

experiencesingapore



F1 Night Race

Singapore hosted the world's first night race with the Formula One SingTel Singapore Grand Prix on 26 to 28 September 2008.

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Vietnam Festival marks 35 years of ties



Vietnam's DPM Pham Gia Khiem, Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) curator Heidi Tan and Singapore FM George Yeo at the launch of the Vietnam Festival in Singapore at the ACM.

STEAMING bowls of the aromatic Vietnamese noodle soup pho, piping hot spring rolls fried to a crisp... no cultural festival in Singapore would be complete without authentic traditional dishes to tantalise the taste buds.

At the inaugural Vietnam Festival in May, Singaporeans and visitors were not only given the opportunity to taste Vietnamese fare, they also learnt how to recreate the fresh flavours in their own homes with cooking demonstrations.

Apart from food, the Vietnam Festival also brought in art, culture and history through an exciting calendar of exhibitions and unique events. Through this, audiences could see that Vietnam is not only a fast-growing country on its way to modernisation, but also a culturally-rich and fascinating partner in ASEAN.

The festival was organised by Singapore's

National Heritage Board (NHB) to commemorate 35 years of diplomatic relations between Singapore and Vietnam.

Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem joined Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo to open the festival at the Asian Civilisations Museum. Apart from co-chairing the Vietnam Festival, DPM Pham also met with Singapore leaders to discuss the measures to promote and expand bilateral co-operation.

At the opening, DPM Pham unveiled a heritage marker dedicated to the late Ho Chi Minh – the father of modern Vietnam – at the museum grounds under the 'Friends to Our Shores' series of historic markers.

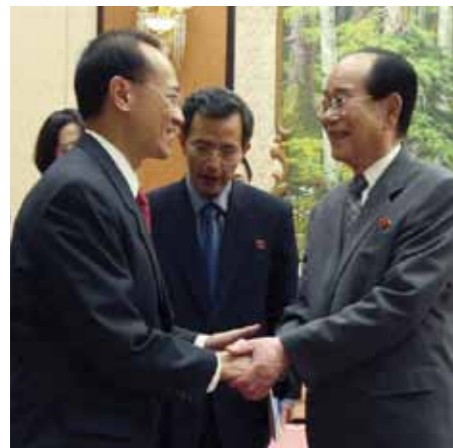
Moved by this symbolic gesture to honour the great leader of the Vietnamese people,

DPM Pham spoke enthusiastically of good relations between the two countries. "May the friendship and comprehensive cooperation between Vietnam and Singapore ever be strengthened," he said.

Singapore and Vietnam established diplomatic ties in 1973. The two countries' relations have developed intensively ever since. Investment is considered the most effective cooperation area between Singapore and Vietnam, and two-way trade hit a high of \$7.7 billion in 2006 and \$4.6 billion in the first half of last year.

At the recent visit, both sides agreed to boost cooperation in international forums such as ASEAN, APEC, ASEM and the United Nations, to take bilateral ties up to the next level.

Singapore-North Korea ties warm



On his first trip to the DPRK, Foreign Minister George Yeo met with North Korea No. 2 leader Kim Yong Nam.

SINGAPORE'S foreign relations ventured into new ground in May this year with the first visit by a Singaporean Foreign Minister to North Korea.

This being his first trip into the closed nation, Foreign Minister George Yeo admitted to reporters that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea far surpassed his expectations.

"I had read all these reports and caricatures and all my guards were up and I psyched myself for a surrealistic experience, but it turned out not to be so. They were warm once we got to know them better, especially after a few glasses of ginseng wine."

On behalf of Singapore's President S. R. Nathan, Mr Yeo presented North Korea's No. 2 leader Kim Yong Nam with a letter conveying Singapore's goodwill and a painting of the Republic's city waterfront. Mr Kim conveyed a verbal response from North Korean leader Kim Jong Il to Mr Nathan, expressing North Korea's goodwill.

Mr Yeo also signed a memorandum of understanding with his North Korean counterpart Pak Ui Chun to communicate

'the willingness on both sides to move relations forward'. Both parties are eager to work on strengthening economic ties, and the countries are currently discussing an investment guarantee agreement to boost investments from Singapore.

In a meeting with Foreign Trade Minister Ri Ryong Nam, Mr Yeo said he hopes to see more Singaporean companies doing business in North Korea. Mr Ri warmly welcomed Singaporean companies to participate in the country's trade exhibitions and fairs to seek out opportunities.

Last year, Singapore imported \$1.6 million worth of goods from North Korea and exported \$82.1 million in return.

After his five-day official visit, Mr Yeo spoke positively of Singapore-North Korea ties. He told the media that apart from attracting Singaporean investments, North Korea is also keen on developing other forms of cooperation.

"They want our businessmen to view their country as an opportunity, they want to send their patients to Singapore, they want scholarships, cooperation in science and technology and culture and various other areas."

Sichuan Relief & Myanmar Aid



Singapore's Mercy Relief representative Dr Fatimah Lateef, who is also a Member of Parliament and the Medical team from the Mercy Relief, checking-in the medical supplies before departing for Yangon to provide medical aid for the victims of Cyclone Nargis.

IT was on the second day of May that Cyclone Nargis swept into the low-lying Irrawaddy River delta and claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent people in Myanmar. A mere 10 days later, a devastating earthquake hit Sichuan in China.

Despite the shock from the double-whammy disasters, China and Myanmar's neighbours, as well as countries in the region, quickly leapt into action and offered their assistance.

In Singapore, two of the country's non-government agencies, Mercy Relief and the Singapore Red Cross, led the way in collecting funds for relief supplies. Both parties also actively organised relief teams to be stationed in both countries to assist where possible.

Mercy Relief raised a total of \$560,000 in collections for Myanmar, mostly for food, medicine, tents and water. Apart from monetary contributions, Mercy Relief also

sent water treatment and filtration systems worth \$250,000.

"Water is a crucial element in such circumstances," said Mercy Relief representative Dr Fatimah Lateef, who is also a Member of Parliament, in an interview with the Today newspaper. "Like all missions, there must be sustainability and continuity".

Medical treatment was also in great demand in the cyclone-hit area. Volunteers from Mercy Relief and the Singapore Red Cross worked onsite with a 13-man Singapore medical team to provide much-needed help.

Besides deploying the medical team, the Singapore Government sent over about \$300,000 in a humanitarian assistance package of medical supplies, drinking water, water-purifying tablets, tents, groundsheets, blankets, sleeping bags and emergency food. A further \$7.5 million has also been pledged as an assistance fund to Myanmar's relief,

recovery and reconstruction efforts.

The Singapore Red Cross was also very active in its fund-raising efforts for the cyclone victims. To date, the organisation has contributed \$300,000 for the purchase of emergency relief items through the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), as well as \$700,000 worth of emergency relief items to Myanmar. In total, the Singapore Red Cross raised \$2.8 million for the delta disaster.

In addition, the Singapore Red Cross also pledged to fund the construction of four buildings as holding areas in the delta region. Together with Myanmar-based construction and property developer Yoma Strategic Holdings, the Singapore Red Cross was able to distribute much-needed aid to the southern region, which was badly hit by the cyclone.

"They (Yoma) have got the resources and people on the ground, so that's why it's easier for them to get through," Mr Christopher Chua, Secretary-General of the Singapore Red Cross had told the media.

In the case of the Sichuan quake, the \$130,000 collected by Mercy Relief in donations went into purchasing supplies such as tents and medicines in Singapore, which were then sent over to the Mercy Relief team deployed in China.

The Singapore Red Cross also made a marked contribution for the China victims, raising a total of \$1.6 million. Of this, \$350,000 has been spent on emergency relief items and tents. The organisation also arranged for \$200,000 worth of rice snacks to be sent to Sichuan.

The public response in Singapore to the Asian twin tragedies has surpassed the speed of previous donation drives. It took less than 10 days to raise \$17.1 million for Sichuan alone – a heartening response to the cries for help.



Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo greets Thuang, 70, a victim of Cyclone Nargis.

SCP COURSES FROM SEP TO DEC 2008

Course	Hospital Management
When	15 – 19 September 2008
Agency	Changi General Hospital, SingHealth
Course	Destination Development and Marketing
When	6 – 17 October 2008
Agency	Temasek Polytechnic
Course	World Urban Transport Leaders Summit 2008
When	4 – 6 November 2008
Agency	LTA Academy, Land Transport Authority
Course	Search and Rescue Administrators
When	24 November – 5 December 2008
Agency	Singapore Aviation Academy, Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore

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>.

Building bridges in Singapore

ONE has dreams of building bridges over rivers; the other aspires to work alongside the United Nations in bridging nations.

These bridges are becoming real for two young ASEAN students – Mr Jong Ming Chuan, 20, from Brunei, and Ms Elaine Wong, 19, from Malaysia – thanks to the Singapore Scholarship.

The Singapore Scholarship, by providing good education opportunities to brilliant students in ASEAN, contributes to human resource capacity-building in ASEAN with its main focus on training and education.

It was initiated by the then Singapore Prime Minister, Mr Goh Chok Tong, at the 6th ASEAN Summit during the Asian financial crisis in December 1998. Since its inception 10 years ago, the Singapore Government has awarded a total of 488 Singapore Scholarships to students from ASEAN countries.

Mr Jong, born to a blacksmith father in a humble village in Brunei, grew up in a world of steel, tools and machinery. His early exposure to the field of engineering led to his dream of one day being a creator of spectacular structures such as bridges, canals and tunnels.

He can now work at realising that dream, as he is currently pursuing a civil engineering degree at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore.

"It means a lot to me to be in a world-recognised university," he said "My family can't afford to send me overseas, and such an opportunity is a real breakthrough that I didn't expect."

He chose to apply for the Singapore Scholarship Programme as the island-state is "closer to home and easier to adapt to". He is the first of three children to study overseas and it is his first time in Singapore.

"My parents are happy about me getting this Scholarship and they want me to get to know all about the country that I am in," said Mr Jong. "Personally, I'd like to give back to Singapore for giving me so much for my future."

Like Mr Jong, Ms Elaine Wong is excited about the Singapore Scholarship. A lover of words yet also gifted with numbers, she will pursue an accountancy degree at the Singapore Management University (SMU).

It was her brother who nudged her to apply for the Singapore Scholarship and she credits his recollections of his Singapore university days in influencing her decision.

"SMU is both interactive and different," said Ms Wong. "After my four years, I would have learned to speak up more."

After her studies are completed, she plans to head back to her hometown in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, to join the foreign service as a diplomat. Her goal is to work for the United Nations and bridge unity between nations and foster a common understanding.

Mr Jong and Ms Wong are just two of the 40 students from ASEAN countries who were awarded with the prestigious Singapore Scholarship in August this year. The Scholarship is given based on academic merit and provides students with a sound tertiary education in Singapore.

At the recent scholarship award event, Singapore's Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr Zainul Abidin Rasheed, told the scholars: "This is a great opportunity for you to take advantage of the situation, not only to acquire the knowledge and skills that are relevant to the developmental needs of your country but also to learn more about the rest of the world."

Already into its milestone 10th year, the Singapore Scholarship programme is part of the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP), which aims to share Singapore's experience and expertise with developing countries.

Through the SCP, Singapore directs a myriad of training programmes, study visits and scholarships which contribute to human resource development in the region. To date, Singapore has sponsored training courses and study visits for more than 56,000 officials from 168 developing countries in the Asia-Pacific, Africa, Middle East, Latin America and Caribbean regions.

40 undergraduate university scholarships were awarded to students from ASEAN countries under the Singapore Scholarship Programme. Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr Zainul Abidin Rasheed was the guest-of-honour at the event held at the Marina Mandarin hotel in August 2008.



ASEAN responds in unity in times of crisis



Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo (seventh from left) and other senior Asean officials at the final meeting of the 41st Asean Standing Committee.

Singapore's year-long chairmanship of ASEAN came to a significant close at the 41st ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in Singapore in July.

Foreign Ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) had gathered to discuss the challenges faced by the region as well as to take stock of milestones during the past year such as last November's signing of the ASEAN Charter.

Highlights of the meeting included the recent cyclone Nargis crisis in Myanmar, the results of the Post-Nargis Joint Assessment Report and the Thai-Cambodian border tension. Singapore also played host to the foreign ministerial six-party talks over North Korea's weapons programme.

ASEAN IN AID OF CRISIS

In May, the world watched in horror as Cyclone Nargis tore southern Myanmar apart. Under Singapore's leadership, ASEAN responded swiftly to the country's cry for aid and worked with the Myanmar government to provide humanitarian assistance where possible.

At the AMM opening ceremony, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien

Loong said: "ASEAN played an important role in bridging the gap of trust between the Myanmar government and international organisations like the United Nations and World Bank."

The Post-Nargis Joint Assessment (PONJA) Report was released by the Tripartite Core Group at the AMM and it showed that an additional US\$1 billion (\$1.43b) is needed to fund the next three years of recovery efforts in the Myanmar capital Yangon and the Irrawaddy Delta.

ASEAN STRIVES TO RESOLVE CONFLICT

Also high on the agenda was the dispute between neighbouring countries Thailand and Cambodia regarding the 900-year-old Preah Vihear Temple situated at their border. The two countries are locked in debate over the ownership of the ancient heritage site.

In an interview with the Singapore media, Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo said it was important for ASEAN to stay engaged in the world and to work to bring the countries together.

The six-party talks that Singapore hosted on the sidelines of the AMM was another

landmark event in Singapore's ASEAN chairmanship, demonstrating ASEAN's role in providing a neutral platform for negotiations. Foreign Ministers from China, South Korea, North Korea, Japan, Russia and the United States convened in Singapore for a series of informal talks on the North Korean nuclear issue.

PASSING THE ASEAN BATON

With the completion of Singapore's ASEAN chairmanship, the mantle has passed to Thailand, which has promised to build on Singapore's successful year and continue to take ASEAN forward.

Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister Sahas Buditkul told reporters in Singapore: "While consolidating our internal integration, ASEAN must remain an outward-looking organisation through our active engagement with our dialogue partners and other relevant partners."

Riding on the strong success of Singapore's chairmanship, ASEAN looks determined to promote regional integration and improve the competitiveness of member states in the coming year.

From the heartlands to the heart of the city, practically the whole of Singapore came together for the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, China, in August. The nation watched in eager anticipation as Team Singapore battled China in the Women's Team Table-Tennis Finals.

Ms Li Jiawei, Ms Feng Tianwei and Ms Wang Yuegu are three young fresh talents from China who had taken up citizenship as Singaporeans under the Foreign Sports Talent Scheme. The Olympics this year was their best opportunity to represent their adopted country. And the three girls put up a fierce fight to bring home the silver medal eventually.

The excitement had begun to build up earlier, when Singapore beat South Korea in an epic semi-final battle that lasted nearly four hours.

Knowing that they were up against tough players from the Chinese team in the final, Team Singapore continued to keep a strong and united front, remaining determined and positive throughout the final leg of their quest to clinch the medal.

"At last, I can repay Singapore for giving me the opportunity to be where I am today," Ms Feng told Singapore's TODAY newspaper. "I knew the whole nation was behind me, and I felt greatly encouraged and motivated."

A loud roar of triumph, pride and joy was heard across the island as Singapore celebrated the country's victory. The medal win ended a dry spell of 48 years since the last time the Lion City brought home a medal from the Games, a silver won by weightlifter Tan Howe Liang at the 1960 Rome Olympics.

The Team Table-Tennis Women's match play took place at the Peking University Stadium, Beijing. The same stadium is now renamed the Tan Sri Khoo Teck Puat Stadium, after a donation by the estate of the late Singaporean benefactor to promote sports and youth development in China.

Speaking about the silver medal win, Singapore coach Liu Guodong said to reporters: "Both China and Singapore are winners, for us to win silver is as difficult as it is for China to win gold."

Ms Li added: "We know the Chinese team are the best in the world and it was an honour to play against them in the final."

Singapore's Foreign Sports Talent Scheme nurtures talented non-Singaporeans to represent the country in international sporting events. Introduced in 1993, the scheme aims to not only elevate sporting standards in Singapore, but also to inspire young Singaporeans to excel in sports.

As Mr Wayne Clews, a Singapore Sports Council official, told the media: "The Singapore Sports Council encourages the national sports associations to think long-term, focus on local youth development and to see the recruitment of foreign talent as a short-term initiative to raise the standards in Singapore."

Singapore's Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Community Development, Youth and Sports), Mr Teo Ser Luck, agreed: "What is integral is that these athletes also help build the system, and be part of the sporting pipeline for Singapore."

ABOVE
Singapore's Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports Vivian Balakrishnan (back row, extreme left) said that swimmer Yip Pin Xiu (front row, second from left) and equestrian rider Laurentia Tan (behind Pin Xiu) will get national awards for winning medals at the event.

BELOW
Singapore Paralympic swimmer Yip Pin Xiu ended the Beijing Paralympics outing with Singapore's first Olympic-level gold in the 50m backstroke (S3 category), plus a silver in the 50m freestyle (S3 category) and two world records.

Olympics victory unites Singaporeans

Singapore shines at Paralympics



Singaporeans found even more Olympic joy one month later at the 2008 Paralympic Games for the disabled, also held in Beijing. 16-year old Singaporean swimmer Yip Pin Xiu swam her way to a triumphant gold finish at the 50m backstroke. She is the first Singapore athlete to win gold at the Paralympic Games and for the first time in history, Singapore's national anthem, *Majulah Singapura*, was played at a medal ceremony in an Olympic arena.

Despite suffering from muscular dystrophy which causes progressive muscle weakness, Ms Yip clocked a time of 58.75 seconds, 7.32 sec faster than her British counterpart Fran Williamson.

"I am excited to win Singapore's first gold," Ms Yip, who started swimming at the tender age of five, told *The Straits Times*. "I'm only 16, yet I have gotten a Paralympic gold medal which has been my dream for some time."

Apart from winning the gold medal, she also set a new world record during the 50m backstroke heats and came in second at the 50m freestyle. Her coach and a former national swimmer, Mr Ang Peng Siong, commended his young pupil on her keen mental strength, saying in media interviews that "she shows that the mind can determine how one actually feels and does."

The Singapore Paralympian team comprised six athletes who participated in four events. Ms Laurentia Tan, 29, who suffers from cerebral palsy and profound deafness, was another Singapore winner. She won two bronze medals in equestrian events, with the first medal from the Individual Championships Test grade 1A.

"Singaporeans, especially our youth and disabled community, should be inspired by her," said Mr Teo. "We can live our dreams if we put our hearts and minds to it."

The Singapore Disability Sports Council (SDSC) is the key supporting agency promoting disability sports in Singapore. Mr Tan Ju Seng, President of the SDSC, said that the athletes "have inspired the whole nation with their performances here." The council will continue to educate and promote disability sports in Singapore.

Singapore's dream is to be one of the top 10 sporting nations in Asia by 2010. With rising stars in both the Olympics and Paralympics, and a nation intent on supporting its talented athletes, this dream looks set to be fulfilled.



The Formula One (F1) SingTel Singapore Grand Prix race track with City Hall as the backdrop.

A ROARING SUCCESS

In many ways, Singapore had never looked so good, as the floodlit city came aglow with glitz and glamour for the world's first night race at the Formula One SingTel Singapore Grand Prix held from 26 to 28 September 2008.

"It is a valuable buzz, publicity for us around the world, which will benefit us in many ways," said Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

An estimated 50,000 motorsports fans from around the world had gathered excitedly in Singapore for this world-class event, including big-name VIPs who flew in specially to grace this red carpet occasion. Some celebrities spotted were Hong Kong film star Jackie Chan, Bollywood siren Shilpa Shetty and Malaysian-born Hollywood actress Michelle Yeoh, who were in town to soak up the adrenaline-fuelled atmosphere.

Supported by the Singapore Government, the \$150-million event made history as night was transformed into day in the country's central business district with the help of 1,500 floodlights. Ferrari driver Kimi Raikkonen said that driving on roads lit up by 3.2 million watts of electricity was "like driving in daytime".

The Marina Bay Circuit, also known as the Singapore Street Circuit, spanned 5.07km in length and racers had to complete 61 anti-clockwise laps in total. The challenging circuit, with a generous amount of twists and turns, took racers through a route lined with symbols of history and modernity.

Drivers whizzed past a glittering backdrop including colonial landmarks like the old Supreme Court and City Hall, Singapore's modern financial district and the world's tallest observation wheel, the Singapore Flyer.

The race marked the 15th round of the 2008 FIA Formula One World Championships and its top-quality Singapore Street Circuit was expertly put together in just under a year.

"The most impressive thing for me is what an amazing job they have done here in Singapore to prepare the circuit," racer Lewis Hamilton, who has since gone on to win the Formula One Championship at the Brazilian Grand Prix on 2 November, told the media. "I think they did a tremendous job."

Apart from a new road, Singapore also built from scratch an impressive pit building housing team garages, a media centre and a Paddock Club. Formula One Management President and CEO Bernie Ecclestone told the media that this was a feat bound to make international audiences sit up and take notice of Singapore, catapulting the island to the global stage.

"For years I've been saying go East, not West. When you think about it, most parts of Asia where people have visited, they sort of put everything in one basket - 'Singapore is the same as India, Malaysia and Thailand'. That's how they feel because they don't know any better. Hopefully this will open people's eyes and they'll say, my God, Singapore really is alive and well," he said.

The timing of this night event meant that it could be broadcast live at a convenient timeslot for European audiences that make up a substantial proportion of the 500 million Formula One viewers internationally.

In Singapore, the telecast on the national TV station MediaCorp Channel 5 was by far the country's highest-rated programme this year, reaching a viewing population of 1.96 million people aged 4 and above.

The historic Grand Prix race was part of an exhilarating line-up of events and attractions that formed part of Singapore's unique transformation strategy.

"Singapore is entering an exciting phase in its tourism development, and the Formula One night race will add to our growing reputation as a world-class destination, offering some of the most unique and cutting-edge experiences," said Mr Jason Ong, Area Director of Middle East and Africa at the Singapore Tourism Board.

TWISTS AND TURNS OF F1 IN SINGAPORE

This was not the first time that Singapore has witnessed such speed-demon thrills up close. The Singapore Grand Prix, held from 1963 and 1971, was the nation's first taste at hosting a motorsports series.

The race was initially named the 'Orient Year Grand Prix' and ran as part of the Formula Libre and Australian AF2 rules. It was renamed 'The Singapore Grand Prix' in 1965 when the country gained independence.

The 4.87 kilometre route ran along the Old Upper Thomson Road in Singapore and had many nicknames such as Devil's Bend, the Rothman's corner and Nee Soon Hairpin. However, as support for the event flagged, 1973 marked the last year that Singapore saw such races.

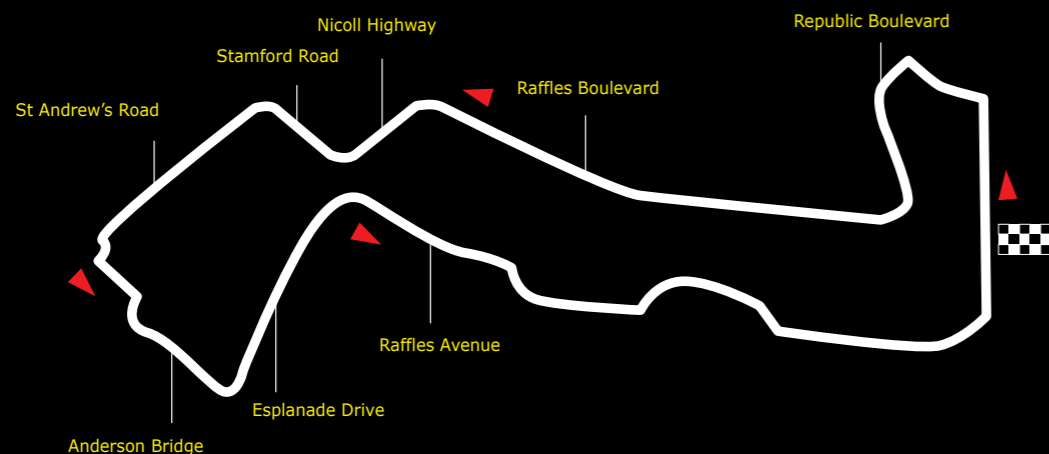
Enter 2007 and the dawn of a new beginning of motorsports in the island-state. In May last year, it was announced that Singapore entrepreneur Ong Beng Seng and the Singapore Tourism Board had signed a five-year deal to host the Formula One SingTel Singapore Grand Prix, with the first to be held in September 2008.

True to its promise of delivering an unforgettable experience, the Singapore race thrilled audiences around the world with an incident-filled 61 lap race that saw Spaniard Fernando Alonso climb from a low 15th position initially to emerge champion of the track.

The race had initially begun with Ferrari's Felipe Massa in pole position but a shocking mistake involving him driving off from the pit-lane with a fuel hose still connected to the race car, had cost him the lead. Teammate Kimi Raikkonen did not fare much better, losing control and crashing his vehicle four laps from the finish line.

Chockfull of nail-biting moments, the Singapore race received rave reviews from around the world, with Formula One Management President and CEO Bernie Ecclestone naming Singapore the "new jewel in the crown of Formula One". London's Sunday Times columnist and former race driver Martin Brundle called Singapore a "world-class venue" with an "electrifying" atmosphere.

The success of this year's Singapore Grand Prix has led motorsports enthusiasts to eagerly anticipate next year's Formula One which is slated for the same time period. The second instalment to its five-year run is touted to be the most exciting race of the season yet again. To welcome this exhilarating race, Singapore is already planning the buzz to heighten the Formula One fever in 2009.



ENTERTAINMENT EXTRAVAGANZA

To ensure that the experience of the Formula One Singapore Grand Prix was an unforgettable one for visitors and locals alike, the Singapore Tourism Board, along with several partners, collaborated to present a series of lifestyle and premium events alongside the action on the track. From waterfront entertainment to exclusive night parties to visual arts exhibitions, the festivities served to enthrall the public that rallied around central Singapore during and after the race period.

One of the highlights was the inaugural Singapore River Festival, which saw the historic river district come alive with nightly festivities. The free festival, from 19 to 28 September, celebrated elements of water, heritage and entertainment after sundown with live music, a mega illusion show and even a "water-less" dance party in a disused swimming pool.

"Legenda Singapura" was a dance drama spectacle on show for the festival and featured a float parade and tracks the journey of the legendary prince Sang Nila Utama to ancient Singapore which prompted the country's move to modernity. The River Festival closed with a big bang after the Grand Prix finale with a specially choreographed ensemble of cultural drums.

Experiencing art at the Singapore Biennale 2008 was another option for visitors. It was the sequel to the highly successful inaugural biennale of 2006. Public spaces dotted around the city centre served as exhibition venues, including the Central Promontory, a spot fringing Marina Bay that is set for redevelopment. The Biennale gave Formula One visitors a chance to be inspired by a provocative showcase of contemporary art by 137 renowned visual artists from over 36 countries. Apart from making art accessible to everyone, the Singapore Biennale is dedicated to providing a platform for outstanding innovation for the global arts community.

The Marina Bay circuit coursed through the exhibition and entertainment venues and gave visitors many things to do before the races.

And what better way is there to cool off after the races, than at the Singapore Beer Festival - another Asian first held from 2 to 5 October. Singapore played host to a global beer festival that offered the sampling of close to 300 different types of beer from around the world.

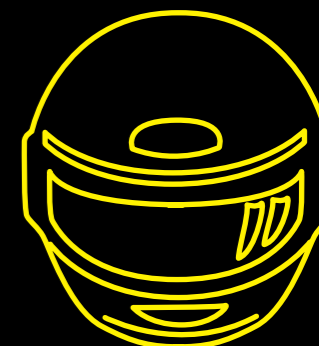
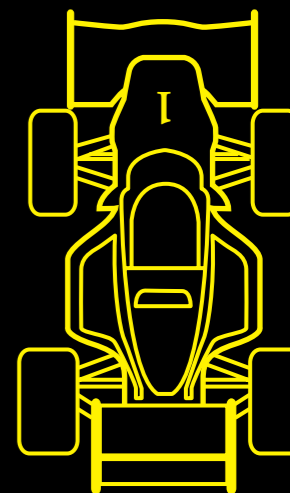


HEAD HONCHOS HEAD DOWN

With many corporate big-wigs in town to attend the Singapore Grand Prix, companies found it opportune to organise conferences and host international guests during this period. Corporate packages for the various VIP areas at the circuit such as the Sky Suites and the Paddock Club were snapped up despite the highest price for entry into the Paddock being tagged at a steep \$7,500.

As Mr Kees Stoute, Managing Director of EFG Bank Singapore, said in an interview in Singapore's Business Times: "We played host to customers, business partners, employees and visitors from the South and East Asia region, including India, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The Formula One has redefined the boundaries of our relationship and put us on a fast track with these key stakeholders."

Millionaire Asia, a publication dedicated to celebrating the millionaire lifestyle, took advantage of the Formula One festivities to attract extremely high net worth individuals to attend Singapore's first Private Aviation Show. Officially supported by the Asian Business Aviation Association, the show was well-attended by some of the region's wealthiest individuals.



Bringing ASEAN together

Singapore's Chairmanship of ASEAN coincided with its 40th anniversary. This was the occasion of major celebrations across all member countries, which have helped to bring ASEAN closer to our people.

Now Singapore's term as Chair is ending. We have done our best to work with other ASEAN members to put in place processes that will enable successive Chairs to continue to move ASEAN forward. At this ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, the baton will pass to Thailand.

Two events during Singapore's chairmanship stood out which, I believe, will define ASEAN in the years ahead. The first was ASEAN's response after Cyclone Nargis struck Southern Myanmar in May. All 10 member countries recognised the responsibilities and obligations of membership. Just as we could not ignore political developments in Myanmar, neither could we stand aside from this humanitarian crisis when so many lives had been lost and many more remained at risk.

The outcome was a positive one in the circumstances – a realistic and meaningful ASEAN-led process to facilitate an international humanitarian assistance effort. While many difficulties still lie ahead, ASEAN played an important role in bridging the gap of trust between the Myanmar government and international organisations like the United Nations and World Bank. ASEAN facilitated the flow of emergency aid to the disaster victims. The situation is clearly better than if ASEAN had not intervened to persuade Myanmar to cooperate with the international community.

While the immediate crisis has passed, much remains to be done to sustain recovery and rehabilitation. Only the international community will have the capacity for this long-term reconstruction work. ASEAN therefore welcomes Myanmar's willingness to continue with the tripartite cooperation. We will continue to do our part to foster greater trust and cooperation between the international community and the Myanmar government.

The other milestone event took place earlier in November last year when we signed the ASEAN Charter. The Charter creates the institutional framework to make ASEAN a more effective and cohesive organisation, and to realise our vision of a vibrant ASEAN Community.

One important aspect of this is a rules-based governing framework to improve our record of implementation. The timely ratification and implementation of the Charter will itself be a signal of ASEAN's resolve. The internal processes of member countries are different and some will be more difficult than others. The pace of ASEAN integration should not be set by its slowest members, or else all will be held back by the problems of a few. Hence, ASEAN has decided to press on with the Charter's implementation without

waiting for all 10 members to ratify. ASEAN will start work on two key areas in the Charter – the dispute settlement mechanism and the ASEAN human rights body. We are also strengthening the ASEAN Secretariat in order to monitor the implementation of agreements and compliance from ASEAN countries.

In recent years, the broader strategic environment has been favourable to Asia. The US continues to exert a decisive benign influence, as the dominant economic and military power in the region. Within the region, relations among all the key players – China, India and Japan – are stable. Cross-strait relations are on an upturn following the election of Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou. North Korea's

submission of its nuclear programme declaration has led to the resumption of the Six-Party Talks after a hiatus of nine months. Singapore is privileged to host the first meeting of the foreign ministers of the six countries, on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum.

Because of longstanding tensions and rivalries between the major Asian powers, ASEAN could play a useful role as a neutral platform for regional interactions. ASEAN cannot take its continued relevance for granted. If our efforts to achieve faster and deeper integration falter, ASEAN may well be sidelined.

To support these integration efforts, I am pleased to announce the establishment of an ASEAN Studies Centre within the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore. The Centre will work closely with the ASEAN Secretariat to undertake policy research on ASEAN. It will look at measures to help the organisation grow new capabilities, strengthen its institutions, and enhance cooperation among its members.

By presenting ourselves coherently, ASEAN will be courted by the major powers as an economic partner, and valued as an effective platform for cooperation on larger regional and global issues. We must achieve this, so that ASEAN will get onto a virtuous cycle of growing prosperity and constructive engagement with our external partners, and also amongst ourselves.

Our founding fathers had the foresight and wisdom to establish ASEAN in 1967. Over the last 41 years, ASEAN has helped to maintain peace and stability in a complex and diverse region. Let us continue to build an integrated ASEAN Community that will fulfil the aspirations and dreams of our people.

Extracted from the Opening Address by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the 41st ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Singapore, 21 July 2008



experience singapore is published by Public Affairs Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore Tanglin, Singapore 248163 Tel: (65) 63798350 or Fax: (65) 64710537 Email: mfa@mfa.gov.sg Website: www.mfa.gov.sg Designed by Epigram. Printed in Singapore. All rights reserved. ISSN: 0219-2896

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