while several towns and villages were cut off from contact with the outside world. At least 15 people were killed, and the damage caused was estimated to be over RM100 million.

To alleviate the situation, two Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) from Singapore – the Singapore Red Cross and Mercy Relief – extended aid worth

\$45,000 to the flood victims in Johor. A meeting between representatives from Singapore's Red Cross and the Malaysian Red Crescent Society identified the most urgently-required items.

The Singapore Red Cross sent two teams, one to Kota Tinggi and the other to Muar. The teams donated about RM30,000 (\$13,000) worth of blankets, baby food and diapers. The team that went to Muar brought with them a hovercraft – a vehicle able to travel over land and sea – which they offered to lend to the Malaysian Red Crescent Society.

Mercy Relief's team of five volunteers and one staff member donated about 3,000 hygiene packs and 100 water filters, as well as drinking water, food, infant milk and clothes to 500 families.

SCP COURSES FROM MAY TO JUN 2007

Course	Port Management and Operations (SCPTA/SIDSTEC)
When	22 May – 5 June 2007
Closing	10 April 2007
Agency	PSA Corporation LTD
Course	Environmental Protection and Health Management (SCPTA/SIDSTEC)
When	29 May – 12 June 2007
Closing	17 April 2007
Agency	Singapore Environment Institute
Course	Dispute Resolution Systems: Policies, Structures and Strategies (SCPTA/SIDSTEC)
When	6 – 14 June 2007
Closing	25 April 2007
Agency	Singapore Mediation Centre
Course	Performance Management (SCPTA/SIDSTEC)
When	6 – 15 June 2007
Closing	25 April 2007
Agency	Civil Service College International
Course	Civil Aviation Management Programme (SPCTA)
When	11 – 22 June 2007
Closing	30 April 2007
Agency	Singapore Aviation Academy

These Training Awards are part of the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) of technical assistance to developing countries. For more information on application procedures and terms of awards, contact the Technical Cooperation Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at tel: (65) 98199353 or fax: (65) 64793357. You can also visit our website at <http://www.scp.gov.sg>.

Singapore-World Bank Workshop for China Technical and Vocational Education and Training

EIGHTY-NINE Singapore Cooperation Programme participants from Beijing, Guangdong, Liaoning and Shandong attended the Singapore-World Bank Workshop for China Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

The senior officials and educationists from China were here to study Singapore's vocational education model. "In this aspect,

Singapore has much experience to offer China," Ms Wu Kin Bing, Lead Education Specialist at the World Bank, told reporters during the Opening Ceremony.

The Workshop in Singapore was conducted from 10 – 19 January 2007 and was jointly sponsored by Singapore and the World Bank. The Workshop was also supported by agencies such

as Ministry of Education, Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP), Institute of Technical Education (ITE), International Enterprise Singapore (IES) and National Institute of Education (NIE).

The programme of the Workshop included panel discussions with World Bank officials and guest speakers, site visits to educational institutions such as NYP, ITE, Ngee Ann Polytechnic and Singapore Polytechnic, technical industry visits, service industry visits such as Raffles Training Centre and Academy and SPA-Lon International Professional Academy, as well as networking sessions.

At the Closing Ceremony of the Workshop, the Chinese delegation leader Mr Liu Weihua of the Ministry of Finance expressed his thanks, saying, "Singapore's education policies are good and successful," and that "the governments of Singapore and China, together with the World Bank, can work together for greater success in education."

Ms Wu Kin Bing, Lead Education Specialist, East Asia Human Development Department, World Bank, in conversation with Mr Simon Wong, Director, Northeast Asia, MFA.



Preparing for Life-Long Learning

LEARNING is about opening new vistas. Two teachers, from the Maldives and Sri Lanka experienced that recently when they visited Singapore to learn more about learning.

Mrs Moomina Abdullah, supervisor and head of accounting at the Majeediyya School in the Maldives, and Mrs Priyanka Wickramasekara Rajapaksa, a teacher at the G/Revatha National School in Sri Lanka, attended a training course on enhancing pedagogy skills at Singapore's National Institute of Education (NIE).

Organised as part of the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP), the two-week course aims to provide participants with hands-on experience to enhance their teaching practice. Participants also visited schools in Singapore for classroom observation.

As this was their first trip to Singapore, the two teachers had only mild impressions that the country was 'well-developed', 'multi-racial' and 'technologically-advanced'. However during their stay here, they certainly discovered that the city was all that and more.

As Moomina said: "It's so peaceful here. I see people from different races living in harmony and having mutual respect for one another." Added Priyanka: "I heard that you have a good education system, but I had no idea that it was so strong! Besides the solid school curriculum and facilities, the trainers



Participants of the SCP course on Enhancing Pedagogy Skills Moomina Abdullah and Priyanka Wickramasekara Rajapaksa at the National Institute of Education.

at our course were extremely knowledgeable and well-organised."

The course emphasised student-centred lessons upheld by the concept: "Teach Less, Learn More", which allows students to have more group projects and discussions while teachers facilitate the learning process.

Moomina found most interesting the module on cooperative learning. To establish a supportive learning environment, different strategies were introduced to motivate different types of learners. Students get to play different

roles such as that of the 'Wise Owl' (for more brain work), 'Time Keeper' (to guide the project) and 'Huggy Bear' (to motivate others).

Priyanka especially liked the module on developing creativity in the learning environment. "Creativity is not a luxury to the initiated, but rather, it thrives in resource-challenged environments. Taking Singapore for instance, though it has no natural resources, its people have somehow managed to make the best use of what it has. Back in India, students have the most basic educational facilities – a desk, a chair and a blackboard. Nevertheless, I am now determined to teach with whatever little we have through the use of creative means."

Both of them were thrilled with the visits to St. Stephen's Junior School and Juying Secondary School. Recalled Priyanka: "I was impressed with how the teachers here provide cross-subject references. We witnessed a Physical Education lesson where the teacher related the physical activities to Science, offering nuggets of information on friction and the importance of breathing and heartbeat. It reminds me to always substantiate what I teach with real-life examples."

Moomina, who holds dual roles of supervisor and department head at her school, said: "Prior to this course, I was considering dropping my teaching role to concentrate on the administrative duties of a school supervisor. After experiencing such interesting pedagogy skills, I've changed my mind. I can't wait to get back to my students and apply what I've learnt!"

SINGAPORE AND SWEDISH SEAFARING



Swedish Ship Gotheborg docked in Singapore. The Swedish Ship Gotheborg set sail last year and made port calls in Spain, South Africa and Australia, among other places.

Back when people thought that ships were the fastest transport, the original Gotheborg ship set sail from the West to the Orient almost three centuries ago. At the start of this year, a replica of this Swedish seacraft docked once again in the safe waters of Singapore's harbour, bearing testimony to its strategic location along a key trading route in Asia.

Gotheborg III arrived at the Harbourfront in Singapore on 30 December 2006 from Hong Kong for a fortnight's stopover. As part of the Sweden-Singapore exchange programme, the public was invited to tour the ship and

experience a bit of history.

Four Singaporeans went further – they literally put their hands on deck for the ship's Hong Kong-Singapore journey. Two navy cadets, a research officer from the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research and a Singapore Management University business student joined the international crew of 80 for this journey since early December.

The original Gotheborg was built in March 1743 in Sweden. A sailing ship carrying passengers and goods that could defend herself against pirates, she traveled from Europe to China and back, following the popular spice

routes during that period of sea trade. After a two-year voyage, the ship encountered an accident and sank near the coastal waters of her homeport Gothenburg.

Research by marine archaeologists revealed that the replica was built over 10 years at a cost of S\$50 million. On 2 October 2005, Gotheborg III left Gothenburg to retrace the original vessel's voyage, including stopping at significant little red dots like Singapore on the world map.

More information about this journey is available on websites such as: gotheborg.wordpress.com/ and www.gotheborg.com/project/

The Swedish Ship Gotheborg crews putting the cannon in place after it fired an eight cannon salute as the ship berthed near Vivo City Promenade.



MODERN HISTORY: OLD FAÇADE, NEW LIFE



The National Museum today. Little of its exterior facade has changed, save for a fresh coat of paint and a newly restored dome.

On 8 December 2006, the National Museum of Singapore lifted its veil to the public after three years of refurbishment and reinvention.

At 119 years old, Singapore's oldest museum has a rich history dating back to 1887. Designed to be a "people's museum" and still living up to this promise, it constantly explores varied ways of presenting history to redefine the conventional museum experience.

THE FACELIFT

Blending the original elegant neo-classical design with modern extensions of concrete, glass and metal, the new development has more than doubled the capacity of the old building, expanding its gross floor area from 8,000 to 18,375 square metres, making it the biggest museum in Singapore.

One key architectural feature is the Glass Passage, which offers a spectacular view of the



Preview of the National Museum, interior and exterior.

old dome from within the museum. This link bridge, designed by Singapore architect Mok Wei Wei, is the only modern addition to the old building allowed by the Urban Redevelopment Authority. The glass structure allows visitors to walk from the main National Museum building to its new modern extension while taking in the beauty of the outdoors seen through the glass.

The museum now also houses world-class facilities including a 247-seat auditorium and a 10,000 sq m exhibition gallery.

BENEATH THE FAÇADE

Multimedia facilities now provide a new lease of life to the National Museum and the stories it presents. An "intelligent" audio-visual guide called The Companion has been specially developed for the Singapore History Gallery.

This Gallery juxtaposes popular history and anecdotal history to present different points of view in two paths. The first path follows historical accounts of major events and characters in Singapore's history, while the personal path tells it through the eyes of the man on the street. As visitors enter the gallery, they can choose to explore either path, guided along by different sets of multimedia content, to gain fresh perspectives on Singapore's history over 700 years.

The museum has four new Singapore Living Galleries to celebrate Singapore's multi-racial society:

1. The Film Gallery traces the emergence of local films and Chinese opera in Singapore. Artifacts include antique projectors, cinema tickets, exquisite Chinese opera costumes and hand puppets.
2. The Fashion Gallery explores the changing identities of Singaporean women through the notions of beauty and modesty. Traditional outfits from yesteryear, such as the samfoo and sarong kebaya, can be found here, together with antique sewing machines and other artifacts.
3. The Food Gallery explores the lives of Singaporeans from the 1950s to 1970s through depictions of popular dishes sold by street hawkers.
4. The Photography Gallery looks at how the family unit in Singapore has evolved over the past 100 years through family photos taken in the early 20th century.

SINGAPORE'S SOUL

The National Museum has consciously engaged Singaporeans and local creative talents during the development of its exhibitions.

For instance, auditions for *Sejarah Singapura* – a short film about Singapore's ancient founding by Sang Nila Utama, a prince of Sumatra – received an overwhelming response, with entire families coming forward to try for different roles in the film. In all, 450 people, mostly amateurs, became a part of this portrayal of Singapore's early history.

In a new presentation showcased in



Some of the paintings on display at the Maria Theresia: Mother Empress of Habsburg, Austria, exhibition at the National Museum.



Mr William Guy Farquhar Atkins, managing director of Jo Bird & Company is the great great great grandson of Major-General William Farquhar, the first British resident and commandant of Singapore.



Drawing inspiration from the legends of Fort Canning, Californian master street painter Kurt Wenner breathed life into his work, Iskandar, on a 4.6m square canvas at the National Museum. His painting has a 3D effect when viewed from a certain perspective.



The revamped National Museum of Singapore officially opened in December 06.

the Film Gallery, Singaporean filmmaker Royston Tan was invited to examine early films (mostly Malay) made in Singapore and to inject his creative interpretation. He was also commissioned to make a short film on Sin Sai Hong, the oldest Hokkien opera troupe in Singapore for the Museum's Opening Festival.

The Museum also commissioned five Singaporean artists, including Matthew Ngui and Han Sai Por, to create installations and sculptures for display on the Museum's premises. Eleven significant national treasures and several never-before-displayed artifacts went on show in the galleries.

These include the painting of colonial governor Frank Swettenham by British artist John Singer Sargent; the funeral hearse made for wealthy Chinese philanthropist Tan Jiak Kim in 1917; the gold mace presented to Singapore in recognition of its status as a city in 1953; and a very rare letter dated 1823

hand-written by Sir Stamford Raffles, founder of modern Singapore.

OPENING FESTIVITIES

With 'Wellspring' as the curatorial theme, the Opening Festival held from 2 to 31 December brought in world-class acts and artistes to the Museum for indoor performances and spectacular outdoor installations and shows.

The opening act, Hydromania by the UK's Avanti Display, animated the Museum's building and grounds with a dance of water and lights. The line-up of international artistes included dancers from the US group Project Bandaloo, which performed breathtaking moves while suspended from the Museum's glass ceiling, and Thailand's Pichet Klunchun which reinterpreted the traditional Khon dance, abandoning masks and costumes.

Acts by Singapore's best talents included the world premiere of Divine Soap by Cake Theatrical Productions, an original play offering

a comedic view of bangsawan, a traditional Malay opera. Performances by 93-year-old opera great Phan Wait Hong provided a rare treat for fans of Chinese opera.

For four weeks, visitors were also treated to a feast of programmes including free film screenings and live performances specially designed for young and old.

Mr Michael Koh, Chief Executive Officer of Singapore's National Heritage Board, summed up the museum's vision: "Museums are no longer merely repositories of art and artifacts. History doesn't have to come in old, dusty photo frames or as manuscripts that are yellow and brittle with age. The stories of time can be told through thematic topics and presented in a contemporary manner that reaches out to all. The National Museum presents history and oral history accounts in a lively way that will stimulate new ways of understanding our rich culture and identity."

COVER STORY

A City



in Bloom

“Always remember the beauty of the garden, for there is peace.”
– Author unknown.

Since independence, Singapore’s reputation as a Garden City has stemmed from having tree-lined roads and mushrooming public parks that make up the country’s urban foliage.

Far from being a whim of nature, Singapore’s luxuriant quality of life is the result of a dedicated greening programme. The then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew identified a “green” Singapore as a key competitive factor in attracting foreign investments to the country. He launched the Tree Planting Campaign in 1963, and shortly after in 1976, formed the Parks and Recreation Department (now known as the National Parks Board) under the Ministry of National Development to realise this vision.

Forty years and numerous accolades later, the National Parks Board (NParks) has progressed onto an improved vision – to create a “City in a Garden”. Instead of just adding greenery to the city, the Board now envisions the whole country as one tropical garden within which urban infrastructure is nestled, with greenery as a distinctive feature of the environment. Cultivating an appreciation for greenery, mobilizing wider support and public participation are key to this process.

SINGAPORE GARDEN FESTIVAL

The inaugural Singapore Garden Festival (SGF) budded with these aims in mind, and fulfils an important role in this vision through its celebration of gardening and horticultural excellence.



Henry Steed, who has worked in Singapore for 24 years, made headlines with his Philosopher’s Seat creation at the inaugural Singapore Garden Festival. It won him a Gold Medal and Award for Best Landscape Garden. His design consisted of a tropical garden set at the edge of a marshland and hidden amid the ruins of an abandoned jetty.

The Festival is a biennial event positioned to be amongst the top flower and garden shows on the international calendar. SGF is the first show to bring together top international award-winning landscape and garden designers, florists and horticulturists. Singapore’s geographic location makes the Festival an ideal platform

to showcase horticultural and gardening products and services from the northern and southern hemispheres, as well as from Asia and New World nations.

Held from 16 – 25 December 2006, the festival hosted sub-events such as the Singapore Orchid Show 2006. The Singapore Garden

Orchids Galore

Singapore's national flower – the orchid – was celebrated in a big way at the inaugural Singapore Garden Festival in December 2006.

The Singapore Orchid Show 2006 was jointly organised by the Orchid Society of Southeast Asia (OSSEA) and the National Parks Board (NParks). The Show featured close to 40 orchid landscape garden displays from Singapore and eight other countries – Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, China, Japan, Taiwan and Korea.

Occupying 3,000 sqm on Level 4 of Suntec Convention Centre, this was the largest Orchid Show ever staged in Singapore. Some 22,000 foliage plants formed a backdrop to 4,000 cut orchids and 8,000 orchid plants. A tremendous diversity of orchids in different colours and varieties was on display, ranging from miniatures suitable for growing in tight spaces to giant vandas from Thailand with flowers 20cm across.

The highlight of the Show was the orchid competition. This year OSSEA handed out 42 trophies and Heritage Challenge Cups. The Cups are handed down from past winners over the years, each with a story to tell. For example, the Governor's Cup, dating from the days of Governor Sir Shenton Thomas, is one of the few pre-war cups from the 1930s, while the HH Sultan of Johore's Perpetual Trophy is one of the Society's most coveted trophies awarded to amateur orchid growers. The President's Challenge Cup was awarded to the best plant in the Orchid Show.

The Orchid Show saw a fierce contest this year, as show participants ranged from individual orchid enthusiasts to hobby groups, national foundations, commercial nurseries, breeders and growers. Seven schools (one primary and six secondary) participated, a new feature of the Show this year.

The competition was judged by a team of distinguished experts from 14 countries, including members of the World Orchid Conference Trust. The World Orchid Conference (WOC) gathered in Singapore to hold their annual WOC Trustees Meeting and this is the first time the WOC Trustees judged at an orchid show outside the WOC.

The Show also included educational activities to foster better public understanding of the world of orchids, a display of VIP Orchids from the National Orchid Garden and landscapes designed by Singapore schools.

It was announced at the event that Singapore will host the 20th World Orchid Conference in 2011.



Three "Best of Show" awards were presented at the inaugural Singapore Garden Festival. In the fantasy gardens category, the team from Far East Flora took the top prize with its depiction of destroyed forests and deformed greenery under a giant dome. Called "Blowin' in the Wind", it drove home the conservation message. The design received the Gold Award and Best of Show at the Singapore Garden Festival 2006.

Festival took up 2.3 hectares in Suntec International Convention & Exhibition Centre and attracted 200,000 local and international visitors.

The festival featured over 30 garden and floral displays, including 19 show gardens and 14 floral displays specially created for Singapore by award-winning designers from world-renowned shows such as the Chelsea Flower Show (United Kingdom), the Philadelphia Flower Show (USA), Floriade (Netherlands) and the Melbourne International Flower & Garden Show.

Over 150,000 tropical and temperate plants were used for the displays, including blooms and special plants, trees and orchids never seen before in Singapore.

The SGF was warmly welcomed by visitors and trade participants. Local players had the opportunity to witness the trends, styles and standards of top-notch exhibitors.

Singapore-based lawyer Fong Wei Kurk said: "The SGF was very professionally run and the exhibits were just



The Chelsea Pensioners' Garden celebrates peace 60 years after World War II and was modeled after an English country pub, depicting dreams of home by soldiers at war. Tropical plants, roses and vegetables, sourced from nurseries in Singapore, provided a reinterpretation of an English country garden.

American designer William Troy Taylor, whose creation Home for the Holidays was awarded a Silver in the Fantasy Garden category, said: "This Festival is the best collection of international designs I have ever seen – the widest range of designs and ideas at one shot."

NParks is stepping up efforts to boost Singapore's international standing as a centre of horticultural excellence and to make the joys and rewards of gardening accessible to everyone. It hopes the Festival will further reinforce Singapore's reputation as a City in a Garden to the world, together with other key initiatives such as the iconic Gardens by the Bay, three major public gardens being built right on the waterfront in the new downtown.

Australian designer Jim Fogarty, whose garden One Country received a Gold and the Royal Horticultural Society's Royal Horticultural Excellence award, said: "Competing on the world stage at an event that is now part of the international gardening calendar has been a huge experience for the international designers at the show. Singapore has been a great host and has set the benchmark for garden shows around the world."

beautiful. Space is such a premium in Singapore, especially greenery space, so the bold step to resist cramming the space with stuff, thereby underscoring the need for Singaporeans to set aside space for greenery and leisure pursuits really speaks volumes with its subtle message."

Pensioner's Garden, which won a Silver award. Visitors to the show cast more than 13,500 votes for their favourite gardens over the 10-day event. Dowle's garden received the highest proportion of 33% of votes.

CREAM OF THE CROP

The Best of Show in the landscape gardens category was awarded to Singapore-based designer Henry Steed with his creation The Philosopher's Seat, which also won a gold medal. This display consisted mainly of plants from Singapore nurseries and portrayed a garden of contemplation, with the surroundings offering a sense of remoteness.

Blowin' in the Wind, named after Bob Dylan's classic song by local florist Far East Flora, won a gold medal in the fantasy garden category with its stark message on conservation. The exhibit took the form of a seven-metre-tall black dome depicting a mutated Earth. Based on the theme of a polluted forest, the display contained glass globes inside which educated visitors on conservation and the effects of pollution. The concept was the effort of an eight-man design team and cost \$100,000 to build.

The exhibit which won the hearts of visitors was a quaint English garden by British gardener Julian Dowle named The Chelsea



Husband and wife team Joby and Carolyn Blackman from Australia with their entry for Singapore's inaugural garden festival.

Inter-Faith Dialogue in a Globalised World

By Lee Hsien Loong



Inter-faith dialogue is an important way for people of different religions to engage one another, and build mutual trust and understanding. The roots of such dialogue can be traced back to the late 19th century when the World Parliament of Religions was held in the US. The inter-faith movement has gathered momentum since then, but in recent years it has become increasingly important and relevant.

Globalisation has connected us all together more closely than ever before. As religious communities and as nations, our futures are inextricably linked. Along with globalisation has come the worldwide movement of people. All over the world people of different religions live together, in mixed societies. The map of the world cannot be colour-coded based on Christian, Muslim or Hindu identity, but each part of the world is now marbled with the colours and textures of the whole. These trends have made religious relations a pressing issue in many countries.

Some people are not comfortable with the idea of inter-faith dialogue and interaction. This is understandable. Different religions may preach similar moral standards and values, but there are very real and distinct differences between the faiths. Furthermore, as religion is a highly personal and spiritual matter, evoking the deepest responses and convictions of a person, these perceived differences can become very emotional and hard to bridge.

But in today's world, we cannot afford to be ignorant of one another, or to have enmities between different faiths. Extremist groups are seizing every advantage to sow distrust and hatred in our communities, especially between Muslims and non-Muslims. They are perverting and abusing religion to radicalise attitudes, justify violence and recruit new members. To root out the stereotypes and prejudices that form the faultlines in a multi-religious society, it is crucial to have a process of dialogue and engagement. Such dialogue is not aimed at achieving agreement, but at building relationship. When we get to know one another, we not only appreciate how others in different religious communities encounter the divine, but also enhance our understanding of our own religions. In the process, we will widen the common ground which we all share together.

This is why the Community Engagement Programme (CEP) was launched in 2006. Under the CEP, a National Steering Committee on Racial and Religious Harmony was established for religious leaders to come together, strengthen their bonds of friendship and deepen mutual trust and

understanding. I urge all religious leaders to support these activities. Such linkages should indeed be built now when conditions are tranquil, and relations are not under stress. Then in times of crises, we will have a strong and resilient network to hold our society together.

All the major faiths of the world are present in Singapore. We have different gods, different holy books and patron saints. The rituals governing birth, marriage and death will always remain different. Yet Singapore is neither a Christian country, nor a Buddhist country, nor a Muslim country nor a Hindu country. Instead we are a secular country, where churches, mosques, synagogues and temples are located next to one another, where Christians, Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and other faiths have to live side by side, and where all enjoy equal rights under the law, and in real life. In an inter-faith event like this, we can come together to celebrate our differences and share a meal with vegetarian, kosher and halal food on the table.

This is a testimony of the strong support for inter-faith cooperation which we have nurtured over the years. It is also a unique and precious achievement. In many countries where people of different faiths live together, religious tensions are commonplace, and inequality is taken for granted. In a troubled world, we have made ourselves an oasis where we can live in peace and harmony together. What we have achieved, very few others have done. We must treasure this and do our best to keep it this way.

Preserving the trust and understanding among our different religious communities requires a spirit of give and take. Every religious group will be protected and assured of fair treatment, but no group should press its claims too hard to the exclusion of the others. This is the accommodation that we have come to accept in Singapore. Singaporeans of different faiths have learnt to trust one another, and to accommodate each other's different customs, traditions and ways of life. We must continue with this pragmatic and responsible approach, and work together as partners for a common cause. Then we can keep our society cohesive, and keep Singapore special and harmonious for many more years to come.

Extracted from a speech by Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the Inter-Faith Dinner Reception on 2 January 2007, at the Singapore Expo.

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