

Singapore



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COVER PHOTO STEVE ZHU

FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

It's that time of year again, and end-of-year celebrations in Singapore are always rich and diverse. From October's Deepavali – the Indian Festival of Lights – to Hari Raya Haji – the Muslim commemoration of sacrifice – to December's Christmas, local festivals truly showcase the melting pot that is this little island.

In this issue of *Singapore*, we celebrate both the diversity that is our strength, and the festivities and goodwill that accompany it.

We find out from three expatriates living in Singapore how they annually give some end-of-year cheer to the less fortunate through their volunteer efforts. Also doing his part for his community is AKM Mohsin, whose self-published Bengali newspaper is helping over 100,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers in Singapore feel less homesick and more connected in their new environment.

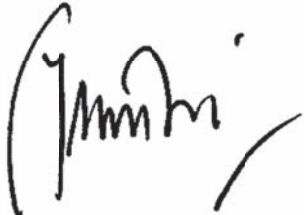
To get you into the festive mood, Chef Manjunath Mural of fine dining restaurant The Song of India shares a recipe for a traditional *Deepavali* – or *Diwali* – dessert, as well as some of the traditions he's brought to Singapore from his home in Mumbai, India.

If you need a break from the dazzling lights and festive hubbub, we take you to a little-known, quiet corner in Singapore where long-gone literary greats are still making their presence felt. Or you could hide away in one of Singapore's 200 cinema halls, which see some of the highest attendance rates in the world.

At *Singapore*, we believe in building a better world, and this is about improving the lives of others. Ashoka Fellow and founder of Specialisterne, Thorkil Sonne, shares with us how he taps into the specialist skill sets of individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, which enables them to secure gainful employment.

We at *Singapore* have the privilege of speaking to and learning from many unique individuals committed to bringing about positive change. We hope this issue inspires you – in the midst of the parties, fraternity and cheer synonymous with the end of the year – to share your joy with those around you who need it the most.

From all of us here at *Singapore*, have a happy, gracious and giving holiday season.



Jean Tan

Editor-in-Chief, *Singapore*

Executive Director, Singapore International Foundation

Email: singapore@sif.org.sg



'Tis the season

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**The sun
will rise,
the sun
will set.**

Former Singapore President S R Nathan, 87, when asked if he was emotional about attending his last National Day Parade as head of state on 9 August 2011.

**I want to
dress in bright
colours while
I'm young.
I'll save the
duller colours
for when I'm
an 'uncle'.**

Shi Jiayi, 28, a China-born football hero who plays for the Singapore Lions.

**It was just
one of those
silly things
that carries
a lot of
meaning.**

Dr. Robert Kamei, 53, who caught the attention of ESPN, Yahoo and YouTube viewers when he put a basketball through a hoop on the ground floor from the ninth storey of the Duke-National University of Singapore Graduate Medical School. He did it to provide publicity for the school, where he is Vice Dean of Education.

**You feel
lucky
just to
be there.**

Wheelchair-bound swimmer Theresa Goh, 24, on what the Paralympics Games mean to her. While the upcoming London edition in September 2012 will mark her third appearance at the Paralympic Games, she added that the experience will be no less meaningful to her.

**I've thought about
heaven and hell;
I'm prepared to
face either, if either
of them exists.**

Former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, 88, answering a question about religion at a Nanyang Technological University forum.

**It's two-and-a-half hours
of tightrope
walking
in front
of a live
audience.**

Singapore actor Adrian Pang, 45, on his preference for theatre over television acting.

**My wish is
to take my
last breath
with a
drawn line.**

Veteran artist S Namasivayam, 85, a founding member of Singapore art group Group 90, who works primarily in life drawing and figure study.

**You get better
when you read.
And when you
get better,
you'll want to
read more
and more.**

Lim Yok Zuan, 25, who received a scholarship from government agency A*Star to pursue a PhD in Immunology.



WHEN THE LIGHTS GO DOWN

Singapore's cinema attendance is among the world's top 10. And why not? Catching a film here is a top-of-the line, forefront-of-technology experience. **BY ANNIE HOW**

Going to the movies is a favourite pastime in Singapore, and the numbers certainly prove it. According to the Singapore Film Commission, cinema attendance in 2010 was at 20,321,000, which amounted to a staggering \$162,338,743 earned in box-office receipts — not bad for a resident population of about five million people.

On average, each resident goes to the cinema just over four times a year — a rate topped only by Iceland and Ireland. This, despite the proliferation of DVDs in homes and faster movie downloads courtesy of high-speed Internet broadband, is a testament to the popularity and prominence of cinema multiplexes (specially-built the-

atre complexes with multiple screens). Many of these in Singapore have been upgraded in recent years and now boast digital screens, state-of-the-art sound systems and even more comfortable seats. Several shopping malls — suburban and in the heart of the city — boast multiplexes alongside myriad shopping and dining options.

Movie distributors say there are not enough screens here to meet demand, and the movie-going business seems to be doing better than ever — cinema attendance in 2009 was at 19,640,000.

A slew of ultra-modern multiplexes, owned by five cinema chains, dot the island. Golden Village (GV) boasts the most cinema screens, followed by Cathay Cineplexes, Shaw Organisation,

Filmgarde and Eng Wah, and their regular revamps, renovations, technological upgrades and expansions attest to how intense the competition can be. There are about 190 movie screens in Singapore.

Singapore cinema-goers don't need to wait very long to catch the latest blockbusters as many open here on the same day as or the day after their American premieres, ahead of much of the rest of the world. And though Singapore's ticket prices are moderate (standard tickets range from \$7.50 to \$11 depending on the multiplex and whether screenings are on weekdays or weekends), movie fans here demand an experience: not just watching the latest offerings of digital and 3D films,



Golden Village is a joint venture between two companies from Australia and Hong Kong



The entrance to Cathay Cineplexes Platinum Movie Suites at The Cathay

Movie distributors say there are not enough screens to meet demand, and the movie-going business seems to be doing better than ever

but doing so ensconced in plush, spacious seats with ample legroom while munching on choice snacks.

A spokesperson for Cathay Cineplexes says that despite "the saturation of the market", the average yearly attendance statistic looks set to be bettered. "Based on a year-on-year comparison, the industry as a whole in Singapore is already faring five per cent better than last year," he notes.

A pioneer of Singapore cinemas, Cathay offers the widest range of movie show times (including 4am and 10am screenings), its signature 24-hour movie marathons (the first here), ergonomically-designed seats and, of course, the latest technology available.

Another cinema powerhouse, Shaw Organisation, reopened its iconic Lido Theatres in May this year after a \$20-million revamp, ushering in a swish new look and 11 halls, including one that utilises Singapore's first IMAX Digital Theatre System. This hall features a significantly larger screen that offers a higher-resolution display. With a total seating capacity of 1,960, all halls feature stadium seating with seats staggered across different levels, wider legroom than before, and allocated lots for wheelchairs.

Seven of the halls, including the IMAX theatre, only screen digitalised movies. And the experience starts even before the lights dim — there is a \$1 million video wall screen, as well as digital video movie 'posters', to engage patrons pre-showtime.

"We wanted to create and champion change in the movie-going landscape in Singapore," says Mark Shaw, Executive Vice President of Operations, Shaw Theatres. "With the IMAX hall, we are able to offer our consumers more choices for any single movie title with 2D, 3D and IMAX 3D."

GV — unlike homegrown players Cathay, Shaw and Eng Wah — is a joint venture between two companies from Australia and Hong Kong. But ever since it set up Yishun 10, Singapore's first multiplex cinema, in the Singapore suburb Yishun in 1992, it has cemented itself as a benchmark for new cinematic experiences by constantly pushing the standards with many cinema firsts.

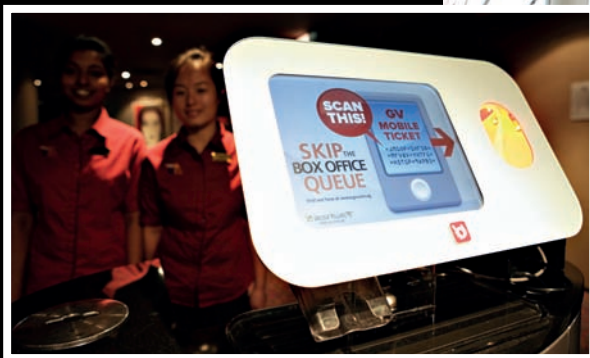
With nine multiplexes featuring 73 screens island-wide, GV upped their

game in 1999 with the introduction of Gold Class. The luxury cinemas offer — for \$28 a ticket — a pre-movie lounge, a gourmet selection of food and drinks and plush pillows and soft blankets on lush reclining seats that wouldn't be out of place in an aeroplane's first class cabin. Cathay and Shaw have since followed suit with their own luxury cinema halls.

GV opened a 15-screen multiplex at VivoCity, one of Singapore's biggest shopping malls, in 2006. They followed that in 2010 with Asia's first green cinema, GV Yishun, a refurbished Yishun 10. The eco-friendly multiplex — with its electronic posters, self-cooling →



Golden Village started the luxury cinema trend with its Gold Class service



Top: Mobile ticket kiosk at Golden Village

Right: Queues at GV Yishun's reopening in 2010



air-conditioning system, energy-saving LED lights and motion sensor lighting in the restrooms — was recently awarded the Green Mark Gold Award by Singapore's Building & Construction Authority (BCA).

The BCA Green Mark Scheme is an initiative designed to promote sustainability in the built environment and raise environmental awareness among developers, designers and builders in pre- and post-construction phases.

A new 10-screen multiplex — the Cathay Cineplex Jem — set to be Cathay Organisation's first environmentally-conscious multiplex, is scheduled to open in the second quarter of 2013.

Cinemas going eco-friendly also means the increasing popularity of associated businesses like the "ticketless" system, as well as smartphone applications. Already, all cineplexes offer various e-ticketing systems which allow moviegoers to buy tickets online or from their mobile phones.

The last word however, rests with the customers. And it seems like a

happy ending.

"I've been to cinemas in Australia and in the UK; most aren't as clean, comfortable and high-tech as ours. And at the ones that are, the tickets cost so much more [than here]!" says Kara Tay, 28.

"We have everything! From a variety of food to choose from and 24-hour cinemas! What more can you ask for?" quips Marcus Lee, 19.



THE BILLBOARD PAINTER

Neo Chon Teck is the last of his kind in Singapore. The traditional movie canvas painter started out in the 1960s and has since produced a steady slew of larger-than-life movie posters. Up until the '80s, he painted around 20 posters a week.

But technology and inevitable modernisation have rendered these works of cinematic art largely redundant.

Although today's digital prints are of "better quality", the movie murals are "more sentimental and

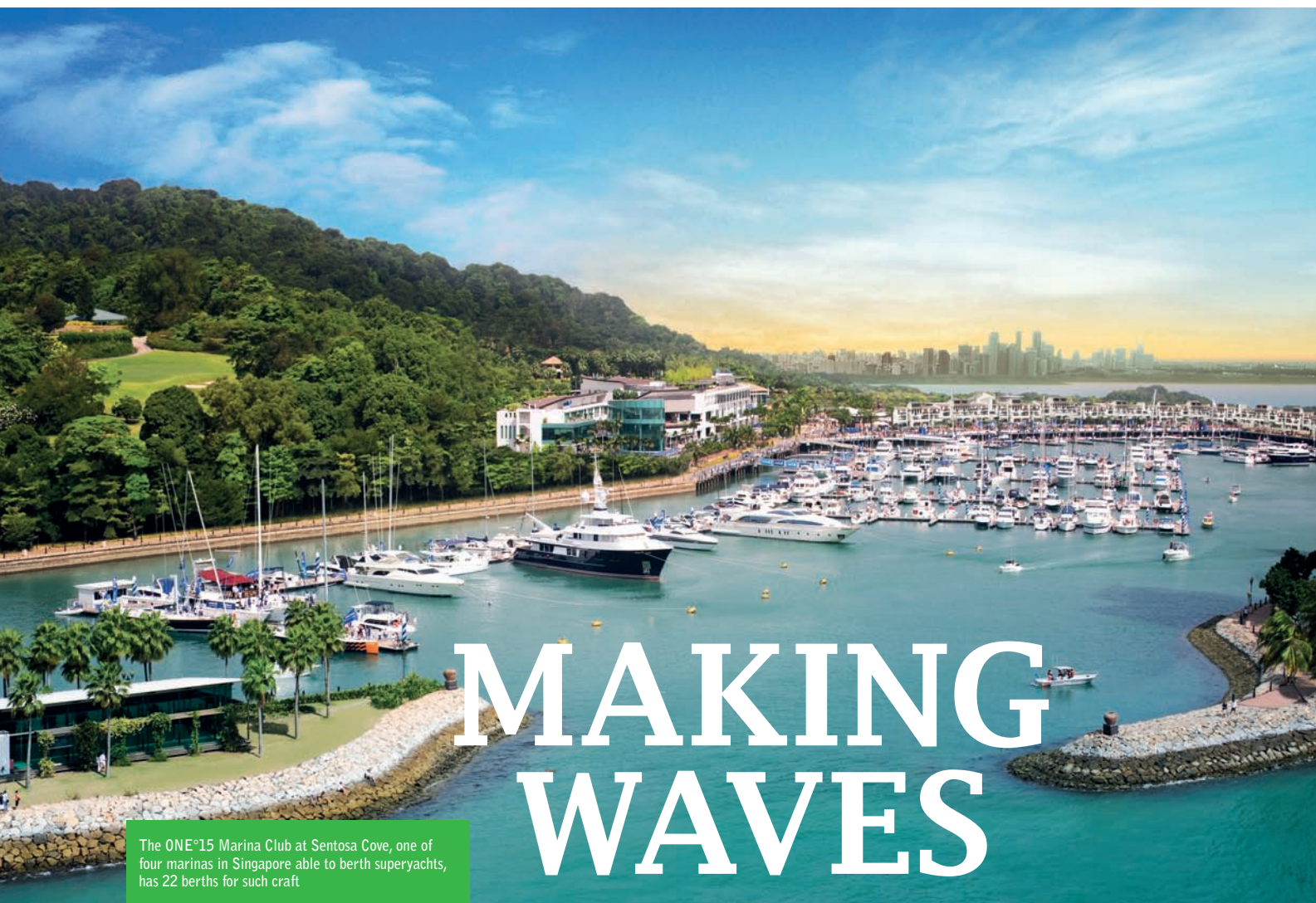
precious, since they were all hand-painted", the artist — now in his early 60s — said in an interview with *TODAY* newspaper.

Though he is retired, Neo's work still lives on. Local filmmaker Eric Khoo, who has lovingly kept the movie canvases from his films *Mee Pok Man* and *12 Storeys*, enlisted Neo's help to paint the poster for his 2008 Cannes Film Festival contender *My Magic*. Berlin-based Singaporean artist Ming Wong also commissioned him to make posters for the Singapore



pavilion at the 2009 Venice Biennale.

Ming's installation, *Ming Wong: Life of Imitation*, which explored the gradual disappearance of hand-painted movie billboards in Singapore, went on to win the Special Jury Mention Award.



The ONE°15 Marina Club at Sentosa Cove, one of four marinas in Singapore able to berth superyachts, has 22 berths for such craft

MAKING WAVES

With Singapore fast becoming a haven for local and expatriate superyacht owners, more people are sampling the investment, entertainment and educational opportunities that the boating industry here has to offer. **BY GENE KHOR**

Not too long ago, a superyacht would have been an uncommon sight in Singapore waters. These days, the scenario is quite different. A superyacht, according to the Superyacht Singapore Association (SSA), is a professionally-crewed leisure vessel of at least 24 metres in length — and an increasing number of these can be spotted here, either berthed for a substantial period of time or docked on a stopover.

SSA figures show that last year, 19 of these vessels were based in

Singapore, a substantial increase from just six in 2006. Traffic has increased as well, with 81 superyachts passing through in 2010, a massive jump from the 16 that did so five years ago.

"This growth comes from a combination of [there being] more local owners, and [more] businessmen who have made Singapore their home or business base," explains Jean-Jacques Lavigne, SSA's Executive Director. "Some [superyacht] owners don't even live here. But because they enjoy cruising around Southeast Asia, they base their vessels here."

Singapore's proximity to Thailand — where island-cruising is an established tourist attraction — is also a factor, says the 43-year-old Singapore Permanent Resident.

Currently, there are four marinas in Singapore that can accommodate boats of such size: the Republic of Singapore Yacht Club, Raffles Marina Club, ONE°15 Marina Club and Marina at Keppel Bay. Each superyacht berth comes with a suite of services including refuelling and fresh water points as well as 24-hour security.

The increase in superyacht numbers



Yacht charter companies offer cruises to nearby islands such as Lazarus Island (pictured) as well as further afield to Indonesia and Thailand. The yacht shown is a 27-metre trimaran

is also due to the concerted efforts of various organisations to raise Singapore's profile as a hub for such vessels. In April this year, the inaugural Singapore Yacht Show (SYS), billed the only one of its kind in the region, was jointly organised by ONE°15 Marina Club and yachting events organiser Informa Yacht Group. The three-day event to showcase superyachts as well

Being on the open sea is very different from the usual team building camps

Kiran Sujanani

as related products and services such as insurance and interior furnishings attracted more than 4,000 visitors from Singapore and overseas. Two years ago, the first-ever Asia Superyacht Conference — organised by the SSA — was attended by more than 150 delegates from the industry worldwide. Both the SYS and the Asia Superyacht Conference are scheduled to be held concurrently in Singapore in April next year.

The SSA was formed in 2007 by a founding group of 11 companies in superyacht-related businesses such as marinas, yacht-building and charters to promote Singapore as a superyacht destination, and to create a boating culture.

"An example of a country with a boating culture would be Monaco," says Jean-Jacques. "There sailing along the coast is a regular affair, with spots to drop anchor about every three nautical miles [around 5.5km], whether to refuel and resupply, or to explore a

scenic harbour."

To achieve its vision of such a boating culture in the region with Singapore as its hub, the SSA is working with the relevant authorities in neighbouring countries to ensure that Singapore-based yachts have ease of passage.

The development of a superyacht refit and maintenance centre is also on the SSA's agenda. It is currently exploring with the Singapore Maritime Academy the possibility of offering courses such as marina management. With the nearest one in Phuket, Thailand, having a refit and maintenance centre here will add to Singapore's reputation as a superyacht hub, says Jean-Jacques.

THE RISING TIDE

A *Bloomberg Businessweek* report in June this year labelled Singapore the 'Monaco of the East'. Singapore, the report stated, has at 11.4 per cent of the population the highest proportion of millionaire households in the world. Is there a relation between this and the



Children playing on the boom net at a 10-year-old's birthday party held on board a chartered yacht, the *Long Ranger*

country becoming a key player in the luxury boating industry? The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) thinks so.

"The SYS is a clear illustration of this. It marked a pivotal point in our growth [as a superyacht destination] as such shows are traditionally held in Monaco and Abu Dhabi," says Tony Lai, Assistant Chief Executive for Industry Development I Group, STB.

Riding on the crest of this development is the superyacht charter business. About 10 companies are

operating here, and the charters they offer range from a 15-minute cruise to Lazarus Island off the southern coast of Singapore to longer trips to Pulau Tioman in Malaysia and Ko Samui in Thailand.

The growing business has prompted one company, Aqua Voyage, to add the Seabear — a 40-metre craft owned by professional golfer Jack Nicklaus — to its existing fleet of four luxury yachts by year-end.

"Plans for cruises with Jack Nicklaus on board to golf resorts in neighbouring countries, where passengers can then play a round with him, are in the works," says Ong Chih Ching, 42, Group

CEO of the KOP Group, Aqua Voyage's owners.

WEEKEND ALTERNATIVES

Superyachts are now chartered for a variety of purposes — business presentations to potential clients, wedding receptions and birthday celebrations. Even schools and organisations see a day out at sea on a superyacht as a good opportunity to foster team building.

Ms Kiran Sujanani, Head of

Operations and Marketing of chartering company MSV Projects says its superyacht, the 27-metre trimaran *Long Ranger*, has been chartered for educational purposes. A trimaran has a main hull and two smaller outrigger hulls, and its design is derived from the *proa* constructed and used by native Pacific Islanders.

"We've conducted educational trips on the *Long Ranger* where youths and adults are taught [under supervision] how to navigate the sea, steer the yacht, and man the sails," says Kiran, a 36-year-old Indian citizen.

"Being on the open sea is very different from the usual team building camps. Participants really have to learn to work together to make it a safe, successful voyage."

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Tan Wai Jia with
some children in
Mozambique

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAN WAI JIA



MISSION-BOUND

You don't need to be extraordinary to do something out of the ordinary, humanitarian and development aid volunteer Tan Wai Jia tells *Singapore*. **BY FAIROZA MANSOR**

Tan Wai Jia — currently serving her residency at one of Singapore's largest multi-disciplinary hospitals, Tan Tock Seng Hospital — is on her feet 80 hours a week at work. But this year alone, she has found the time to write her third book and go on two volunteer aid trips. To date, she has been on 13 such trips, most recently to Myanmar in July for a five-day programme that saw her teaching children at an orphanage. It sounds like a lifetime's work, but Wai Jia is only 24.

It's little wonder then that the Orchid Jayceettes of Singapore — a non-profit organisation that recognises and awards Singapore individuals committed to humanitarian efforts — honoured her as a

Young Outstanding Singaporean (YOS) in January this year.

Despite the impressive accolades under her belt, or scrubs in her case, the National University of Singapore graduate maintains that she is "an ordinary person", and asks to be referred to by her first name instead of 'Dr Tan'.

At a café in the hospital after coming off a 12-hour shift, the sprightly young doctor says talking to *Singapore* is like coming full circle. "My first humanitarian trip was to Cambodia in 2004 as part of the Youth Expedition Programme organised by the Singapore International Foundation [publishers of *Singapore*]," she says. Wai Jia was 17 then and in her first year at junior college.

The trip marked a turning point for

her. "I had been brought up in a sheltered, middle-class family. Until [my trip to Cambodia], I had never been to a village, visited the poor, or realised how much we have to be grateful for," she recalls. "The trip made me realise how much we can learn from the poor, and about our social responsibility to help the less fortunate."

This desire to contribute to developing communities was further ignited by her own spiritual awakening.

"I decided to reach out to the poor around the same time I accepted Christianity," explains Wai Jia. "I saw how blessed I was, and wanted to do something meaningful with my life."

So while her friends were off on their holidays after their A-Level exams,

Wai Jia set off alone on her first volunteer trip to Nepal in December 2005. The six-week trip, during which she visited an orphanage called Sophia's Home in the country's capital of Kathmandu, was a life-changing experience.

The biggest heartache, she says, was finding out that the children had to move every couple of months because the orphanage could not afford the rents. "The children shared with me their dreams — the kind I had when I was a kid, only I had the privilege to pursue them," Wai Jia says.

Driven to give the orphanage a fixed premises, she wrote her first book, *Kitesong*, about a child's journey as she chases after a runaway kite. It's a story about having faith and following your dreams, says Wai Jia, who also illustrated it. Within six months of its release in August 2006, she had raised \$110,000 from its sales — enough to purchase a four-storey building for Sophia's Home.

"All I did was come up with the idea for the book. That is why my greatest testimony is that you don't have to be

someone remarkable to do something remarkable," she says.

A HIGHER CALLING

In May this year, Wai Jia went on a three-week trip to help underprivileged children in Mozambique. In preparing for her trip, which took place shortly after her 24th birthday, she asked her friends and family not to give her birthday presents, but to instead bring donations and items for the orphanage she was visiting in the port city of Pemba. She raised \$2,000 in donations and collected a seven-seater carload of children's clothes, shoes, stationery and sports items. These proved useful, but at the orphanage, Wai Jia was faced with a challenge she hadn't expected: extreme hunger.

"[The children] squatted on the floor and shoved fistfuls of food into their mouths, and even snatched food from others. I had never been so heartbroken in my life."

Having witnessed their plight, Wai Jia is now determined to set up a fund for a feeding programme for children.

Now four months into her residency, Wai Jia is not able to take very long breaks, but plans to go to developing countries to do humanitarian work at every opportunity. Her next trip is in October to Surabaya, Indonesia where, with a disaster relief team from her church, she will provide medical care to children and destitute women.

High on her list of priorities is a visit to Kolkata, India, where Missionaries of Charity — founded by the late Mother Teresa — operates. "One of her maxims, to do small things with great love, has inspired me to live life with humility and gratitude," Wai Jia reflects.

INSPIRED LIVING

Being recognised for her efforts is something that Wai Jia neither expects nor yearns for.

"I don't want to put myself on a pedestal. I've met many people who are far more amazing, yet unknown. I only hope my YOS award encourages

My greatest testimony is that you don't have to be someone remarkable to do something remarkable

Tan Wai Jia

others," she says, citing the example of Dr Tan Lai Yong, a Singaporean medical humanitarian aid worker who is one of her heroes.

Her parents, both of whom work in the financial industry, have become increasingly supportive, says Wai Jia. "On one hand, they always knew it was good work and would be touched by the photos and stories I brought back, but all these trips kept them on the edge of their seats! At first, they would try to dissuade me from making these trips out of concern for my safety, but in time they became more supportive," she says. In fact, they sponsored her 'graduation trip' to Mozambique.

Wai Jia is grateful for the support, as besides helping her provide aid to those who need it, it helps her grow. "The poor inspire me — their diligence, reverence for humanity and respect for one another. Every time I go on volunteer trips, I meet brilliant people who have given their lives to serve the poor. If they can do it, I can do it too."

Wai Jia also seeks to inspire others through her writing. Her second book *A Taste of Rainbow* — released earlier this year — was prompted by her own battle with depression and anorexia. It is distributed for free as part of a public education drive to promote healthy self-esteem. The book is also helping to raise funds for her feeding programme, as some people who have read it make contributions to her aid work.

Her third book, *I Love You*, is a story about learning to say those three special words. "We don't do it enough. That's the source of many of our problems," she explains. A release date has yet to be announced. "One thing at a time," Wai Jia says with a smile.



Top: Promoting her second book *A Taste of Rainbow*, and with Mozambican children (below)



Adekunle Adeyeye (right) and Milagros Rivera came to Singapore because of the favourable living environment

A CLASSY PROPOSITION

Drawn by research and funding opportunities and a great place to call home, foreign academics are flocking to the Little Red Dot. **BY ARTI MULCHAND**

When Associate Professor Milagros Rivera hopped on a plane to Singapore in 2002 to visit a former colleague who was teaching at Nanyang Technological University (NTU), she knew nothing about the country — except that the weather would be warm.

It was love at first sight, not least because of the ethnic diversity she encountered. This was something Milagros, who is of Hispanic descent, really missed at her previous post at a university in America's Midwest.

"On my first MRT ride, there were Chinese and Malays chatting together next to me, and a group of Indian women wearing beautiful saris got on

the train at one of the stops. There were also a few Caucasians who looked like they were living in Singapore. At that very moment, I thought, 'I would love to live here!'" she recalls.

Milagros got her wish when an opening for a one-year stint as a visiting professor at the National University of Singapore (NUS) became available during her extended visit. Nine years later, the Puerto Rico native is now heading the Department of Communications & New Media of the university's Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences.

She is one of the hundreds of expatriates who have turned Singapore's academia into a veritable

United Nations, drawn by the Republic's world-class universities, strong funding support, research opportunities and general lifestyle.

Her colleagues come from 15 countries, and "their commitment resonates with my own values," Milagros says. "I don't think I would have stayed as long [as I have] if I didn't have the colleagues and students I have. When I taught my first semester at NUS, the students were so eager to learn that I've never looked back since."

But the working pace took some getting used to for Milagros, who has worked at two public research universities in the United States.

"The workload is heavy and the hours are very long", says the 50-year-old. "My weekdays are seldom shorter than 16 hours and I work seven days a week. I have never worked this hard in



Husband-and-wife pair Qiang Cheng (left), and Xia Chen, both from the School of Accountancy at SMU, hopes being in Singapore will help their young sons understand Asian culture better

my life, but there is great value when you work in a place where everyone shares a vision."

Like her, Associate Professor Adekunle Adeyeye from the Department of Electrical & Computer Engineering of NUS's Faculty of Engineering was drawn to Singapore by the living environment. "It is a safe place to live and raise a family," says the Nigerian who has three children aged 10 and eight years, and 15 months.

Adekunle worked in Singapore for nine months in 1997 before he left for the University of Cambridge. He returned with his family in 2000 to take up a faculty position at NUS. He was also drawn by the opportunity to be involved in the building of the Information Storage Materials Laboratory and to conduct research.

"I like the fact that I am part of the

transformation that is taking place in the education landscape in Singapore and especially at NUS, which has gone from a teaching- to research-intensive university in the last 10 years," says the 43-year-old.

At NUS, the number of non-Singaporean academic staff has gone up by 15 per cent over the last three years. There are now 76 nationalities,

including Singaporeans, represented among the teaching and research staff. This has much to do with the university's focus on academic excellence and potential, and its lack of constraints on nationality, explains Professor Lai Choy Heng, Vice Provost (Academic Personnel) for NUS.

And he is confident that this number will continue to grow. An expanding student population means more teachers are needed, and schools such as NUS are launching major research initiatives to draw thought leaders and creative academics from around the globe.

Foreign faculty numbers at the other local universities, including Singapore Management University (SMU) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU), are also on the rise. At SMU, non-Singaporeans now make up close to 58 per cent of its faculty and come from 28 different countries, says a spokesperson for the university. At NTU, the number of foreigners went up by 44 per cent between 2007 and 2011, with over 70 countries represented, says Dr Koh Hock Tee, the university's Director for Human Resources Faculty Affairs.

Apart from work opportunities, it seems many foreign academics choose to live in Singapore because of an ability to pursue interests outside work hours.

A typical day for Adekunle is filled



National University of Singapore

S'PORE UNIVERSITIES JUMP THE RANKS

Nanyang Technological University and the National University of Singapore have improved on their positions in a recent global ranking of universities.

NTU jumped 16 places to take 58th position while NUS moved up three spots to be ranked 28th in the world, according to the 2011 World University Rankings released in September. The third university, Singapore Management University, was not included in the survey because it is a specialised university.



There are not many other countries where young academics get the opportunities they get here

Assistant Professor Adam Switzer,
Principal Investigator at NTU's Earth
Observatory of Singapore

with lectures, meetings with research students and attending to various administrative duties. But there is time for family during weekends when he is also involved in church activities, and when he makes it a point to catch English Premier League football matches on television.

Milagros makes time for reading and meditation, and even teaches a meditation class at her faculty.

For husband-and-wife pair Qiang Cheng and Xia Chen, both 38, from SMU's School of Accountancy, weekends are when they take their sons, aged five and nine, out and about to explore Singapore. Originally from China, they have also worked in the United States and Canada.

"Singapore offers a wealth of learning opportunities for the kids, such as different kinds of [enrichment] classes and programmes. The children were born and grew up in North America. Since they are still young, we hope the experience of living in Singapore will help them understand Asian culture better and have broader horizons," says Xia Chen, an Associate Professor of Accounting.

That aside, "Singapore is attractive

because I believe that it is a future education hub, particularly in the field of accounting," says Qiang Cheng, who is Associate Dean (Research) and Professor of Accounting. "The working environment here is excellent."

He is not alone in his sentiments. Assistant Professor Adam Switzer, a Principal Investigator at NTU's Earth Observatory of Singapore and who previously taught at the University of Hong Kong, finds the academic and research environment here pleasantly collegial.

"At NTU, I get more of a sense that people really want to help one another succeed," explains the Australian-born earth scientist, 37, who researches coastal hazards.

The real draw for him, though, is the support academics get from both the government and industry. "Singapore offers one of the best research cultures in the world... My research requires a lot of manpower and a truly multidisciplinary team, and Singapore offers opportunities in terms of both funding and manpower," he says.

"There are not many other countries in the world where young academics get the opportunities they get here."

A RACE TO FORGE FRIENDSHIPS

On 19 March, more than 100 students, both international and local, competed in the inaugural intervarsity edition of the *Singapore Challenge*.

The competition, modelled after the reality television competition *The Amazing Race*, had students in teams comprising foreigners and locals race around Singapore, working together to solve puzzles while learning about Singapore's many facets.

This annual event was organised by the Singapore International Foundation, together with NTU, NUS and SMU and the Singapore Institute of Management to forge friendships between Singaporeans and international student communities here.

The foreign students hailed from 18 countries including Belgium, Canada and Vietnam. According to figures from the Singapore Tourism Board, there were more than 90,000 foreign students studying in Singapore each year from 2008 to 2010.

PHOTOS: STEVE ZHU, WILSON PANG; PHOTO OF ASSISTANT PROFESSOR ADAM SWITZER COURTESY OF NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY
ADDITIONAL INTERVIEWS AND RESEARCH: FAIROZA MANJOR AND GENE KHOR

Singapore by numbers

\$13b

The net profit for Singapore government-owned investment company Temasek Holdings for the financial year ending 31 March 2011. This is more than double the \$5b profit of the previous year.

\$5b

What local banker Wee Cho Yaw is worth. The richest man in Singapore, according to *Forbes Asia*, saw an increase of \$728 million in his fortunes from 2010. The business magazine also put the number of billionaires in Singapore at 13, an increase of two from last year.

8

Singapore's ranking in the Top 10 Fashion Capitals 2011 poll by media analytics company Global Language Monitor. It beat Tokyo and Berlin at ninth and tenth place, respectively. This is the first time the Lion City has appeared on the list, which has been published since 2008.

4

The number of eligible candidates who vied for the presidency in Singapore in 2011. Though the second time a presidential election has been held — the first was in 1993 — it was the first multi-candidate presidential race in Singapore's history. Polling Day was 27 August 2011.

\$140m

The amount of funding from the National Research Foundation for research and development in Singapore's water sector this year. Areas that will benefit include research into advanced membrane processes and low-energy seawater desalination. This amount is in addition to the \$300 million set aside five years ago.

... AND ON THE WEB

Have trouble telling house and techno apart? Get insight into electronic music at www.mnshift.com, a site by local dance music label Midnight Shift. It also features interviews with innovators of the local and international club scene, as well as updates of and invites to upcoming club events.

Set up by two budding Singaporean entrepreneurs, www.cartelblanche-x.com is a platform for female bloggers around the world to air their thoughts on fashion, music, film and art. Alongside this melting pot of discussions is an online store retailing accessories like eyewear, necklaces and rings.

For a light-hearted perspective on life in Singapore, check out twntysmthg.sg, set up by a group of local writers. Here you'll find out how the mama shop (neighbourhood convenience store) got its name, where to get the best bargain haircuts in the heartlands, and what inspired a local indie musician to create his own musical notation system.

SIF CELEBRATES 20 YEARS

In August, the Singapore International Foundation (SIF) turned 20, marking two decades of making friends for a better world through the sharing of ideas, skills and experiences. This has seen the coming together of friends and partners across cultures, united by a common cause. To commemorate this milestone, the SIF is launching *Inspirations for a Better World*, a collection of ideas and stories from SIF alumni on how they are helping to build a better world, and how others can follow suit in their everyday lives. An online platform (www.sif.org.sg/inspirations) has also been set up for everyone to share their ideas on building a better world. The SIF will install a water filter in a Cambodian village on behalf of anyone who posts an idea on the site.

As part of its 20th anniversary celebrations and continuing to grow and engage a more diverse and vibrant volunteer community, the SIF also launched its refreshed volunteer identity, Singapore International Volunteers (SIV). Those part of the SIV community, as well as potential volunteers, can connect with like-minded individuals and receive volunteer updates on the new online portal (www.sif.org.sg/siv). The SIV community can also look forward to regular networking events, volunteer opportunities based in Singapore, and a comprehensive volunteer management and recognition system.

BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

The SIF has been developing partnerships with institutions around the world to promote understanding and forge relationships between Singapore and world communities.

Recently, it signed two memorandums of understanding (MOU) — the first on 18 May with the British Council, and the second on 21 July with Ashoka, the largest association of social entrepreneurs in the world.

The MOU with the British Council — the first of such collaboration for the SIF — will strengthen cross-cultural understanding between the citizens of both countries through arts and cultural exchanges. It will also allow for the exchange of ideas and views between artists, curators, academics and thought leaders through artistic residency and collaboration.

The partnership kicked off with an artist-in-residence exchange programme between multi-disciplinary artists Singaporean Michael Lee and British Bob Matthews in June and July this year. The two will also work together to create a cross-cultural showcase to be held in Singapore and London this year as well as in 2012.

The SIF's three-year partnership with Ashoka is aimed at fostering a global network of change-makers



for social innovation. This will be done by having regular exchanges of perspectives and insights between Ashoka's members in 70 countries and the Singapore community through the SIF's Distinguished Visitors Programme and Ideas for a Better World Forum.

Ashoka will also be a partner in the SIF's Young Social Entrepreneurs programme which equips youths with the skills needed to become social entrepreneurs.

So far, the SIF has hosted seven Ashoka Fellows who are leading social entrepreneurs in their respective countries on several visit programmes to Singapore, and as speakers at SIF's Ideas for a Better World Forum, which was launched in March 2011.

This forum brings together global thought leaders to share their insights and experiences on issues to inspire positive change.

BOOSTING BABY CARE IN LAOS

A team of volunteer medical personnel from Singapore's KK Women's and Children's Hospital is scheduled to make a trip to Laos from 9 to 14 October to conduct training for Laotian medical personnel who work with pregnant mothers and their newborns.

The team will comprise paediatric surgeons and doctors, gynaecologists, obstetricians, anaesthetists and nurses. Their trip is part of an ongoing, three-

year SIF project to boost the level of obstetrical care in the landlocked country.

In Laos, 70 out of 1,000 live births do not survive, and about 405 Laotian mothers — out of every 100,000 — die in childbirth.

The Emergency Obstetrics and Paediatrics project was launched in the capital, Vientiane, on 11 October, 2010. Besides KK Women's and Children's Hospital, the SIF's other partner in the project is Vietnam's Mother and Child

Hospital. The project is partly funded by Save the Children, Singapore.





Amarjeet Kaur Gill (far left) and Jaffna librarians reading with children at the Jaffna Public Library

5 QUESTIONS... AMARJEET KAUR GILL

Amarjeet Kaur Gill, Assistant Director of Public Libraries for the National Library Board, went with a fellow volunteer to Jaffna, Sri Lanka twice to help the Jaffna Public Library improve its children's section, and to train librarians to implement reading and educational programmes. She was there in September 2010 and January this year.

WHAT MADE YOU SAY YES TO THIS OPPORTUNITY?

I have been working in the library field for over 20 years, during which time I have gained considerable experience and exposure to various aspects of library operations and developments. Having overseen the setting up of many of the public libraries in malls in Singapore, and currently overseeing operations of public libraries, I felt I could positively contribute to the Jaffna Public Library project.

WHAT WERE THE LIBRARY'S MOST URGENT NEEDS?

The most urgent needs included remodelling the children's reading areas, improving the collections of books and non-print materials, and training the librarians in skills that would encourage children to come to the library to use its resources and develop a reading habit. This in turn would provide

them early literary skills needed to excel in school. Due to the political situation in Jaffna, the librarians had limited access to developments in the library world, in terms of services, programming and infrastructure.

We conducted space planning workshops and skills-training for the librarians in the area of storytelling for children. We also carried out workshops for parents and caregivers on how to select and use age-appropriate materials with the aim of inculcating the joy of reading and making the children lifelong readers.

THE JAFFNA PUBLIC LIBRARY WAS ONCE ONE OF ASIA'S LARGEST. WHAT SORT OF STATE WAS IT IN?

Though the books and furniture were old, they were well-maintained, as were the library's reading rooms and surrounding areas. This to me was an indication of the important role the library had, and still has, in the lives and memories of the people.

WHAT WERE YOUR ENCOUNTERS WITH THE CHILDREN LIKE?

We made a deliberate attempt to speak with the children; they are resilient and determined. The children see the library

as a means to learn English, be exposed to the outside world and lift themselves out of their current situation. [Like many parts of Sri Lanka, Jaffna is still in the process of rebuilding itself after 26 years of a civil war which ended in May 2009.] To be part of this process and contribute in a small way to their aspirations and hopes was what made the project personally and professionally satisfying.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM BEING A PART OF THE PROJECT?

The confidence the Jaffna librarians had in terms of conducting the programmes with minimum level of training and resources was very encouraging. In a short time their efforts have shown great results. Prior to the project, there was no programming in the library. Now storytelling sessions see between 35 to 50 children per session.

The rate of participation of fathers during the programmes was also very encouraging. This joint responsibility of both parents inculcating the joys of reading in their children is something we can learn from Jaffna.

This project has made me see and appreciate our library system with all its world-class services, programming and infrastructure, which we often take for granted, in a new light.



LITERARY SANCTUARY

With streets that honour famous educators and literary giants, the Teachers' Housing Estate in the northwest of Singapore is a tranquil throwback in time. TEXT AGATHA KOH BRAZIL PHOTOGRAPHS STEVE ZHU

For all his imaginative verse, Omar Khayyam — the great medieval Persian mathematician, astronomer, poet and philosopher — probably never dreamt that centuries later, he would be immortalised in a quiet corner of a tropical isle.

But with a street sign — Omar Khayyam Avenue — that bears his name, Khayyam is in good company at the Teachers' Housing Estate. Built in the 1960s, this housing development

was intended to provide the teachers of that era with the opportunity to purchase houses within their income. And as a tribute to culture and learning, seven roads here have been named after literary greats and prominent educators.

Besides Khayyam (who lived from 1048 to 1131), there is Tagore Avenue after the Bengali poet, polymath and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1864-1941). A stone's throw away from Omar Khayyam Avenue, two roads

pay homage to a pair who are regarded as the greatest of Chinese poets — Li Po (701-762 CE) and Tu Fu (712 – 770 CE) — who lived during the Tang Dynasty. Then there is Iqbal Avenue after Muhammad Iqbal, a Muslim poet and philosopher who lived in British India from 1877 to 1938, as well as Kalidasa Avenue after the 4th century Sanskrit writer Kalidasa.

Munshi Abdullah Avenue pays tribute to a literary figure from Southeast Asia. This road honours Abdullah bin



A slice of suburban life at the corner of Kalidasa Avenue and Munshi Abdullah Avenue

Abdul Kadir, or Munshi Abdullah (1796–1854), a giant of Malay literature who also served as an occasional private secretary to modern Singapore's founder Sir Stamford Raffles.

"Ever since the estate was upgraded a few years ago, people have been asking more frequently why the roads have been so named," says resident Madam Rita Wong, 69. In that exercise, plaques displaying a quill were added to the road signs. Markers bearing poems by those honoured with road names were also erected.

The estate was also included in the Ang Mo Kio Heritage Trail, launched as part of the recent Singapore HeritageFest in July.

OLD WORLD CHARM

The estate, located just off Yio Chu Kang Road in Singapore's northwest, was a co-operative housing scheme

completed in 1968. It comprises 256 terrace houses which were priced between \$23,000 and \$25,000 — low prices for their time, but huge sums for teachers, most of whom were earning between \$325 and \$690 a month then.

The "mobile market", a van that used to travel around the estate selling groceries — there were no provision shops or markets within walking distance then — has long gone, and the Singapore Teachers' Union Teachers' Centre, which boasted a swimming pool and squash courts, was demolished last year. At one time, almost all the houses were occupied by locals — teachers of course —



The literary greats at a glance at the entrance of the estate

ISLAND GEMS



Adding to the 'village' feel are numerous fruit trees planted by residents. Here, a plastic bag protects a bunch of bananas from the elements — or hungry passersby!



Left: A group of teachers holding a trishaw to raise funds for the Teachers' Housing Estate, 1973. Right: Minister for Education, Lim Kim San, officiating the opening of Teachers' Centre, 1973. (Source: The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission)

Part of the commemorative marker showing historical events leading to the opening of the Teachers' Housing Estate. The photo on the left depicts teachers holding a trishaw-thon in 1973 to raise funds to build the Teacher's Centre. The other photo shows then-Minister for Education, Lim Kim San, officiating at the opening of the centre in 1973.

but these days there is a smattering of expatriates in the neighbourhood. Some of the original two- and three-storey units have also been extensively renovated.

For all these cosmetic changes, however, many aspects of this estate have remained the same. From a row of shophouses, some shopkeepers still ply their trade for the residents. Besides a laundry, there is an egg-seller and a bakery, Thong Huat Breads and Cakes Manufactory.

According to Mdm Wong, the bakery was already there when she moved into the estate 35 years ago. On its premises, it still bakes old-style loaves distinctive for their traditional burnt tops which are shaved away before the bread is sliced and packed.

"My grandchildren still play in the streets, like what my children used to do," says the retired primary school teacher who lives on Tagore Avenue.

You may no longer come across mischievous monkeys or the occasional pythons who would have strayed in from



A quill in their name; these plaques were added to the road signs in an upgrading exercise a few years ago

the nearby Peirce Reservoir Park, like Mdm Wong has, but there is still hardly any traffic on the quiet roads, gardens are lush with well-tended trees and flowers, and neighbours stop to pass the time of day with one another.

"A jug of wine, a loaf of bread — and thou beside me singing in the wilderness..." Khayyam wrote in his famous *Rubaiyat* poems.

He would have felt at home in this tranquil corner of Singapore.



The Teachers' Estate Park, located off Kalidasa Avenue



Original unchanged shophouses along Kalidasa Avenue still house businesses catering to the residents in the estate



Freshly-baked bread from Thong Huat Breads and Cakes Manufactory, which has been in business for more than 35 years



A commemorative marker with a poem by Rabindranath Tagore



Open spaces like this one beckon

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH, AND PHOTOS OF MARKER AND BANANA TREE: GREGORY LEOW



PHOTOGRAPH BY TREVOR TAN

PAGE BY PAGE

Bangladeshi-born AKM Mohsin started a newspaper to give his compatriots in Singapore a 'voice' and a means to keep in touch with their homeland and their host country. **BY GREGORY LEOW**

He came to Singapore "not to catch a golden deer," says Abul Khaeer Mohammed (AKM) Mohsin, as fame and riches were the last things on his mind when he left Bangladesh in 1991. "There was political chaos in Bangladesh then. I wanted to live a peaceful life."

In Singapore, Mohsin — then aged 27 and a bachelor — enrolled in computer and English language courses, all the while remembering what his father Abdul Malek Bhuiyan — a politician who fought for the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 — had taught him about never treating work as just a money-making venture. Little did Mohsin realise how true this would

be for him one day.

In 2006, he felt called upon to start *Banglar Kantha* or *Voice of Bengal*, a newspaper for his fellow countrymen who live and work in Singapore.

There are around 120,000 of them, and Mohsin had observed this community becoming increasingly isolated from society in their host country. For example, other migrant communities like the Chinese from China and the Tamils from India are able to read local newspapers in their native languages to get their news, but the Bangladeshis cannot as Singapore does not publish any newspapers in Bengali, the main language in Bangladesh.

With little in the way of language and culture that spoke to their roots, "the workers felt cut off and isolated here, so they craved something familiar," Mohsin, 47, and now a Singapore Permanent Resident, says.

He decided to start a newspaper to enable the workers to keep in touch with current events and find out information for themselves.

"Whenever they seek [any] help, the Bengali interpreters are mostly from India, not Bangladesh, so the accent and terminology is different, thus difficult to understand," he says.

With help from his family back home — he has five brothers and four sisters — Mohsin put together \$20,000

to start *Banglar Kantha*. Filled with personal stories and articles contributed by the workers, entertainment and arts features as well as news about Bangladesh and Singapore, the bi-monthly publication helps to alleviate the Bangladeshis' homesickness.

Every Sunday, large numbers of them wait for Mohsin in the ethnic enclave of Little India to hand him stories, poems and letters they have written about their lives here and their families, hoping that these will find their way into the newspaper. He tries to publish as many of these as he can. "[The Bangladeshis] get a lot of satisfaction from being published because they feel they are being heard," he says.

From an initial 500 copies, the paper's circulation is now about 2,500 and rises to 5,000 or so during the Muslim festival of *Hari Raya Aidilfitri* when the workers get a day off. The 24-page full-colour publication has a cover price of \$1.50, and is available at workers' dormitories and Bangladeshi shops. It is financed by advertisements.

Banglar Kantha also serves as a channel for Singapore's Ministry of Manpower; it buys advertisements and runs sponsored features whenever it wants to disseminate information to these workers.

Mohsin, who supplements his income with translation work, has also helped his countrymen in other ways. He found himself in the news in April this year, when he helped the Singapore authorities track down and interview the family of a port worker from Chittagong in southeastern Bangladesh who had inadvertently stowed away to Singapore. The man and a fellow worker had fallen asleep in a container which was then loaded onto a Singapore-bound ship. They were trapped inside for nine days; the other man died.

As chief editor and chief executive of the paper, Mohsin's day

starts in the late morning when he attends to business matters and meets contacts to gather news. At midnight, he goes home for dinner and to write articles and design pages until around four in the morning. After some sleep, he spends time in the mornings with his wife and children before catching a quick nap, and starting his routine again.

Family holidays are unheard of. "On the whole, the family supports what I do, but they do complain," he says with a tired smile.

What drives him is his passion for journalism, inherent since his student days. This passion had taken a back seat during his early days in Singapore. He got a job managing a printing business, went back to Bangladesh to get married, became a father, and brought his family to Singapore. He now has three daughters aged 14, 11, and eight months.

Mohsin also ran a Bengali restaurant before setting up the paper but that didn't fulfil him either. He yearned to do something of benefit to society. In Bangladesh for instance, he had played the *sarod* (a stringed instrument prominent in the classical music of northern India, Bangladesh and Pakistan) in an orchestra, something he felt had added value to the community.

"Both journalism and classical music are a type of art. Behind these

Both journalism and classical music are a type of art. Behind these things I was doing, there was always a goal attached

Abul Khaeer Mohammed Mohsin

things I was doing, there was always a goal attached." Together with his *sarod* teacher, the only blind such musician in the world, Mohsin set up the Inner Eyes Institute and Family Orchestra in his hometown of Brahmanbaria to help the visually-impaired make a career in music instead of resorting to begging. He is actively involved in publicising the orchestra internationally, and staged a concert here in 2007.

"Sometimes my wife says that I am stupid. People come [to Singapore] to make money but I choose to do the newspaper instead. But I ask my wife why she is complaining. Things are okay here.

"Singapore is a fair country where my children can have a world-class education. My family is enjoying their daily life. No chaos."



A SINGAPORE LOVE STORY

Paige Parker, wife of investor Jim Rogers, tells *Singapore* why her family has made its home here. BY THERESA TAN



Paige Parker, with daughters Bee, 3 (left) and Happy, 8

If Paige Parker ever had to leave Singapore, what she would miss most is “the incredibly strong education system”.

“I love being in a place where it’s cool to be smart,” says the 42-year-old who moved to Singapore in 2007 with her husband, investor Jim Rogers. They came with their daughter Hilton Augusta or ‘Happy’, now eight. The couple now has a second child, Beeland Anderson or ‘Bee’, three.

In America, where she is from, “there’s that ‘geek syndrome,’” says Paige. “But not here. I don’t buy that learning is rote here — kids have to think. It’s rigorous!”

Education was a key reason for the couple to first start looking East. Investments were another. Jim, the co-founder of the Quantum Fund with fellow financier George Soros and creator of the Rogers International Commodities Index, had famously said, “If you were smart in 1807 you moved to London, if you were smart in 1907 you moved to New York City, and if you are smart in 2007 you move to Asia.”

Since moving here in mid-2007, Jim has announced a new index fund, The Rogers Global Resources Equity Index, which focuses on top companies in agriculture, mining, metals and energy sectors as well as those in the alternative energy space including solar, wind and hydro.

When the family lived in New York, to give Happy a headstart, her parents hired her a Mainland Chinese nanny and put her in a private school that taught Mandarin.

“Happy was speaking beautiful Mandarin, but it was hard to maintain, especially in the American school system. We wanted her to be truly bilingual, so we started spending our summers in Asia. We went to Shanghai, Hong Kong and then we came here,” says Paige. The couple looked for a suitable place to live in China but “pollution was an issue” so they decided on Singapore.

“Our second summer in Singapore, I found out about Nanyang [Primary School]. We got on the waiting list for the kindergarten, but were told it’s very hard to get in. The next year, around the time we had put our house in New York City up for sale, a child dropped out of Nanyang Kindergarten so Happy got in. We thought, ‘We’ll try this out for a year’.”

**“Happy, within three weeks of going to Nanyang, could speak perfect Singlish...”
Bee (*Xiao Mi Feng* or little bee in Mandarin), is in pre-nursery at Nanyang Kindergarten and “thinks more in Chinese than she does in English.”**

Paige Parker, on how local her daughters have become

What was meant to be a year turned out to be “indefinitely”. Happy started kindergarten, Paige discovered she was pregnant with Bee, the New York mansion was sold for a reported US\$16 million and Singapore became home.

Paige, who speaks a smattering of Mandarin herself, learned the local system in a flash, becoming a model *kiasu* (Hokkien for ‘scared to lose’) parent. She soon found out about the volunteer programme at Nanyang Primary School and — before Happy had even gotten in — became a parent volunteer in the English language department.

The family also found a home within one kilometer of the school — they rent a bungalow in the Cluny Park area. Today, Happy (“*Kuai Le* [happy in

Mandarin] or *Le Le*, depending on what mood she’s in”) is in primary two, and was in the top five of her cohort last year. She pops in during this interview and asks her mother: “When the rain stops, we go cycling, can?”

“Happy, within three weeks of going to Nanyang, could speak perfect Singlish [colloquial Singaporean English],” notes Paige drily. She still volunteers at Happy’s school. Bee (*Xiao Mi Feng* or little bee in Mandarin), is in pre-nursery at Nanyang Kindergarten and “thinks more in Chinese than she does in English,” says Paige.

In between shuttling her kids to enrichment classes — swimming, Chinese dance and Spanish for Bee — Paige helps Jim, 69, with his work. She is also studying to be a certified gemologist.

An only child, Paige grew up in a small town in North Carolina. She went to Salem College, the oldest women’s college in America, and her first job was in the non-profit sector as the director of major gifts and campaigns at Queens College in New York. It was there that she met Jim.

After Jim proposed to her in November 1998 — when she was 28 — Paige went with him on his second round-the-world trip. That three-year trip became a Guinness World Record: they covered 116 countries and 245,000km in 1,101 days, in a custom-made yellow four-wheel-drive Mercedes. They got married in England in 2000 while still on the road.

For vacations these days, the family heads to China where the children get to use their Mandarin; their last trip was to Chengdu to see the pandas.

Paige believes her contribution to Singapore is “to raise two bilingual, compassionate potential Singaporeans. I think I’m doing the most important thing [as a mother].”

Citing the “ease of liveability”, she declares, only half joking, that she is “not leaving. This is home, we see it as home now.”



GIVING, AND GETTING BACK

Thinking nothing of shelving their holiday plans to ensure the spread of year-end cheer, expats in Singapore are chipping in for charity, and say they have gained much by doing so.

BY FAIROZA MANSOR AND GREGORY LEOW



Katie Ault will be selling Christmas cards for the Riding for the Disabled Association this year

For expatriate associations in Singapore, helping others is a year-round activity, offering their members opportunities to integrate into the society of their adopted country and strike up friendships.

"For most expats, volunteering for local charities is about doing something for Singapore, and working together with like-minded people to do something useful with their time," says Anita Jansen Turkenburg, 53, Treasurer of the Netherlands Charity Association (NCA), who has lived in Singapore since 2009.

The NCA holds charity drives throughout the year, from garage sales

to fairs in support of local charities such as Boys' Town and the Society for the Physically Disabled. Likewise, the Canadian Association of Singapore (CAS), which hosted a charity ball for Make-A-Wish Singapore (a non-profit organisation that seeks to fulfil the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions) last April, also carries out other activities throughout the year. These include a food drive at the annual Canadian Thanksgiving Dinner (this year's was on 9 October) and the Terry Fox Run, which it organises each January to raise funds for cancer research in Singapore.

Collectively, Singapore's expatriate

community has made invaluable contributions to local organisations that cater to the less fortunate. James Lim, Volunteer Resources Manager for the Salvation Army, says that expat wives lend a big hand, especially during office hours on weekdays when there is a shortage of local volunteers.

However, the year-end holiday period — usually from the third week of December through to the first week of January — tends to interrupt the schedule of charity work among expatriates. Many of them return to their home countries or go on holiday during this time. With this in mind, some associations have found ways

to work around this annual 'break'.

"We have learnt to schedule our charity events for early December and after the first week of January to ensure maximum attendance, participation and fundraising," says CAS President Janey Schueller, 38. The same holds true for the NCA, which holds its annual Christmas Charity Fair as early as mid-November. Proceeds from this event go to local charities and students from underprivileged homes.

STAYING TO SPREAD THE CHEER

Although many of their friends and colleagues tend to head home, some expatriates remain in Singapore at the end of the year, and spend their time volunteering through the festive season. To those like 39-year-old Katie Ault, who volunteers three times a week as an Assistant Instructor for the Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA), it's a labour of love. RDA offers free therapeutic horse riding for adults and children, and she's hoping to carry out riding activities through the Christmas season this year if the organisation has enough volunteers on hand for programmes to continue as usual.

"If you have led an amazing life and have been given every privilege, it's important to reach out to the less fortunate during Christmas," says Katie, who originally hails from East Sussex, England.



Margaret Wong will continue with her practice of handing out red money packets to the elderly at the Salvation Army's annual Christmas lunch

For Singapore Permanent Resident Margaret Wong, 45, who is a Catholic, volunteering in December serves more as a reminder of how blessed she is.

"Anytime the opportunity presents itself for you to reach out to the less fortunate, grab it — Christmas or not," says the Hong Kong-born American citizen who has been donating goodie bags and *hongbaos* (red money packets) to the elderly at the yearly Christmas lunch held by the Salvation Army's Family Support Services for seven years now.

Gail Stubber, an elementary teacher at SJI International, agrees. She is the Community Services Coordinator at the Australian and New Zealand Association and regularly 'kettles' (a street campaign where volunteers ring a bell to inspire passersby to drop money into trademark red kettles) for the Salvation Army in December.

"I don't see volunteering during the festive season as something that's difficult to juggle [with my other commitments]," says the 54-year-old Australian, who has been living "on and off" in Singapore for 15 years with her engineer husband. "You just make it fit."

THE SPIRIT OF THE SEASON

As these women have found, volunteering during the year-end period can be a different experience as compared to other times of the year, and has even provided insights about the locals. For instance, Katie — who sold Christmas cards for the RDA along Orchard Road last year — realised that in Singapore, charity is not about getting a token in return for your donations: it's just about giving. "There was a



Besides her annual kettling, Gail Stubber also helped to paint the homes of some elderly people during Chinese New Year last year

lovely lady who put money into the donation box and walked away. There were a handful of people like that. It is strange to me, coming from England, where we buy and send a lot of Christmas cards," she says.

Gail experienced similar generosity while on a kettling drive last year. "It seemed people were much more generous than the year before. 2010 had been a tougher year economically, and maybe people realised that there would be more of those in need," she recalls. "A number of people fished out fifty-dollar notes from their wallets."

Margaret, who has lived in Singapore for 17 years and who kettles regularly as well, feels that helping others, especially the elderly, during the holiday season is about more than just giving money. "What [the less fortunate] really need is attention and affection," says Margaret, who has roped in her 15-year-old son Alfred to join in her charity efforts.

For people like Margaret, Katie and Gail, end-year volunteering is a win-win activity. Besides the knowledge that others have benefited from their acts of kindness, the sense of fulfilment they gain from their good work adds to their own festive cheer as well. As Gail puts it: "By volunteering, you get so much back — it's magic."



DELIGHTING IN DEEPAVALI

Chef Manjunath Mural of fine dining restaurant The Song of India shares his favourite treat for the Festival of Lights. BY GWEN LIN

It is the day Chef Manjunath Mural looks forward to the most each year, when he changes out of his chef's whites and dons new clothes for a very important festival — *Deepavali*, the Festival of Lights.

"*Deepavali*, which literally means 'a row of lamps' in Sanskrit, celebrates the victory of good over evil, knowledge over ignorance and light over darkness," says Chef Mural, the corporate executive chef of fine dining restaurant The Song of India. "It is one of the few festivals celebrated in every part of India. It's a celebration of joy, hope, togetherness and happiness."


The 38-year-old from Mumbai has lived in Singapore for five years and now considers the island home. So he celebrates *Deepavali* — or *Diwali*, as it is called in his hometown — as he would in India, keeping to the usual rituals. In India, *Diwali* is traditionally celebrated over five continuous days, with the main festival taking place on the third day. Colourful displays of fireworks are always associated with this festival, and people light up *diyas* (lamps) and candles all around their homes, and set off firecrackers.

Singapore's laws prohibit the sale of firecrackers, which can only be lit at controlled events. Setting these festive noise makers off is one tradition Chef Mural misses.

"In Mumbai, it's traditional to light and burst beautiful and colourful firecrackers to dispel the darkness," he says.

That restriction aside, Chef Mural takes care to observe the other *Diwali* customs.

"In the morning, I perform *Laxmi*



During *Deepavali*, sweets known as *mithai* are eaten and exchanged as gifts

Pooja, at home. This ceremony, which venerates Laxmi [or Lakshmi], the Goddess of Wealth, is central to *Diwali* celebrations. We also decorate our homes with *rangoli* [rice or flour floor art] and *diyas*, and feast with all our near and dear ones," says the Singapore Permanent Resident.

Chef Mural may be renowned for his modern Indian cuisine, which he has served to the likes of Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan and even past prime ministers of India, but when it comes to desserts, it is the traditional sweets of *Diwali* that he favours.

"Every house is 'flooded' with a variety of sweets. We serve them to

guests and exchange them as gifts," he says.

Sweets known as *mithai* are made to represent the sweetness in life. Different kinds of expensive dried fruits are used to make delicacies such as *burfi* (chewy condensed milk candy), *ladoo* (sweet flour balls), and *kheer* (rice pudding). These are eaten as a snack as well as appetisers or desserts. The pistachio *burfi* is one sweet that Chef Mural always insists on.

"It brings back memories of my mother making them as offerings or *prasad* for the goddess Laxmi. These are distributed to all present after the prayers," he says.

At the restaurant, Chef Mural makes this treat with pistachios and serves it as a roll, alongside a host of other traditional sweets given a modern twist, such as Saffron & Sesame Delight and Green Tea Katli (a *katli* is similar to a *burfi*).

By serving these, Chef Mural hopes diners will come to appreciate what *Diwali* is about.

"It is a time to celebrate the sweet things in life with the family," he explains.

Deepavali falls on Oct 26 this year.

The Song of India
33 Scotts Road



PISTACHIO ROLL

SERVES 4
(MAKES 12 PIECES)

INGREDIENTS

250g whole shelled pistachio nuts
250g whole cashew nuts
400g sugar
400ml water
¼ tsp green cardamom
Green food colouring
Sesame seeds
Edible silver leaf, if desired

METHOD

1. To make the pistachio mixture, boil the pistachio nuts in water for five minutes. Leave to cool, then remove the skin by rubbing the nuts with a piece of cloth. Grind nuts into a powder.
2. Heat 200g of sugar and 200ml of water in a saucepan. Keep stirring constantly until a thick caramel — that can be rolled into a ball — is achieved.
3. Add the pistachio powder and a few drops of liquid green food colouring to the caramel, and cook the mixture on a low flame for 5 to 6 minutes. Allow to cool.

4. Add the green cardamom powder to the cooled pistachio mixture. Mix this well with your hands and form the mixture into a soft ball. Set aside.
5. Grind the cashew nuts into a powder.
6. Heat another 200g sugar and 200ml water in a saucepan, and keep stirring constantly until a thick caramel is achieved.
7. Add the cashew nut powder and cook over low heat for 7 to 8 minutes. Set aside to cool.
8. Mix well with your hands, and form the mixture into a soft ball. Set aside.
9. Roll the pistachio and cashew mixtures into square sheets, about one centimetre in thickness each.
10. Place the cashew sheet on top of the pistachio sheet. Roll tightly to form a roll around five centimetres in diameter.
11. Cover the roll with sesame seeds or, if you prefer, edible silver leaf. Cut into small pieces, and serve.

As It Fades

T.H.E Dance Company
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
19 - 25 September 2011
Dance



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Applications for Singapore Internationale, the Singapore International Foundation's arts and culture grant, are open from 3 Oct to 25 Nov 2011 for works that will be presented abroad from 1 Jan 2012. For more information, please write to contactus@sif.org.sg. For a full list of grant recipients, visit www.singaporekopitiam.sg/arts-and-entertainment



INSITU
Beautiful/Banal
London, UK
4 - 11 November 2011
Multidisciplinary art



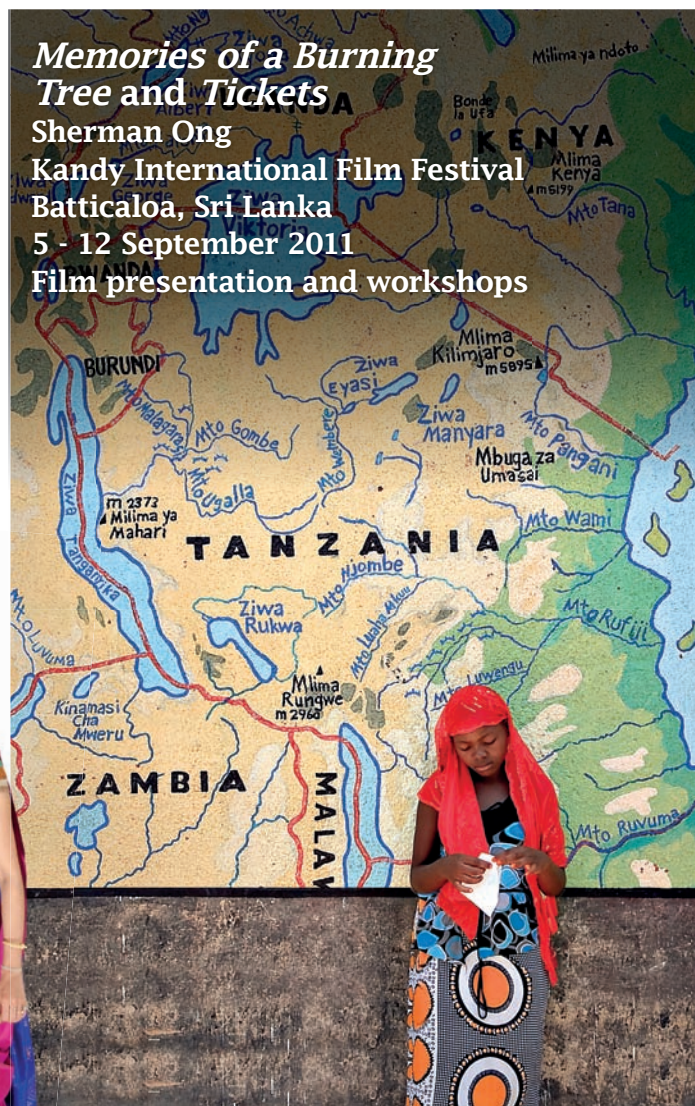
Chaos & Order
Tan Haur
Xi'an, China
21 October -
30 November 2011
Visual art

**TRIKON -
The War Within**
Gayatri Sriram
Bangalore, India
8 July 2011
Performance art

The F Word
360 Productions
Edinburgh, UK,
5 - 27 August 2011
Theatre



**Memories of a Burning
Tree and Tickets**
Sherman Ong
Kandy International Film Festival
Batticaloa, Sri Lanka
5 - 12 September 2011
Film presentation and workshops



A specialist society

Sometimes all it takes is a change of perspective and a little accommodation to unlock the hidden potential in people, says Thorkil Sonne, founder of Specialisterne, an organisation that taps the specialist abilities of those with autism. BY SHERALYN TAY

When his youngest son Lars was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) at age three, Thorkil Sonne and his wife were devastated. "As parents we want all our children to have good opportunities in life, but the diagnosis meant that Lars would never have the same chances as his siblings and peers," he says.

But the father of three (Lars is now 14, with two older brothers aged 19 and 22) saw something special beyond the stigma and perceived limitations of the disorder. "To us, Lars is this great, skilled child. But society does not see that. Maybe it is society that has the problem," says the 51-year-old. "So I thought I'd like to try and change that."

He founded Specialisterne in 2004, a company that employs people with autism (or "specialist" people) to test software and process data for multinational corporations such as IBM and Deloitte. Having worked in IT for many years, Thorkil saw that the industry needs people who are able to do detailed, repetitive tasks that require a high level of accuracy and compliance. This knack for perfection is something his specialists do with instinctual flair.

"At least five per cent of business tasks can be better done with our specialists, and with about one per cent of the [world's] population diagnosed with

autism, there is plenty of scope for specialists in the workforce.

"I wanted not only to establish a company that could help Lars and others like him to find work, but also change the way society views their abilities which are applicable not just in sheltered work environments and low skilled jobs, but which can be harnessed to do work that values and maximises their special skills," he explains.

Specialisterne now employs 33 consultants with ASD and 20 employees with 'normal' abilities. In 2008, Thorkil sold the company to set up and run the Specialist People Foundation, with the vision of enabling one million jobs for specialist people with autism and similar challenges on a global scale.

A keynote speaker at the Singapore International Foundation's (SIF) Ideas for a Better World Forum in July this year, Thorkil's emphasis on the importance of embracing diversity and changing social perceptions reflects the vision of the Ashoka Foundation, of which he is one of 2,500 Fellows across more than 70 countries.

Thorkil Sonne was a keynote speaker at the SIF's fourth Ideas for a Better World Forum in July this year. The forum is a platform for global thought leaders to share their ideas to inspire action for good. Key areas explored through the forum include health, education, environment, arts and culture, and livelihood and business. On 27 October 2011, John Elkington, Founding Partner and Executive Chairman of Volans will deliver a keynote address at the fifth Ideas for a Better World Forum, which will field discussions on revolutionising current sustainability practices.



Thorkil Sonne speaking at the SIF's Ideas for a Better World Forum in July

The SIF has signed a three-year memorandum of understanding with the Ashoka Foundation that will comprise mutual exchanges between Ashoka Fellows and Singapore.

Thorkil is also a participant of the Ashoka Globalizer programme which aims to help identify social entrepreneurs with the greatest potential for catalysing global systems, and to further refine their social innovations so as to adapt their strategies for accelerated global spread.

Ultimately, says Thorkil, the idea is to change mindsets and in doing so drive innovation and maximise the human potential — a vision illustrated by his Specialist People Foundation's logo of a dandelion seed.

A dandelion is also regarded as a herb, and is one of the most valuable plants in Denmark, where Thorkil and his family live. "[A plant like the dandelion is] a weed in an unwanted place. If you take the weed and place it in a wanted place, it becomes a herb," he says.



You Could Be The Reason For Their Smiles

It is estimated that more than 30 percent of Cambodians have no access to improved drinking water sources. The country also has one of the highest infant mortality rates in Asia and the majority of these premature deaths could be attributed to water-borne diseases like diarrhoea, hepatitis A and typhoid.

The SIF is calling for organisations who wish to make a difference to this situation by forming groups of 10-12 individuals to travel from Singapore to Cambodia to volunteer with Water for Life, the foundation's first direct-service project.

By assisting in the assembling and installation of bio-sand water filters, conducting basic hygiene

education and/or refurbishing a rural health centre, you can play a part in helping to improve the quality of life of some 2,000 Cambodian villagers in Siem Reap.

Water for Life is kindly sponsored by Deutsche Bank and Ngee Ann Development Pte Ltd. The project partners are Middletown Rhode Island Rotary Club U.S.A and the Angkor Hospital for Children.

Volunteer today! Visit www.sif.org.sg for more project information and application details.



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