

HOME

August 9, 2015

50 Truly Unforgettable Moments Of
Singapore's Golden Jubilee

FOREWORD

On Aug 9, 1965, the lives of Singaporeans changed forever.

At 10am, a voice on the radio announced that Singapore had been expelled from the Malaysian federation and would “forever be a sovereign, democratic and independent nation”.

Few believed that Singapore would make it on its own. There were too many problems - unemployment and a shortage of housing among them.

But the city state survived - and more.

The Old Guard leaders led by Mr Lee Kuan Yew and Dr Goh



A tribute film honouring Singapore's founding prime minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, brought many at the parade to tears. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

Keng Swee reinvented the economy to rely on export-driven growth, creating jobs in the process.

In defence, a law was passed to enlist men at age 18 for national service, and an army was built.

And in housing, new towns were created.


Over the next five decades, Singapore grew and flourished. Educational levels were raised, healthcare improved, transport systems put in place and the finer things in life, like the arts, were developed.

Core beliefs like multi-racialism and meritocracy were also reinforced.

On Aug 9, 2015, Singapore celebrated its Golden Jubilee.

For many, the big day started with the 9am public broadcast of the Proclamation of Independence read out by Mr Lee, the founding Prime Minister who died on March 23, 2015. This was followed by various National Day observance events across the island and a nostalgia-filled National Day Parade at the Padang.

Throughout the day, a palpable sense of pride and national identity filled the air.

Home: 50 Truly Unforgettable Moments Of Singapore's Golden Jubilee captures the events of this special day in photos, audio and videos. 

Sumiko Tan
Deputy Editor



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1

Fly the flag

Just as National Day celebrations islandwide were upsized for the Golden Jubilee, so were the decorations.

Why hang just one national flag? Why not 60? That was what a residents' committee in Toa Payoh did, so that it could form an un-missable "50" billowing in the sky.

"After we put up our display, we noticed more flags at the blocks. It's like a signal to the other residents," said Mr Henry

More than 60 flags forming the number 50 billowing in the wind between blocks 107 and 109 at Lorong 1 Toa Payoh.


PHOTO: PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION



An eye-catching scene featuring heliconia flowers and a sunbird on the facade of Block 838, Yishun Street 81 was the work of 2,000 Nee Soon South residents and students from Orchid Park Secondary School. PHOTO: PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION

Ong, chairman of the Toa Payoh North Zone 2 Residents' Committee.

Elsewhere, facades of HDB blocks across the islands were transformed into canvases as 100 artists, with the help of 50,000 residents, put up art installations that were up to 900 sq m in size.

In Yishun, a canvas showed a giant sunbird, while in Tampines, the Merlion made an appearance. Over in Jurong, paper planes soared over a rainbow. Nice. 



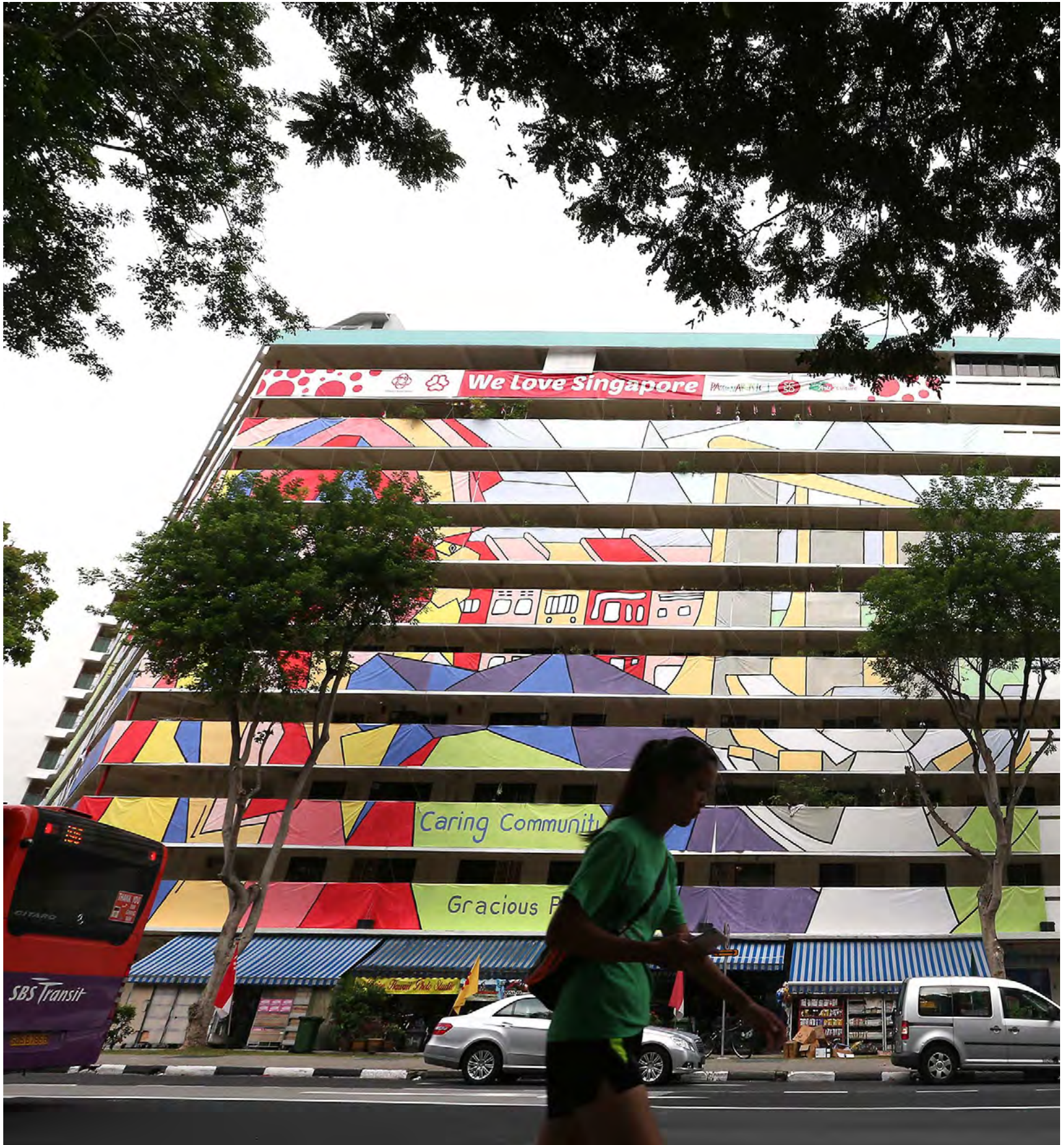
A colourful makeover for Block 374 Bukit Batok Street 31 as part of PAssionArts Festival 2015, where the facades of 105 HDB blocks were transformed. PHOTO: DIOS VINCOY JR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES



Block 728, Tampines Avenue 5's facade Game-On featured a video game design incorporating Tampines icons and was created by 800 Tampines Central residents and students from Temasek Polytechnic and Poi Ching School. PHOTO: PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION



Splashes of colour at Block 370 Tampines Avenue 7, one of the blocks dressed up as part of the PASSionArts Festival 2015.
 PHOTO: YEO KAI WEN



Another block that had its facade done up in bright and bold colours was Block 58 Marine Terrace.
ST PHOTO: NEO XIAOBIN



Buildings come alive

At 50, Singapore is a child compared to The Fullerton Hotel, which is 128 years old this year.

But 50 is nothing to sniff about, and the hotel, which in the past housed the General Post Office, was one of many commercial buildings that pulled out all the stops to celebrate SG50.



The SG50 logo is displayed on the ArtScience Museum. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM




TAP TO WATCH VIDEO

(Available only on desktop and Apple devices)

ST VIDEO: T. KUMAR

Every night from Aug 1 to 9, a stunning eight-minute-long music and visual display entitled *A Celebration Of Our Heritage* appeared on the hotel's facade. It showcased iconic moments that took place at Fullerton Square, including scenes from election rallies and 3D animated stamps.

The show was produced with Hexogon Solution, the Singaporean firm behind the light show at the opening ceremony of the 2015 SEA Games at the National Stadium.

Fullerton Hotel wasn't the only place lit up in full SG50 glory. The Esplanade's famous "durians" were awash in red and white, while the Pickering Operations Complex in Raffles Place sported a massive SG50 banner. 



An SG50 banner high up on the Pickering Operations Complex in Raffles Place can be seen during a Parade performance at the Padang. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG



Bishan North students and residents forming Singapore's largest SG50 logo at Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park in January 2015. PHOTO: HOPE TECHNIK



SG50 projects

SG50-related projects in all shapes and sizes were launched in the lead-up to National Day. Some were sponsored by the Government, others were spontaneous.

Among them was a project by photographer Tay Kay Chin who set out to photograph one person born on Aug 9 for every year Singapore had been independent.


Another project saw a group of Raffles Institution students and alumni embarking on Becoming Bishan, where they tracked down the origins of Bishan.

But for writer Natalie Lim, 26, “everything also SG50” made her cynical at first. So she started a Facebook project to catalogue at least one SG50-related item a day for 50 days after seeing companies “simply just jumping on the SG50 bandwagon”. But when her foreign friends living here started contributing to the project, sending her pictures of SG50-related items and the interesting way the occasion was being celebrated, she changed her mind.



Writer Natalie Lim, 26, who started a Facebook project to catalogue at least one SG50-related item a day. PHOTO: DIOS VINCOY JR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

“I realised that the occasion is very festive, since not many countries count down to their birthdays.” In the end, she collected 235 photos of SG50 celebrations, among them a postbox with SG50 stickers, Singapore-themed pedicures and fish cakes with SG50 cutouts.

“More than half of the photographs were actually contributed by expats living here, and I came to realise how cosmopolitan and culturally diverse Singapore is - many people who choose to live here actually really care about the country,” she added. 



Photographer Tay Kay Chin taking a picture of Ms Eliza Chia for his SG50 project to photograph one person born on Aug 9 for every year since 1965. PHOTO: DIOS VINCOY JR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

4

Bag full of fun goodies

It's a National Day Parade tradition, but 2015's goodie bag was bigger, better and not just for Parade spectators but also every household.

The SG50 version came in 50 different looks designed by Singaporeans from all walks of life. Each of Singapore's 1.2 million households was also given one, and hundreds of people spent days packing 22.8 million items into the bags.



The standard items in the SG50 funpack - instant cereal, detergent, miniature flag, NEWater, two nostalgic games, replica of Proclamation of Singapore, NDP poster of programmes during the Jubilee weekend, Singa Lion figurine, two nostalgic snacks and LED balloon maraca. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

The bags contained nostalgic treats and toys of yesteryear like haw flakes, country flag erasers and paper balls, and a keepsake figurine of Singa the Courtesy Lion that proved to be very popular. There were, of course, the inevitable Singaporean grouses that the funpacks were not remarkable enough.

To that, Straits Times correspondent Jermyn Chow had a retort: “Let’s not get too fixated with the freebies in the funpacks or feel disappointed they weren’t big, or costly, or meaningful enough.

Instead, we should appreciate the effort and love that went into preparing a funpack that will bind the nation in celebration. Whatever its humble contents, this is one funpack with a big heart.”

Here are the 50 designs of the goodie bags.









A fan of veteran singer Tracy Huang waving a lit placard at the Sing50 concert.

BT PHOTO: JOSEPH NAIR




Sing a song of Singapore

What's a celebration without music? And if you're celebrating 50 years, why not 50 years of music? That was what the Sing50 concert at the National Stadium provided, kicking off the Golden Jubilee weekend festivities on Aug 7.

Music – and musicians – from five decades got together to showcase the very best of music in Singapore in front of a 41,300-strong audience.

Songs were as diverse in language as they were in genre. More than 250 artists including Mandopop superstars Stefanie Sun and JJ Lin, pioneering acts Vernon Cornelius, Ramli Sarip and Tracy Huang, and Cultural Medallion recipient Jeremy Monteiro took to the stage, crooning classics in Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English.

There was xinyao, there was pop yeh-yeh, there was jazz, there was rock at the concert organised by The Straits Times and The Business Times of Singapore Press Holdings Limited.

Even seasoned performers felt Sing50 was a concert to remember. Said iconic singer Rahimah Rahim, 59: “I’ve done many shows, but I’m so proud to be a part of this one because it marks SG50.” 



The community choir, made up of 1,000 members, singing their hearts out at the concert.

ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE



The young choir members sang popular songs in different languages at the Sing50 concert.
ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG



World-renowned Chinese concert pianist Lang Lang performing on stage during the two-and-a-half-hour show. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG



Some of the 50 pianists performing together with pianist Lang Lang in the classical act, Concerto In Three Movements. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG



Guests such as President Tony Tan Keng Yam, Mrs Mary Tan, Mr Heng Swee Keat (in the background), and artistes Dick Lee and Rani Singam waving to the audience, after the final note of Majulah Singapura. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG



Singapore singer JJ Lin performing his soulful breakthrough ballad River South. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE



Chart-topping songbird Stefanie Sun wowing the audience with renditions of four of her biggest hits. BT PHOTO: JOSEPH NAIR



Performing in the jazz segment were (from left) Melissa Tham, Jacintha and Rani Singam.
BT PHOTO: JOSEPH NAIR



Singers (from left) Jeffrydin, Rahimah Rahim, Ramli Sarip, Art Fazil and Sezairi Sezali performing at the Sing50 concert. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG



One people, one Singapore

Singapore's improbable journey from Third World to First, and as one united people, has given Singaporeans ample reason to celebrate its Golden Jubilee, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said in his National Day Message released on Aug 8.




Mr Lee delivering his National Day Message from the Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall. PHOTO: MCI

While Separation from Malaysia in 1965 was – as founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew said – a moment of anguish, “that moment of anguish turned into a lifetime of determination to forge a path for this island nation”, he said in a speech delivered from the Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall, which reopened in 2014 after a major four-year, \$158-million facelift.

Progress was made each year with the country overcoming many challenges, from the British withdrawal in 1971 and the oil crisis in 1973, to Sars in 2003 and the global financial crisis more recently.

“Most of all, let us celebrate how we journeyed from Third World to First, as one united people, leaving no one behind. Every citizen has benefited from Singapore’s progress. Life has improved for all – for Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians; for blue-collar as well as white-collar workers; for HDB as well as condominium dwellers. We are a nation of home owners. Everyone has opportunities to improve himself. Everyone can look forward to a brighter future,” he said.

“Fifty years on, on our Golden Jubilee, we will gather again at the Padang. We will sing Majulah Singapura proudly, and recite the National Pledge. We will rejoice in the success of our last five decades, and commit ourselves anew to work together as one united people, regardless of race, language or religion, to build Singapore, so as to achieve happiness, prosperity and progress for our nation. Happy 50th National Day.” 



Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Datuk Seri Najib Razak being served top-grade Mao Shan Wang durian at Agrobazaar Malaysia in August 2014. On the right is Ms Ho Ching, Mr Lee's wife. ST FILE PHOTO



Tale of two countries with shared history

Singapore and Malaysia decided to go their separate ways on Aug 9, 1965, but the ties between the neighbours have since flourished and grown deeper, the prime ministers of both countries said in messages on the 50th anniversary of bilateral relations.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and his Malaysian counterpart Najib Razak wrote of how the countries are linked by history, geography and kinship, and have been able to look beyond differences to work together for the mutual benefit of their people.

Mr Lee's message:

Today, on Aug 9, 2015, Singapore celebrates its 50th National Day. This year is also the 50th anniversary of Singapore-Malaysia bilateral relations, a significant milestone for our ties.

On this day 50 years ago, Singapore and Malaysia decided to go our separate ways. It was a difficult period for both countries. Many Singaporeans and Malaysians had friends and family on the other side of the Causeway. Both countries decided that despite the Separation, and whatever our differences, we had to live together and work together to create mutual prosperity. Our deep historical, social and cultural ties helped us to do so.

Our bilateral relations have since flourished. Today, Singapore and Malaysia enjoy a warm relationship and good cooperation at all levels. I met regularly with former Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, and now with Prime Minister Najib Razak, to review our relations and explore new areas of collaboration. Ministers and officials have frequent exchanges on a wide range of issues, including trade and investment, security and telecommunications. The Leaders' Retreat is an annual highlight in our bilateral relationship.

In recent years, we have resolved a number of longstanding bilateral issues. For example, we achieved the full resolution

of the Points of Agreement (POA) on Malayan Railway land in Singapore in 2011. Following the POA resolution, the joint-venture projects between Temasek and Khazanah in both Singapore and Iskandar Malaysia are progressing well.

Our economic ties have grown. Malaysia and Singapore are each other's second largest trading partners, with total merchandise trade valued at \$111 billion in 2014. Singapore is also the top foreign investor in Iskandar Malaysia.

As of end-2013, Singapore investments into Malaysia totalled \$37 billion, while Malaysian investments into Singapore totalled \$27 billion.

Singapore and Malaysia also cooperate well regionally. As founding members of Asean, we share an interest in maintaining regional peace and stability and promoting economic integration. Malaysia is Asean chair at a crucial moment: This year, we will establish the Asean Community. Singapore will continue to support Malaysia's chairmanship, and work with Malaysia to foster a more integrated and prosperous region beyond 2015.

The depth of the friendship is evident in our shared family trees, festive seasons and food culture. Every day, hundreds of thousands of people cross the Strait of Johor, whether for work, play or to visit friends and relatives. Our citizens find the other country familiar, yet it also offers a change of scenery.

We have come to each other's assistance during difficult periods, such as the MH370 flight incident last year and the Sabah earthquake on June 5 this year.

We are deeply grateful for the prompt support and assistance of the Malaysian authorities in the search, rescue and recovery efforts on Mount Kinabalu.

Looking ahead, our countries are pursuing many exciting developments together, like the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High Speed Rail (HSR). Discussions on the project are making steady progress. The HSR will provide a fast and convenient means of travel between Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. The Johor Baru-Singapore Rapid Transit System, with co-located checkpoint, immigration and quarantine facilities in Johor Baru and Singapore, will also enhance cross-border connectivity and speed up travel between Singapore and Johor Baru.

Malaysia will always be an important partner for Singapore. When Malaysia does well, Singapore also prospers. Singapore is committed to a strong and mutually beneficial partnership with Malaysia. As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Singapore-Malaysia friendship, I look forward to both sides working together for the betterment of our countries, peoples and region.

Mr Najib's message:

Fifty years ago today, Singapore became an independent state. As a 12-year-old, I was aware of the significance of Malaysia gaining a new neighbour and of our two countries settling our boundaries – both to continue independently on the adventure of independence, with all the opportunities and perils that developing nations faced in the 1960s.

Of course, we had a special interest in Singapore; history and geography bound us together. We have a Malay proverb for it: *Sedangkan lidah lagi tergigit*, or We are like tongue and teeth. In other words, we were destined to be conjoined and need to cooperate, not compete.

Over the decades, we observed Singapore's progress. And we too mourned the passing of Mr Lee Kuan Yew in March. His vision underpinned Singapore's advances, and he was admired by friends and critics alike. South-east Asia lost a statesman when he died. His presence is missed during landmark celebrations, but his legacy is secure – it is the Singapore of today.

Malaysia and Singapore have had differences, but we have always achieved the most when we have worked pragmatically together – and we have much to be proud of.

In 1967, we were among the five founders of Asean, an organisation that has kept peace in the most ethnically and religiously diverse region on earth. We came together in the Five Power Defence Arrangement in 1971; we cooperated closely at the UN in the 1980s to ensure a settled future in Indochina; and today we are linked in so many ways.

Take trade cooperation, for instance. We are each other's second largest trading partner after China. In 2014, Singapore was Malaysia's second largest trading partner globally and the largest trading partner in Asean. Singapore was also the second largest source of foreign investment in Malaysia in 2014, and I am pleased that while Iskandar Malaysia and Penang have been the main focus of investment from Singapore, Singaporeans are now also beginning to look further afield, including Sabah and Sarawak.

In terms of tourism, the total number of visits to Malaysia from Singapore in 2014 was 13.9 million – an increase of 5.7 per cent from 2013. But we want even more of you to visit us, and this year, Tourism Malaysia is hoping we can attract 14.5 million guests from Singapore.

The changed approach between our two countries was emphasised soon after I became Prime Minister. The win-win solution of the Points of Agreement in 2010 – after a 20 year deadlock – was an example of how we chose to move forward in a spirit of mutual benefit, and put a longstanding stumbling block behind us.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and I agreed that our countries should not be encumbered by any issues associated with the past. The days when some considered agreement to be a form of weakness are gone. Our future is as partners. Indeed, recently there have even been suggestions that our two countries should formulate an Olympic bid together.

On a personal note, the new relationship between Malaysia and Singapore was underlined soon after I became Prime Minister. On a visit to the Singapore Botanic Gardens in May 2009, I was honoured to be told that a hybrid of the Dendrobium Ronald Imanuel and Dendrobium Jeffrey Tan orchids had been named the Dendrobium Najib Rosmah. The hybrid orchid is a symbol of the relationship between Malaysia and Singapore. It needs to be nurtured carefully– for then it will flourish.

I am pleased with the results of our closer relations, and look forward to achieving more. The construction of the High Speed Rail linking Kuala Lumpur and Singapore will certainly transform the way Malaysians and Singaporeans interact with each other, facilitating travel between both capital cities, enhancing business linkages and improving people-to-people ties.


At this time of opportunity between our nations, I urge Singaporeans not to judge Malaysia by what you may read on social media, or by politically motivated statements from certain

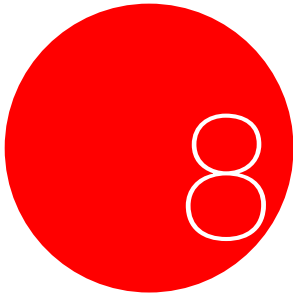
quarters running down our country.

I will ensure that Malaysia remains stable and safe – for guests and Malaysians alike.

The reality is that we share your aspirations for good governance; for a strong, inclusive and sustainable economy based on sound fundamentals; and for stability, harmony and diversity.

That is why we make good partners, and why Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and I will continue to work closely to bring real benefits to all Malaysians and Singaporeans.

Fifty years ago, ties between our two nations were strained. Today, relations have never been better and the results speak for themselves. Happy 50th birthday, Singapore – Malaysia looks forward to toasting many future anniversaries with you. 



ST's Aug 9 edition looks back

Sunday, August 9, 2015




The Straits Times' headline on Aug 10, 1965, summed it up simply: "Singapore is out".

Fast forward 50 years, and Singapore's national identity and global standing couldn't be more different. What better way to capture the difference five decades has made than the headline on Aug 9, 2015: "S'pore is in".

The Straits Times toasted the improbable nation in a supplement paying tribute to the men and



women who navigated uncharted waters in creating Singapore's icons.

The Aug 9 edition of the paper also came with a unique tribute – a 3D flypast on the front page of the paper, with the help of augmented reality. 

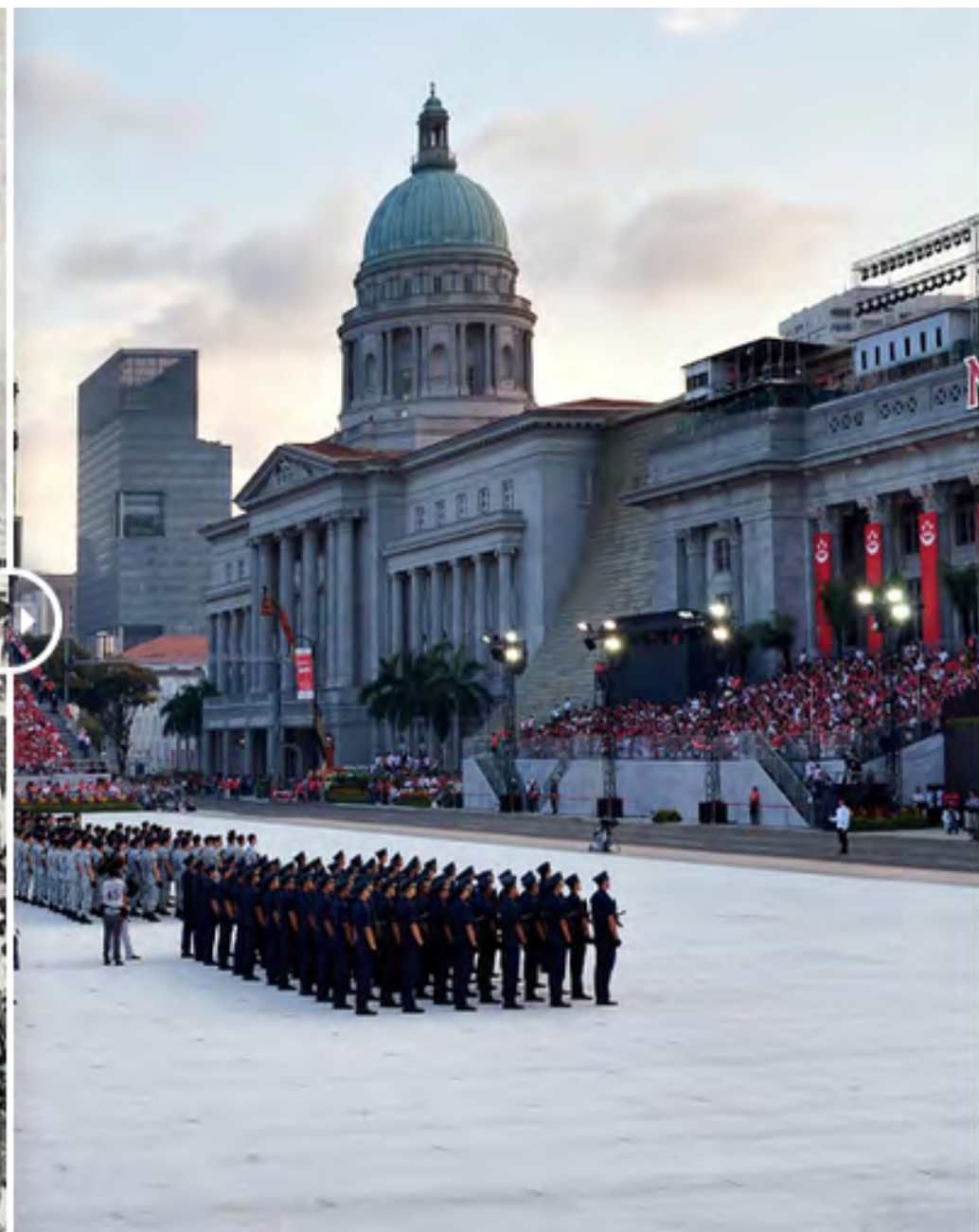
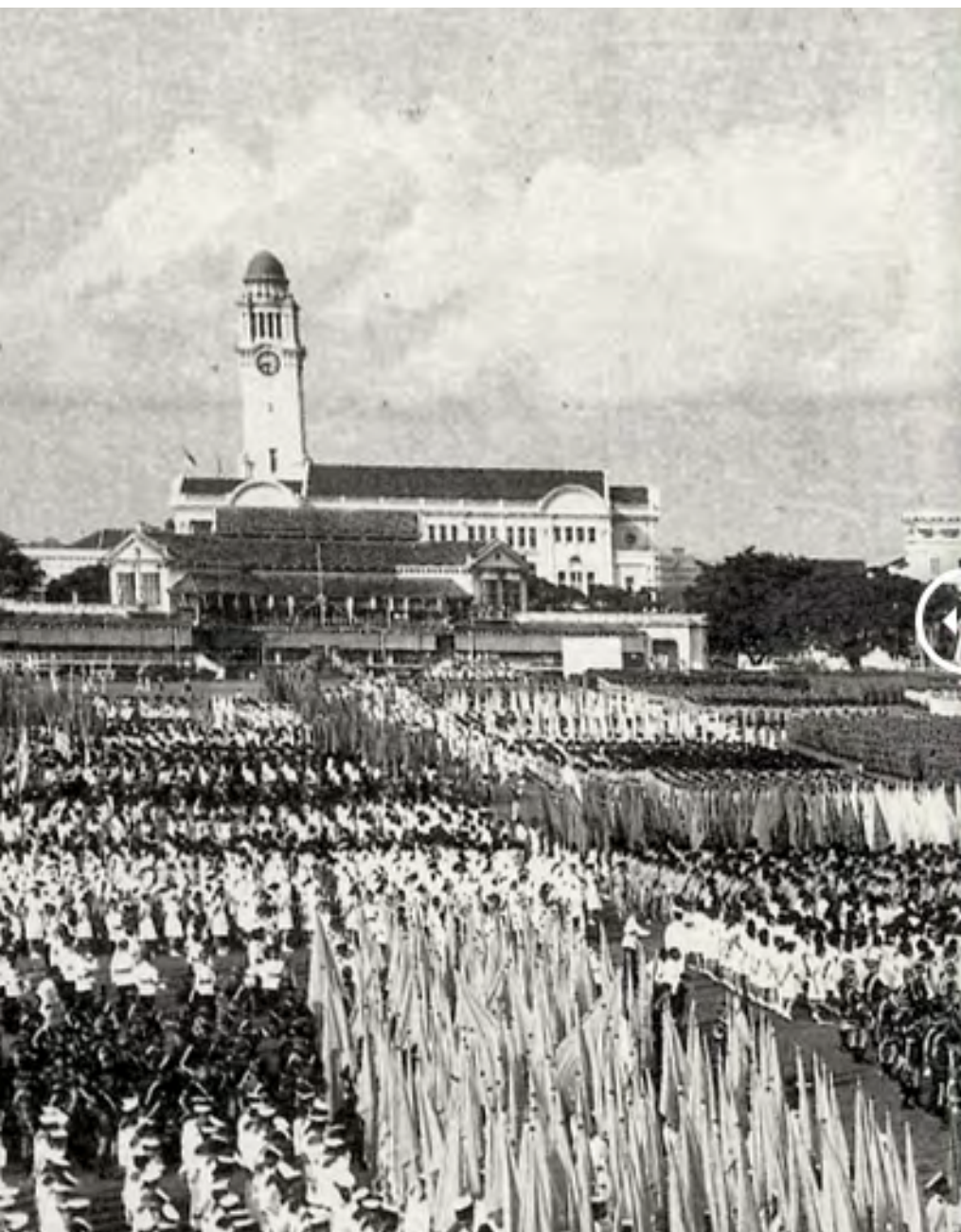


ST GRAPHICS: CAROL GAN, PETER THOMAS WILLIAMS AND ADAM LEE




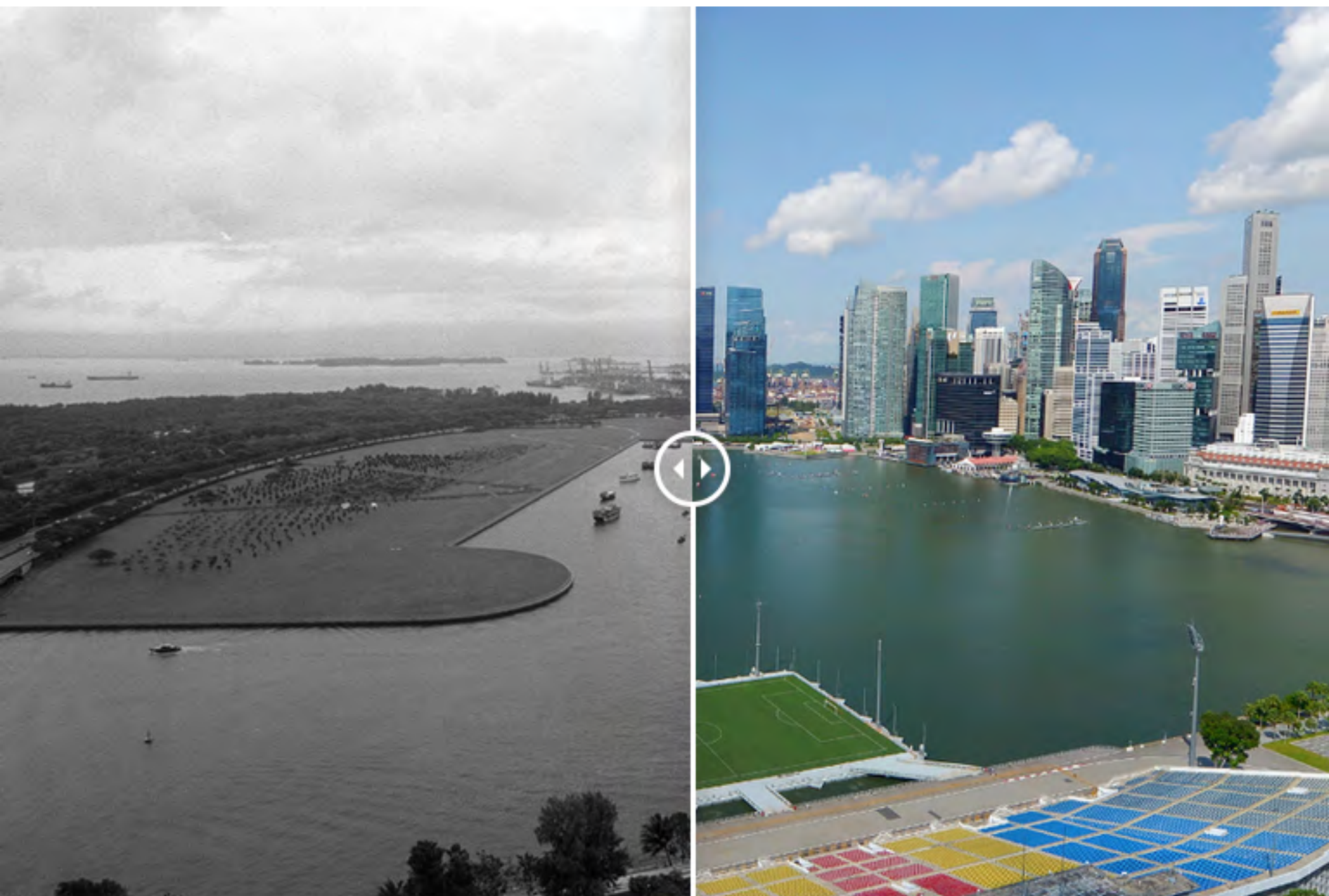
Slide to Then & Now

The Marina Bay Floating Platform has played host to National Day Parades, with the gleaming CBD skyline as a backdrop. Formula One cars zoom by beside it once a year, thrilling fans in the bay grandstand. Thousands head to the gleaming towers of Marina Bay Sands and the lotus-inspired ArtScience Museum each weekend, and on Jubilee Weekend, thousands more headed to the area to soak in aerial displays and other sights.

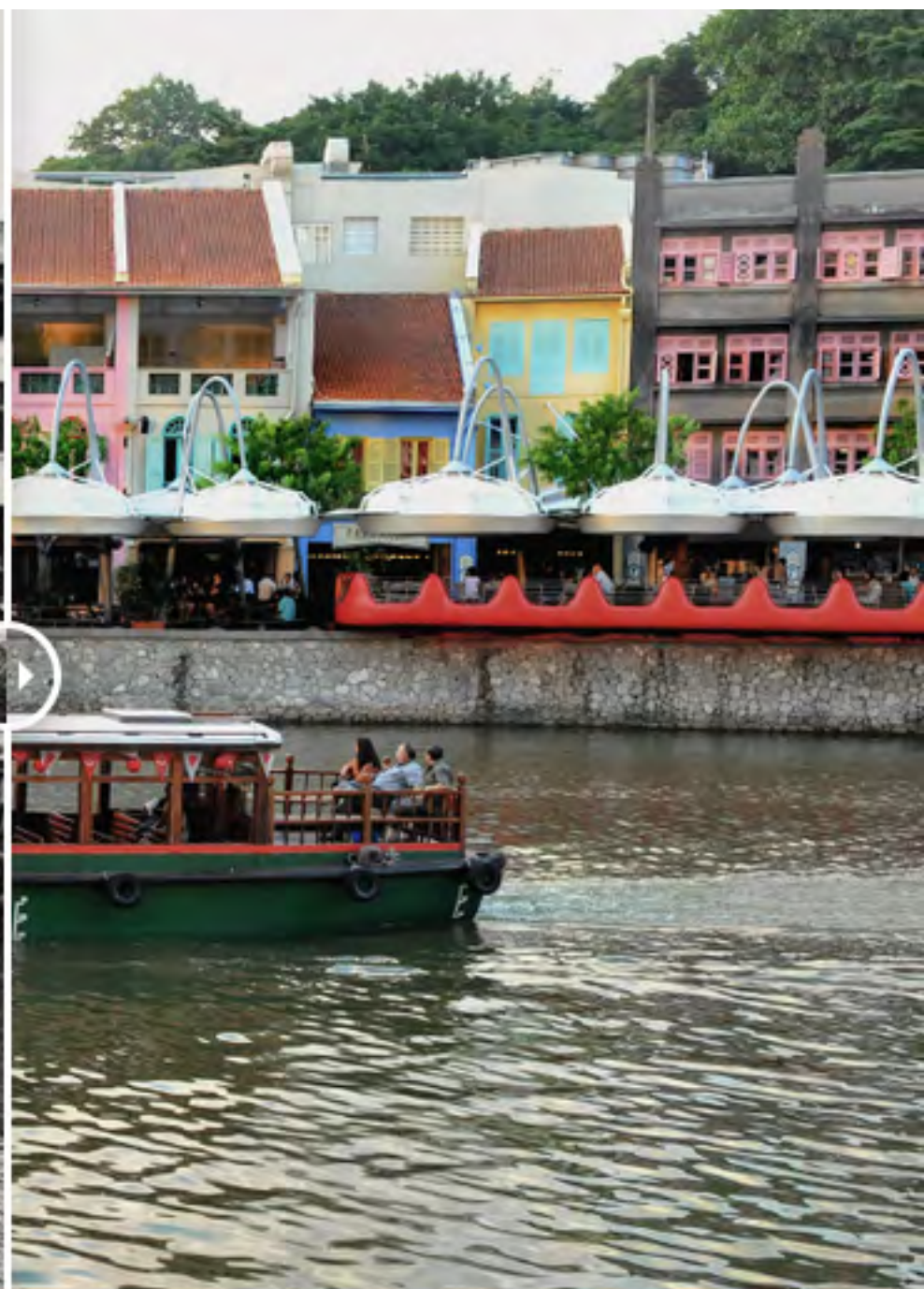


The National Day Parade on the Padang on Aug 9, 1966, and this year's parade preview on Aug 1. ST PHOTOS: FILE, CHONG JUN LIANG

But just 15 years ago, the land where they now all stand laid vacant. See for yourself just how the area has changed with the drag of a handle in The Straits Times' Singapore Slider: Then & Now series. What better time than Singapore's 50th birthday to see just how some of its iconic locations, from Lau Pa Sat to Clarke Quay, have transformed. 



The Marina Bay area in 2000 and today, with Marina Bay Sands and the ArtScience Museum. ST PHOTOS: FILE, ONG WEE JIN

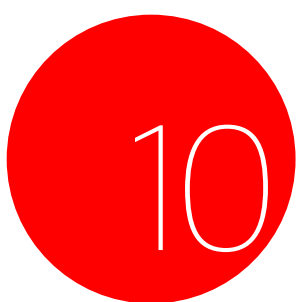


Clarke Quay in the 1980s and the quay today. ST PHOTOS: FILE, LIM SIN THAI

FOR MORE SINGAPORE SLIDERS, CLICK HERE
(Available only on desktop and Apple devices)



PM Lee Hsien Loong (centre) and his wife, Ms Ho Ching, joined more than 3,000 residents and schoolchildren at the Teck Ghee National Day Observance Ceremony held on Aug 9 in an open field in Ang Mo Kio. ST PHOTO: CHEW SENG KIM



Heartland joy in 82 ceremonies



On a balmy morning, Bedok residents form a sea of red as they march with a big flag from Block 18, Bedok South Road, to the nearby community park.

ST PHOTO: AZIZ HUSSIN,

The morning of Aug 9, 2015, began with a drizzle but it had no effect on the celebratory mood at 82 National Day observance ceremonies across the island.

Thousands turned up, decked out in red and white, for events as diverse as the country itself.



TAP TO WATCH VIDEO OF CELEBRATIONS ISLANDWIDE
(Available only on desktop and Apple devices)

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and his wife Ho Ching celebrated with residents at an open field in Ang Mo Kio.

At Temasek Junior College in Bedok, more than 1,500 people took part in the Great Singapore Workout.

In Sembawang, members of the Pioneer Generation were cheered on by friends and family as they took part in a run.

There were residents dressed as samsui women in Jurong West and Marine Parade, while a large Singapore flag was carried in a march around Bedok.

All over Singapore, the party was just getting started. 



More than 1,500 participants, in red shirts and caps, taking part in the Great Singapore Workout at Temasek Junior College. ST PHOTO: NG HUIWEN

People gathered along Lower Delta Road to witness the live broadcast of Mr Lee reading the Proclamation of Singapore..
ST PHOTO: JAMIE KOH




Reading of Proclamation by Mr Lee Kuan Yew

It wasn't just fun and games on the morning of Aug 9. A palpable hush fell over the grassroots ceremonies at 9am as public warning sirens blared.

Then, the familiar voice of Mr Lee Kuan Yew filled the air: “Whereas it is the inalienable right of a people to be free and independent.”

In 1965, the late founding prime minister had been unable to read the Proclamation of Singapore, saying in his memoirs that he had “too many other things to do” following the shock separation from Malaysia.

But thanks to a recording made in 2012, Singapore got to hear him read out the Proclamation.

Mr Lee died on March 23, 2015, at the age of 91. 



12

Remembering Mr Lee

Residents of Tanjong Pagar-Tiong Bahru and Tanglin-Cairnhill lining Lower Delta Road to view the broadcast of the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew reading the Proclamation of Singapore's independence. ST PHOTO: JAMIE KOH

In March 2015, thousands lined the streets to bid Mr Lee Kuan Yew farewell. Those scenes were replayed in his former Tanjong Pagar GRC on Aug 9 as some 6,000 residents crowded Lower Delta Road to listen to his reading of the Proclamation of Singapore.

Indeed, it was a day to pay tribute to Mr Lee as Singapore held its first National Day Parade without its founding father. During the parade, a three-minute video tribute to Mr Lee brought many, both in the stands and at home, to tears. A chair in the stands where he would have sat was left empty, occupied only by two sprigs of the Aranda Lee Kuan Yew orchid.

Up in the skies, the Republic of Singapore Air Force's Black Knights paid tribute to him when five F-16s zoomed by in a "Five Stars" fly-past.




A woman at Lower Delta Road moved to tears by the broadcast of the late Mr Lee reading the Proclamation of Singapore. ST PHOTO: JAMIE KOH



At Lower Delta Road, 6,000 people gathered to listen to the Proclamation recording, join in the mass singing of the National Anthem and recite the Pledge. ST PHOTOS: JAMIE KOH





What would he have made of the parade? Mr Lee's former principal private secretary, Education Minister Heng Swee Keat, said: "I think he would have had a deep sense of satisfaction at our progress and said, 'Well done, our people can achieve great things when we work together.' Then he would say, 'Life goes on, let's get back to our work of keeping Singapore and Singaporeans safe, stable and happy.'" 

13

Missing Papa on Aug 9

Lee Wei Ling

I was hoping that this National Day Parade would start for me at noon on Friday with the aerial display over Marina Barrage by Singapore's Black Knights.

Despite the massive traffic jam and crowd, my friend and I arrived 15 minutes before the Black Knights were slated to start. It was raining heavily and low-hanging clouds blotted the darkening sky.

It recalled for me the funeral of my father, Lee Kuan Yew, on March 29, when it was also raining and when there was also



Sprigs of yellow orchid mark this seat in front of the National Gallery at the National Day Parade, in honour of Mr Lee Kuan Yew. PHOTO: LEE WEI LING

a flypast for Papa, which the crowd at the Padang couldn't see because of the weather.

But we couldn't find a parking space on Friday and so abandoned the plan to witness the Black Knights perform.

I was on crutches, recuperating from a foot operation, and was worried about the crowd. So we headed back home for lunch.

I had wanted to watch the performance at the barrage for sentimental reasons.

Marina Barrage was a dream and a challenge to Papa. When it was completed, he spent many Sunday evenings watching Singaporeans enjoying themselves there, especially the kids flying kites and entire families picnicking.

Often, people would shout Papa's name and wave at him, and some walked towards his buggy to ask for selfies. Papa would return the smile and shake his head about the selfies.

Just before I left home for the parade yesterday, a patient's mother WhatsApped me photographs of the Black Knights' performance.

As I arrived at the Padang, a stranger e-mailed me: "My eyes filled with tears and heart with pride as we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of our nation. Singapore will never be what we are today without the hard work and fighting spirits of your dear late father and the old guards..."

Yesterday's parade was the first I attended since 1980. We used to watch from Papa's office in City Hall. Yesterday, I found myself seated on the steps in front of City Hall, but it had been transformed into the National Gallery Building. On the seat Papa was supposed to occupy were sprigs of yellow orchids.

In the early years after independence, Papa would attend all the parade rehearsals personally. He never told me why and I

never bothered to ask him. I had assumed that it was because he was trying to build a national identity and thought the parade could help achieve this.

After Aug 9, 1965, much of what the Government was doing, and much of Papa's attention, was centred on the welfare of Singapore and Singaporeans – be it the flag-raising ceremony and saying the Pledge, National Service, building a rugged society, bilingualism or clearing land for the Jurong Industrial Park.

For us, his children, these issues and concerns buzzed around us. Some went over our heads, but the gist of them all, we understood and knew: Papa was concerned with Singapore's survival.

To write this article, I turned to Papa's book, *The Singapore Story*. Inside the book, on the page facing a photograph of Papa "at work on my drafts on my home PC (Oxley Road)" was a note from Papa penned in his neat handwriting: "Ling, You did not know much of what I was doing when you were growing up."

Below this note was his signature and the date Sept 15, 1998.

I did know, if not explicitly, then certainly implicitly.

Singaporeans also knew, and if anyone wonders why Singaporeans turned up in massive numbers to send Papa off when he died in March this year, these were grateful Singaporeans who remembered those early days of uncertainty and hardship compared with what we have now.

That we are now enjoying peace, prosperity and progress is unexpected, and we are grateful for our good fortune, the foresight of our leaders and the hard work of so many Singaporeans.

Many Singaporeans have expressed their disappointment

that Papa was not present to witness yesterday's parade in the Golden Jubilee of Singapore.

But the last few years of Papa's life without Mama were a sad and difficult time for him. He raised the topic of euthanasia with his doctors, and they told him that was illegal in Singapore. I also told him it was illegal for me to help him to do so elsewhere.

Papa was released from his suffering on March 23 this year. Knowing what he was battling prior to his last hospital admission, that he died without further suffering, the security officers who tended to him round the clock and I were relieved, yet terribly sad.

But knowing Papa, his best reward was that he did witness that his efforts had improved the lives of Singaporeans.

He never sought fame and rejected it as much as he could. Some things he could not reject, such as the honours conferred by Britain's Queen Elizabeth, so he accepted these graciously.

We should behave the way Papa wanted us to, which is to advance Singapore for the sake of Singaporeans, and to do this by action, not just by symbolism.


Symbolism sometimes causes us to forget about doing what is right. So while we have just enjoyed a spectacular National Day Parade, let us not forget what we should strive for – a better future for Singapore and Singaporeans.

While we thank the pioneer generation which Papa led, we should also remember that he did it from a sense of duty. He felt responsible for Singapore's ejection from Malaysia, so he counted himself responsible for independent Singapore and the survival and welfare of Singaporeans.

In life, he asked Singaporeans to trust him to take care of their interest. In death, he asked only that his marital home be

eventually demolished. To preserve that house as a concrete symbol for future generations goes against what Papa wanted. His work and books already convey his concerns and what he did for Singapore.

What would Papa have thought of this Golden Jubilee NDP? In the greater scheme of Singapore's survival, he would have thought this parade was a nice gesture.

Papa's overarching concern was to improve lives for Singaporeans. If the parade's spectacular demonstration of harmony and togetherness did that, I think he would have thought well of it because it was good for Singapore. 

This article first appeared in The Straits Times on Aug 10, 2015.



14

Next to Mr Lee Kuan Yew's empty chair at the grandstand, sat People's Action Party stalwarts Othman Wok, Jek Yeun Thong and Ong Pang Boon, the last three surviving Old Guard leaders who signed the official document that marked Singapore's independence 50 years ago. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

Honouring Old Guard leaders

Former labour minister Jek Yeun Thong started his preparations to celebrate Singapore's Golden Jubilee a week earlier.

The 85-year-old, who was one of three Old Guard ministers honoured at the National Day Parade, enlisted the help of his wife, Madam Huang Kek Chee, 81, to get his outfit ready.

She went shopping at fashion retailer Uniqlo and a department store in Bugis Junction to pick out two red shirts for her husband. She also bought a white adidas sports cap to shade Mr Jek, whose movements are laboured, from the elements.

It took some persuading to get him to wear both red and white because the PAP stalwart - a member of independent Singapore's first Cabinet - said he was used to wearing "just white".

Said Madam Huang: "I let him pick from two red polo T-shirts. At first, we thought the style was a bit too young for him, but we wanted him to blend in with the rest of the VIPs."

The two other members of the Old Guard honoured on National Day were former education minister Ong Pang Boon, 86, and former social affairs minister Othman Wok, 90.

The trio, who arrived at the VIP grandstand with Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, were helped to their seats. They sat next to a chair that was kept empty in honour of founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, who died in March.

The three Old Guard ministers at the parade are the last of the 10 men in the founding government to have inked the Independence of Singapore Agreement on Aug 9, 1965.

The other signatories were Mr Lee, former deputy prime minister Toh Chin Chye, former finance minister Goh Keng Swee, former law minister E.W. Barker, former culture minister S. Rajaratnam, former health minister Yong Nyuk Lin and former national development minister Lim Kim San.

Speaking to The Straits Times earlier, Mr Jek said he was looking forward to seeing Mr Othman, whom he had not seen in six months. "My health has not been too good in the past few years, but I'm happy that I was invited to celebrate Singapore's Golden Jubilee."

Mr Jek's day started at 11.30am, when he had home-cooked


beehoon for lunch. At around 3.30pm, a government car came to his Bukit Timah home to take him to the Padang. His granddaughter Amelia Jek, 24, who recently graduated from university, helped him into the car.

Mr Jek said: “Seeing the citizens, as well as my younger comrades, I feel that Singapore has a great future because we are united, and we have the spirit of perseverance. I believe Singapore will be able to overcome any difficulties, and prosper.”

Meanwhile, Mr Othman said Singapore’s 50th year of independence was “a milestone that is especially meaningful for the generation of people who have seen Singapore grow since we became a sovereign nation”. He added that he had “no doubt” Singapore would make it this far.

“Singaporeans have always been a hardworking people, and they genuinely want to build a better Singapore, so I was confident, even back in 1965 when we became independent, that we would go far,” he said.

Polytechnic student Amir Azman, 24, who was at the parade, said he was looking out for the three men as they made their way to their seats.

He said: “I’m very glad we’ve taken the time to honour our pioneers and remember their contributions. After all, they are the only living legends left.” 




Former president S R Nathan (above, centre), with representatives from 10 religious groups at the National Day observance ceremony at the Lorong Koo Chye Sheng Hong Temple in Paya Lebar. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

15

Prayers for religious harmony

They came from 10 faiths, dressed in different religious attire, but all for one purpose. Religious leaders and members gathered at the Lorong Koo Chye Sheng Hong Temple in Paya Lebar on the morning of Aug 9 and said a silent prayer for Singapore.

Then, hands on their hearts, the inter-faith crowd recited the Pledge and vowed to remain “one united people, regardless of race, language or religion”.

With them was former president S R Nathan, who said religious harmony is in the hands of the younger generation: “Our young must learn how to tolerate each other - each other’s religion, each other’s race, each other’s language, and think of ourselves as Singaporean.” 

16

Ride free on buses and trains



There was no need to beep your EZ Link card as commuters got to travel free on buses and trains.

PHOTO: TIFFANY GOH FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

Transit cards stayed at home on Singapore's 50th birthday. Trains and buses were packed with people but for once, there were no complaints, no gripes - just smiles.

SMRT and SBS gave the country free train and bus rides, letting a populace run free to explore Singapore.

And if you spotted smartphone addicts with their faces glued to their screens while zipping about, they had a good reason for this.

Telco M1's customers talked, messaged and surfed on the house over the entire long weekend. Singtel's post-paid subscribers enjoyed unlimited local mobile data. 



Free travel meant that boarding could take place through the back door.

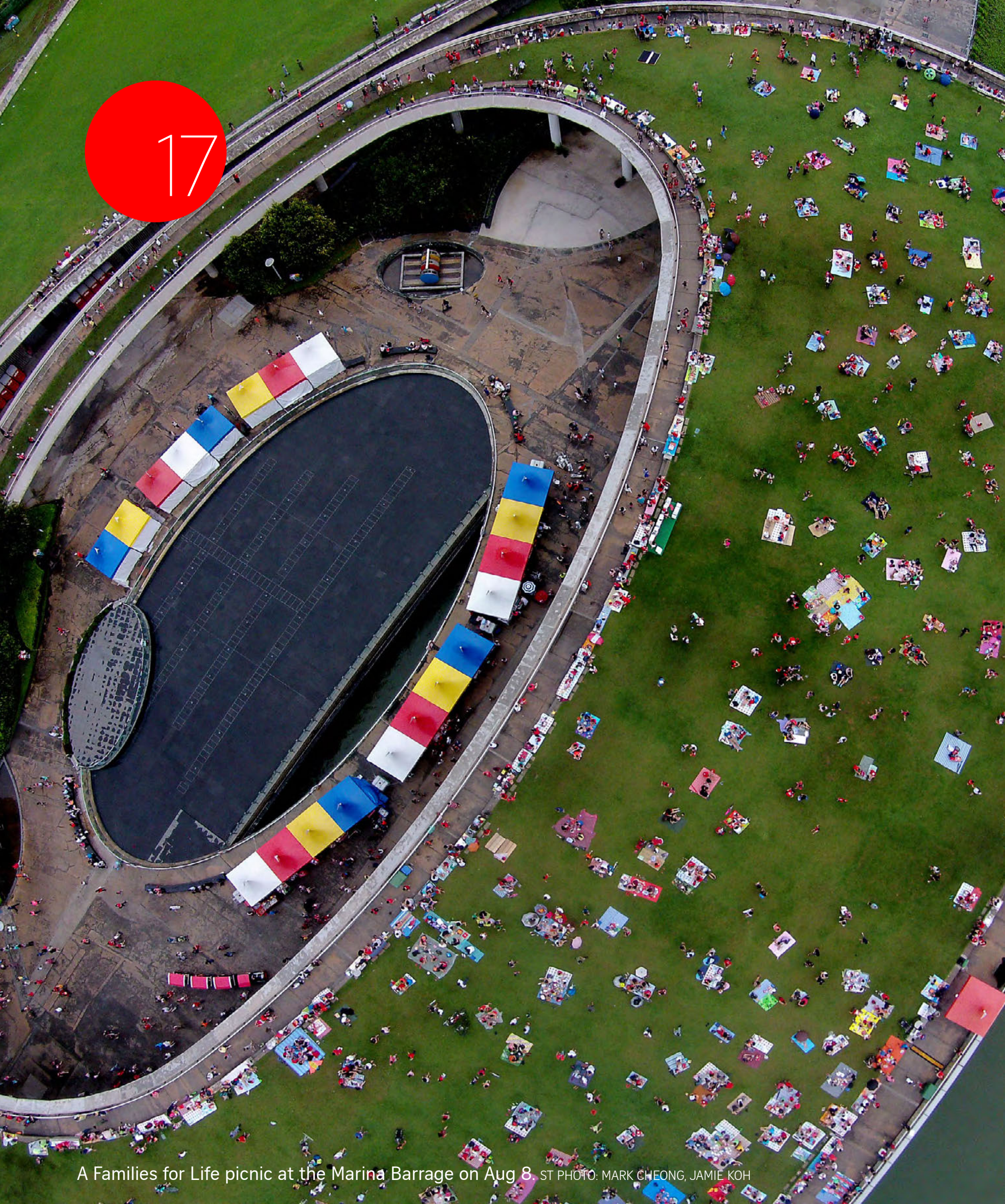
PHOTO: TIFFANY GOH FOR THE STRAITS TIMES



MRT stations opened their barriers for ease of access. PHOTO: TIFFANY GOH FOR THE STRAITS TIMES



The fare card scanner was covered to remind commuters that travel was free.
PHOTO: TIFFANY GOH FOR THE STRAITS TIMES



A Families for Life picnic at the Marina Barrage on Aug 8. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG, JAMIE KOH

Making memories at special outings

Memories to treasure for a lifetime - that was the reason trade executive Vijaya Barathi decided to organise a picnic at Botanic Gardens for her children on Aug 9.

“In the future, when there is an SG100, they can share memories of this special day with their own children,” said Ms Barathi, 30.




The Jubilee Weekend concert at the Botanic Gardens. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG, JAMIE KOH



Visitors at the National Museum during the National Day long weekend.

PHOTO: NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

From as early as 7am, people streamed into the Gardens, Singapore's first Unesco World Heritage Site, to mark the day. They got their faces painted in the national colours, chomped on traditional snacks from carnival booths set up there, and played traditional childhood games.

Whether at an SG50 carnival at the Sports Hub or flying kites at Marina Barrage, it was a Golden Jubilee weekend to remember. 

Spectators viewing the aerial flypast during the National Day Parade at the Merlion Park.

PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI
FOR THE
STRAITS TIMES





As part of its celebrations to mark its 170th year, The Straits Times organised an exhibition that tells the Singapore story through a display of its reports and photos over the years. ST PHOTO: JOYCE FANG

18

ST's STories exhibition a crowd-puller

The ArtScience Museum threw its doors open for free and saw a huge turnout over the Jubilee weekend, and, well, we'll take some credit for this.


One of the exhibitions was Singapore STories: Then, Now, Tomorrow, which chronicles Singapore's triumphs and



The very first front page of The Straits Times is carefully moved into the exhibition. ST PHOTO: NEO XIAOBIN

challenges through reports and photos from The Straits Times' 170-year history. Entry to the exhibition is free every day, not just over the long weekend.

More than 40,000 had visited the show as of Aug 4, but here's something that could tempt some back.

Wonder what the first-ever issue of the paper looks like? The July 15, 1845, edition of The Straits Times - now brittle, torn and with portions missing - is now on display. Catch it before the exhibition closes on Oct 4. And, yes, The Straits Times has been covering Singapore these past 50 years, and 120 years before its Independence. 



Trace Singapore's history through the pages of The Straits Times. PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI FOR THE STRAITS TIMES



Interactive elements bring the Singapore STories exhibition to life. PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

Lime Patisserie at ParkRoyal on Pickering created a HeartSG cake, in the shape of Singapore and fire-engine red on the outside and with red-and-white sponge layers on the inside.

Conrad Centennial Singapore's SG50 Lapis cake probably took the, ahem, cake, with a red and white confection using local rose syrup and evaporated milk flavours. 



SG50 cake from And All Things Delicious. PHOTO: MATTHIAS HO FOR THE STRAITS TIMES



Ang ku kueh and soon kueh make up a tray in the colours of the Singapore flag. PHOTO: INTERNET



SG50 Lapis from The Terrace at Conrad Centennial Singapore. PHOTO: CONRAD CENTENNIAL SINGAPORE



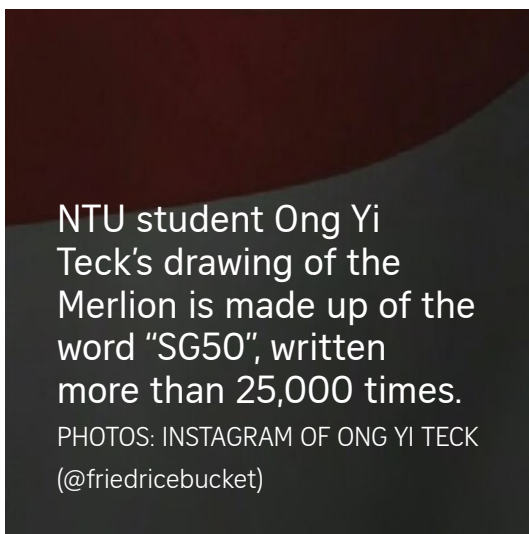
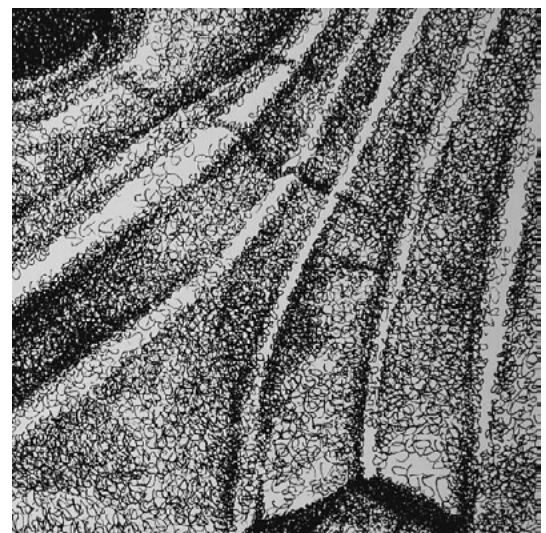
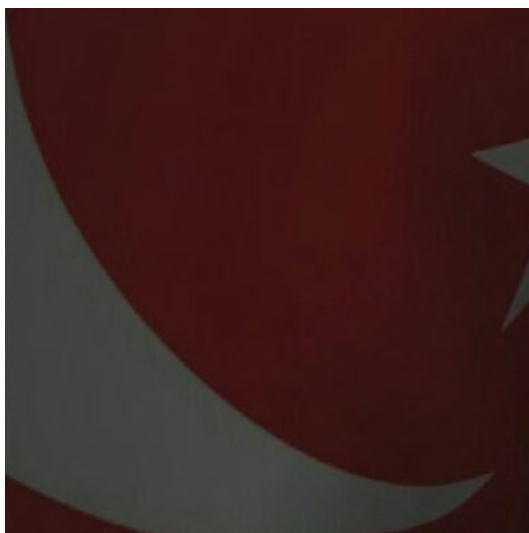
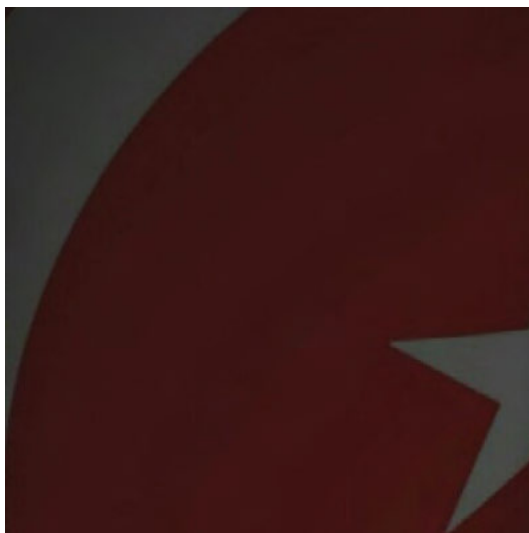
Rice and red chillies may not make a proper meal but they do look patriotic. PHOTO: PIGGYWEN



Jubilee every which way

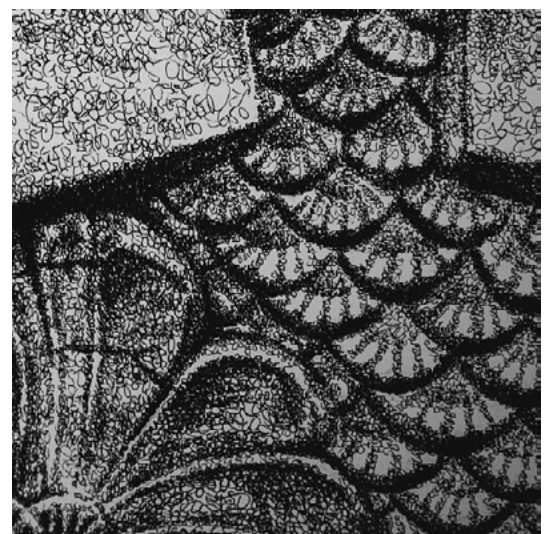
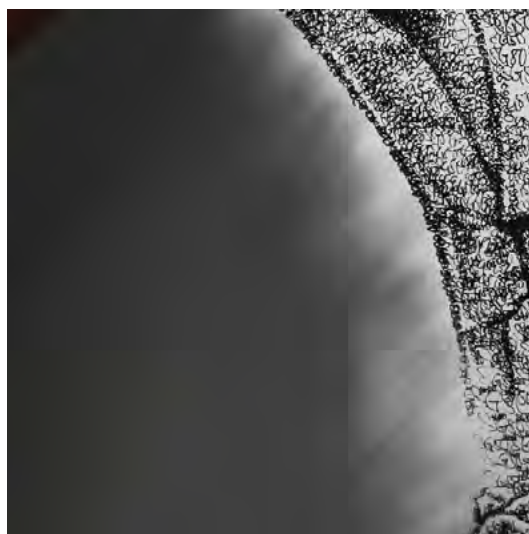
It wasn't just food that got Singaporeans' creative juices flowing.

Twitter user Jiashen's father had time on his hands and about \$800 in coins lying around, so he constructed an SG50 tribute,



NTU student Ong Yi Teck's drawing of the Merlion is made up of the word "SG50", written more than 25,000 times.

PHOTOS: INSTAGRAM OF ONG YI TECK (@friedricebucket)



complete with a crescent moon and five stars.

Other folks were also inspired by the nation's Golden Jubilee, and not just to stack up their loose change.

Full-time mum Dawn Choo came up with a practical keychain trolley coin with the SG50 logo stamped on it.

The coin, which has the same dimensions as Singapore's second series 50-cent coins, can be used to unlock shopping carts at most supermarkets, saving people the trouble of having to fumble around for an appropriate coin.

Madam Choo, 36, a former civil servant, said: "I had been



Madam Dawn Choo's SG50-themed trolley coin keychains can be used to unlock shopping trolleys in Singapore. PHOTO: DIOS VINCOY JR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts student Ang Xin Ying with a waterproof Chop Liao tissue pack holder.


ST PHOTO: AZIZ HUSSIN



considering starting a small business since the beginning of the year and thought, why not start off with something special to commemorate the nation's birthday?"

National Technological University student Ong Yi Teck took over a week, writing "SG50" more than 25,000 times, to complete a picture of the Merlion.

Ang Xin Ying went another route and made the tissue packet "chope" official. The Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts student's tissue pack holder, which sells for \$7.50, has the words "chop liao" proudly emblazoned, so no one has any excuse to take your hard-won seat.

Another student saw a shophouse and thought of food. Michelle Kartokusumo's shophouse tingkat, or tiffin carrier, came about after three weeks exploring the distinctive houses around Singapore. It's now sold for \$50 at FairPrice Finest and FairPrice Xtra outlets, and at Robinsons department stores. 



Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts student Michelle Kartokusumo with her shophouse-inspired tiffin carrier. ST PHOTO: AZIZ HUSSIN

21

Raves for 7 Letters

Undergraduate Gabriel Tang, 24, now wants to join his parents to pay his respects to his late grandmother at Qing Ming next year. He used to go, but stopped when he got older.

Why the change of heart? It's thanks to film director Kelvin Tong's *Grandma Positioning System*, which is about a trip made by a three-generation family to a cemetery in Johor. It is one of seven films that make up the anthology *7 Letters*, featuring the works of Singaporean directors – (below, from left) Tong, Eric Khoo, K. Rajagopal, Royston Tan, Tan Pin Pin, Boo Junfeng and Jack Neo.

Tan, who was the project's lead film-maker, said: "7 Letters is a heartfelt gift to Singapore by its creative arts community."



“We only got to where we are today because of the generous support and encouragement of the people around us. All seven of us know of many people among us that need our support to overcome their adversities too. They need help, and we hope that Singaporeans can be inspired by these dedicated organisations, and join us to extend a helping hand to those in need around us. No amount is too small if it is from the heart.”

Free screenings of the film were held at the National Museum over the National Day long weekend following a gala premiere at Capitol Theatre in July. Tickets were snapped up and reviews were unanimously positive. Audiences were encouraged to make donations which would go to seven charities picked by the directors.

The SG50 project was fully funded by the Media Development Authority and the Singapore Film Commission. 



**TAP TO WATCH
TRAILER**

(Available only
on desktop
and Apple
devices)



The long queue outside the National Museum for free tickets to the screening of 7 Letters. ST PHOTO: AZIZ HUSSIN

22

Babies, welcome to the world



Ryker Jedd Ng (above) and Low Yu Qing were born at the stroke of midnight on Aug 9 at KK Women's and Children's Hospital.

PHOTO: TIFFANY GOH FOR THE STRAITS TIMES




While the rest of Singapore partied away, Ryker Jedd Ng, Low Yu Qing, Brandon Nair and Adam Hafiz Azmi slept.

They will always be known as Singapore's Jubilee Babies, having been born on Singapore's 50th birthday.



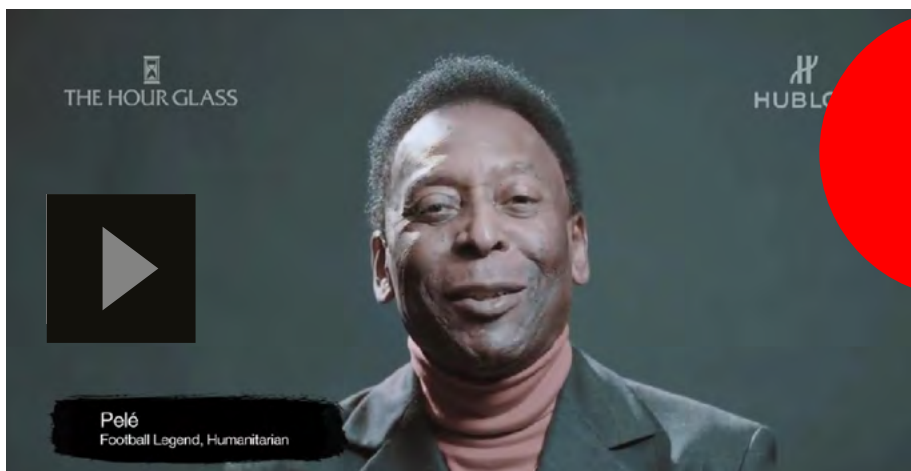
Ms Angeline Lim, 35, with her baby boy Ryker Jedd Ng and husband Ng Ming Jay, 45, speaking to Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Grace Fu (centre). With Ms Fu are KKH CEO Kenneth Kwek (far right) and Mrs A. Prasad. Behind Mrs Prasad (in white) is Professor Alex Sia, chairman of the medical board of KKH.

Altogether, 129 Singaporeans were born that day, an increase from the 91 born on National Day in 2014. All Singaporean babies born in 2015 get an SG50 Baby Jubilee Gift comprising eight items such as a medallion, shawl, baby sling and diaper bag.

Two babies who were born at midnight at KK Women's and Children's Hospital also got an adorable pair of SG50 booties that were lovingly knitted by Mrs A. Prasad, 78, a community volunteer at Ang Mo Kio Family Services Centre. "They are the future of the world," she said as she met the babies on the morning on Aug 9. 

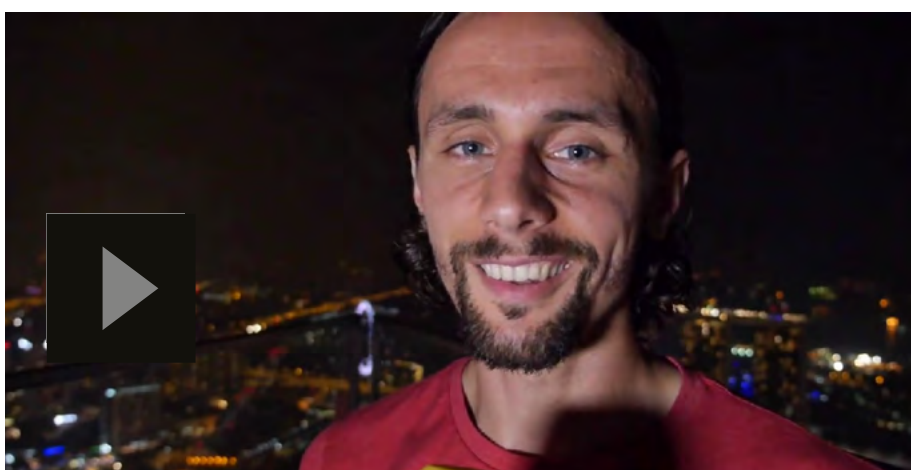
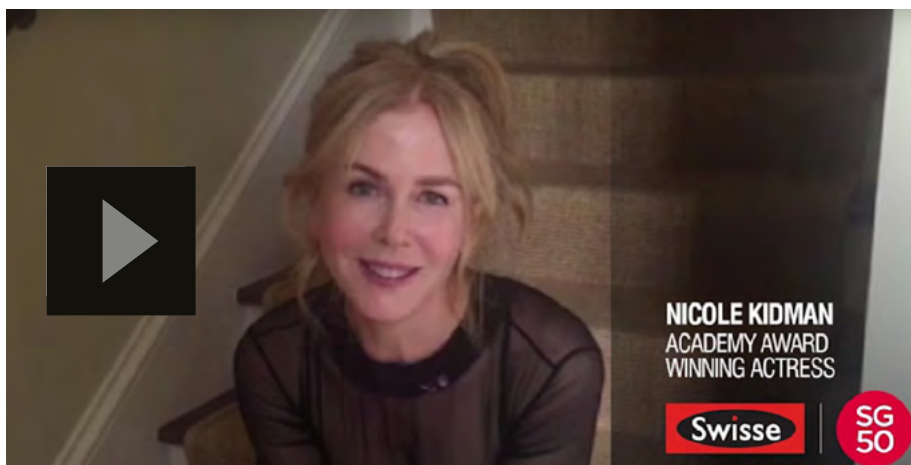


Ms Jeissy Foo, 34, with jubilee baby girl Low Yu Qing, her husband Kelvin Low, 35, and their firstborn Joanna, two. All Singaporean babies born in 2015 get an SG50 Baby Jubilee Gift comprising eight items such as a medallion, shawl, baby sling and diaper bag. PHOTOS: TIFFANY GOH FOR THE STRAITS TIMES



23

Wishes from around the globe



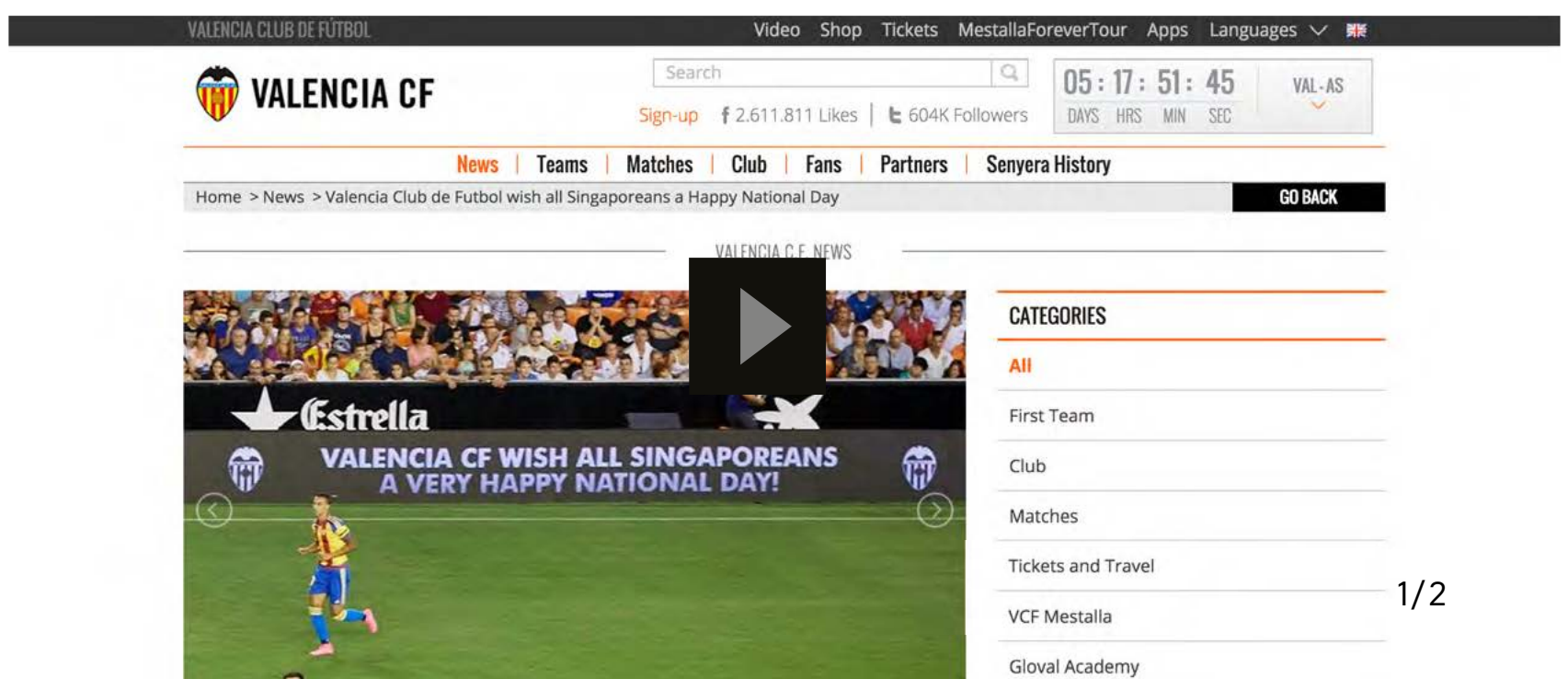
Charmed by this little island,
stars from sports, showbiz
and further afield sent
their birthday wishes on
Singapore's Golden Jubilee.

“Majulah Singapura”, or
“Amunt, Singapur” to the
locals, read an electronic
board at Mestalla, the home
of Peter Lim's Spanish

(From top) Pele, Nicole Kidman, Neven Subotic and Valencia football club were among the many stars who sent birthday wishes. PHOTOS: SCREENGRABS

TAP ON PHOTOS TO WATCH VIDEOS

(Available only on desktop and Apple devices)





Narendra Modi
@narendramodi

Follow

Greetings to the people of Singapore as they mark 50 years of Singapore's independence. @SG50 @leehsienloong.

On the occasion of their National Day, I convey my greetings to the people of Singapore.

Ties between India and Singapore are very special. This year we are celebrating 50 years of a robust and comprehensive partnership with Singapore, a partnership that has grown tremendously with the passage of time. People of India have tremendous goodwill towards people of Singapore. Several people of Indian origin have made Singapore their home.

Singapore's expertise in sectors such as urban development, coastal development, affordable housing etc. is deeply respected.

I have had productive meetings with President Tony Tan & PM Lee Hsien Loong & other senior functionaries from Singapore. We are confident that our relationship will scale new heights in the years to come.

Yours,
Narendra Modi



TAP TO SEE MORE (Available only on desktop and Apple devices)

football club Valencia.

The stars from the world's most popular sport didn't stop there. Brazilian legend Pele crooned a mellow Happy Birthday in a video by watchmaker Hublot, while Neven Subotic from Germany's Borussia Dortmund wished the people of Singapore a happy "50th independence day".

Champions of other sports, like athletics' Usain Bolt and Formula 1's Sebastian Vettel, sent their good wishes as well.

Adding a touch of glamour, actress Nicole Kidman chimed in, sending "an Aussie gift of health, love and happiness" via multivitamin brand Swisse. So did K-pop group Beast, who congratulated Singapore on turning 50.

Leave it to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to steal the show with a lengthy wish and a stunning shot of the Merlion and Marina Bay Sands. "On the occasion of their National Day, I convey my greetings to the people of Singapore," he wrote on Twitter.



World's media pay tribute

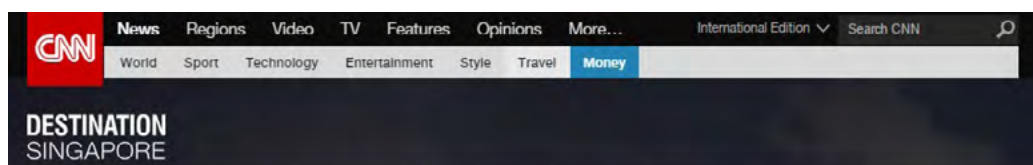
Singapore, the world's greatest city – at least for a week. That's according to CNN, which joined international media in the chorus of tributes to the Republic's Golden Jubilee.

The Huffington Post's more than 100 million visitors read how Singapore became one of the world's greatest success stories. "Is Singapore the most successful society since human history began?" asked Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy dean Kishore Mahbubani in his piece for The Huffington Post.

Black-and-white photos and red-and-white charts laid out Singapore's transformation in The Wall Street Journal, while Bangladesh's Daily Star took its readers through the journey

from Third World to First.

And if you noticed every business going SG50-crazy, well, the BBC noticed too. It produced a video about companies "desperate to be associated with the anniversary", highlighting, among others, Singapore Airlines' two A380s with the SG50 livery. 



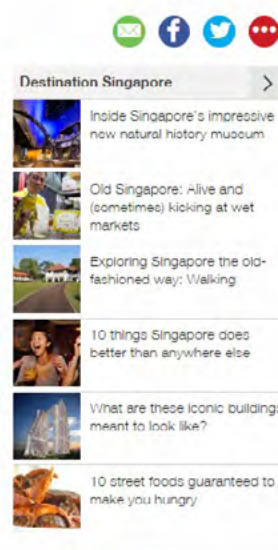
50 reasons Singapore is the world's greatest city (this week)

By Charlotte Glennie, Mavis Ang, Gillian Rhye, Vidhu Aul and Nicholas Walton, for CNN
Updated 0845 GMT (1545 HKT) August 7, 2015



15 photos: 50 reasons to love Singapore

Happy birthday lah, Singapore – Singapore is 50 years old this weekend. We're celebrating by recounting the things we love most about Singapore. Chop chop, curry pork -- read on.





25

Up in the sky over
Marina Barrage



TAP HERE TO SEE THE BLACK KNIGHTS IN ACTION
(Available only on desktop and Apple devices)

ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

For three days, ace pilots in red-and-white Fighting Falcons swooped and soared in the skies just off the Marina Barrage. Performing 22 aerial manoeuvres with names like Vertical Spiral, Needle Cross and Finale Burst, the Republic of Singapore Air Force's Black Knights wowed thousands with deft displays of derring-do over the Jubilee Weekend.

The heart-stopping stunts take place at blazing speeds - the F-16Cs travel at an average speed of 700kmh, and reach a top speed of 2,000kmh. Each pilot spent 150 hours in the air training for the displays.

Did you see the Double Heart? That's where four planes flying in a diamond formation pull up and split, creating two hearts with their smoke trails.



The Black Knights leaving trails of smoke in the sky over the Skypark after their aerial exploits. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

Pilot Derek Chan says it bears special significance: “The Double Heart is dedicated to our country and the people of Singapore.”

One move was made specially for Singapore’s pioneers: the Dedication Pass, in which four planes arc across the skies in a diamond, while the remaining two spiral around their smoke trails.

“It’s dedicated to the pioneers of Singapore who had given their lives and put in (effort) for the country for the last 50 years,” said Major Chan. 



The Black Knights in action (from left) seen from the Floating Platform, executing the bomb burst as six planes fan out and in a Five Stars tribute seen from Merlion Park. ST PHOTOS: NEO XIAOBIN, LIM YAOHUI





26

Red Lions play it safe

The Red Lions in action during the National Education Show and the National Day Parade preview (previous page).

ST PHOTOS: KEVIN LIM,
KUA CHEE SIONG



It had promised to be a “once in a lifetime” experience, said First Warrant Officer Ivan Low. Alas, after months of training both in the skies and in a wind tunnel, daredevil freefallers the Red Lions were thwarted by a familiar foe - bad weather - during the Parade.

Their jump on Aug 9 had to be called off after low cloud cover obstructed their view of the landing area. “The safety of all our Red Lions performers is our foremost concern,” parade chairman Brigadier-General Melvyn Ong said.

It was meant to be a special SG50 performance for the Red Lions, who had overcome the threat of air eddies delivered by the buildings in the Padang’s vicinity to land safely during preview shows.

What next for the Red Lions? They may not be able to land to the roar of spectators when the National Day Parade moves to the National Stadium next year. The structure’s narrow roof opening may make for a difficult landing inside the arena. **ST**



POSB employees dressed in the bank's old uniform took part in the parade. ST PHOTO: MELISSA LIN

27

Vintage takes centre stage

Retired policeman Zailanee Othman never got the chance to don the old police uniform with the famous khaki shorts like his father and grandfather did. “I come from a family of police officers and my granddad and my dad used to wear this,” the 56-year-old said.


He finally had the chance to in the vintage parade on Aug 9, joining 449 other participants who put on the uniforms Singapore's soldiers, police officers and firemen used to wear. Some women from the People's Association wore knee-high socks, while Singapore Girls in their kebayas rolled past in trishaws.

The pioneers from the Singapore Armed Forces were a crowd favourite as they marched smartly past. The 50-strong contingent came together in just two weeks, thanks to the efforts



A contingent from the People's Association included women in knee-high socks. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

of Lieutenant-Colonel (Ret) Swee Boon Chan. He was in the first NDP in 1966, and agreed to join this year's without hesitation.

“We are donning the uniforms of the early days to remind the newer generation where we have come from... We worked very hard (and) it was not easy,” he said. “It’s an opportune time to tell our next generation - it’s time for them to take over the baton and take Singapore to the next level.” 







28

Stay calm and march on



Lieutenant-Colonel Alvin Tjioe was the “voice” at the Padang as parade commander of the National Day Parade. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

He had to learn 21 Malay commands for the 52-minute parade, but Lieutenant-Colonel Alvin Tjioe was unfazed by the prospect of millions of eyes, and ears on him as the parade commander.

“There is, of course, an expectation... to do well but I don’t let the pressure interfere with my performance,” the 34-year-old said.

Knowing that his voice alone would move more than 2,000 people from 37 contingents, he would practise the commands when he was alone at home or in the car.

LTC Tjioe wasn’t the only one whose job had those watching all nervous.

Drum major Muhammad Hafis Amron led a combined band and a precision drill squad which combined rousing military tunes with

Drum major Muhammad Hafis Amron leading the Combined Band contingent. BERITA HARIAN PHOTO: M.O. SALLEH



popular Singapore songs. With all the attention on him, the 33-year-old spun and caught his baton to end a flawless routine.

He's no parade newbie and was all smiles before the show began, despite the pressure. He said: "I've been in the parade 12 times but this is the most special." **ST**



29

SIA's first-time fly-past

As the Singapore Girls were being pulled on trishaws in the vintage parade, something modern was accompanying them in the sky. A Singapore Airlines Airbus 380, decked out in a special livery with a national flag-themed design on both sides of the fuselage, flew by overhead.

The plane, the airline's first in any National Day fly-past, gave crowds around Marina Bay a taste of the action as it flew low across the bay.

Spectators got their cameras out and craned their heads as one as the world's largest passenger plane flew by. **ST**



A low-angle shot looking up at three military aircraft flying in formation against a clear blue sky. The aircraft are silhouetted against the bright sky. In the foreground, the silhouettes of a crowd of people are visible, many holding up cameras and smartphones to capture the aerial display. A large red circle with the number '30' is overlaid on the image.

30

Flights so fancy

There were plenty of stand-out aerial moments during the Jubilee Weekend. Other than the special Black Knights display at the Marina Barrage, the Parade saw other action in the skies.

One was the traditional fly-past of the state flag, performed by a CH-47 Chinook helicopter escorted by two AH-64D Apache choppers.



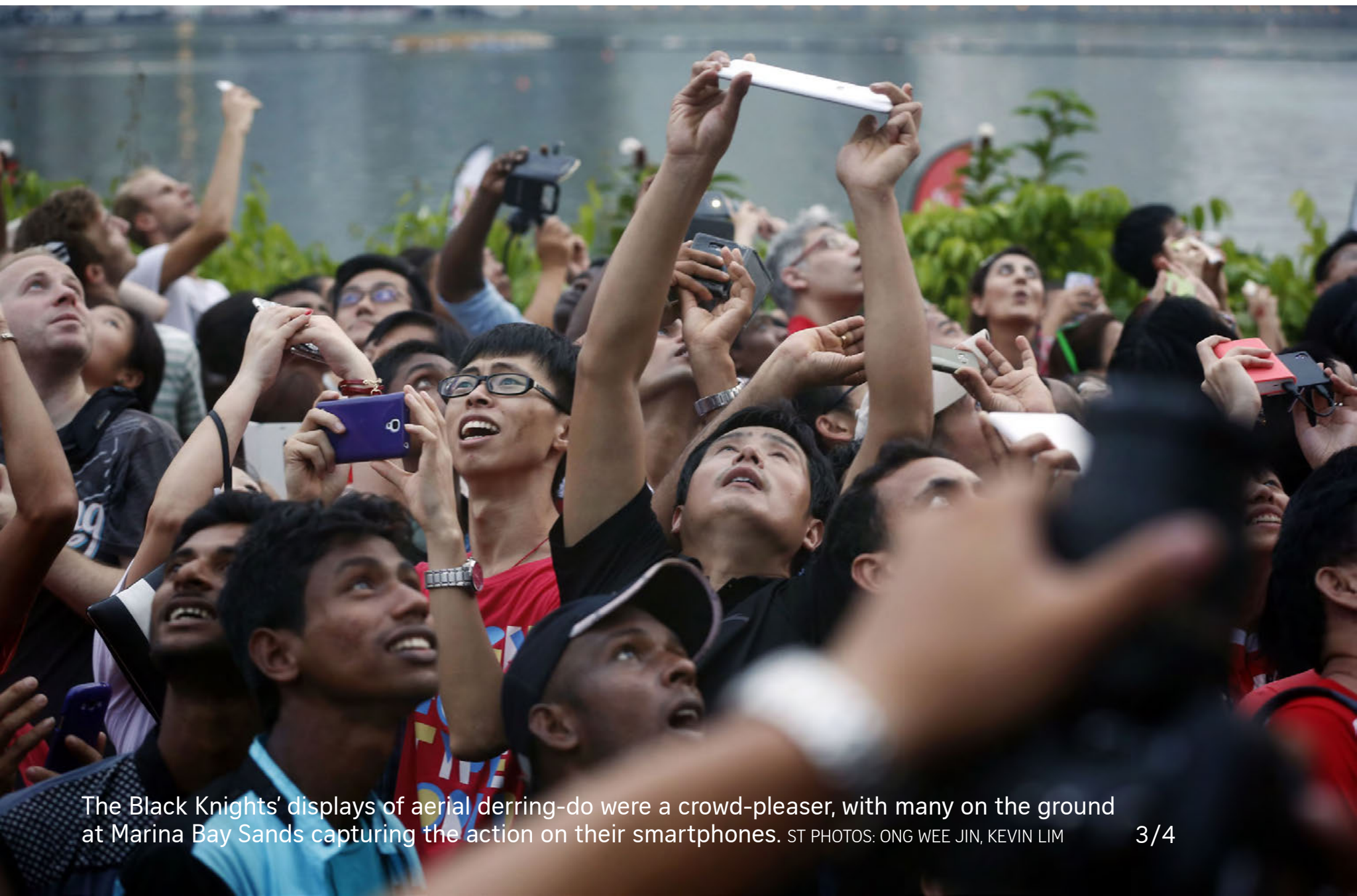
Twenty F-16 planes forming the number 50 up in the skies above the Skypark.

ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

Spectators also saw 20 F-16 planes form the number “50”, followed by the Black Knights’ bomb burst that had them fanning out and leaving distinctive smoke trails behind.

The best seat in the house was up on Marina Bay Sands SkyPark, where 25 children from the Children’s Cancer Foundation and Dyslexia Association of Singapore, and their parents, got an up-close view.

“The fly-pasts were very cool. I’d never seen them up close like that before,” Lee Shawn Kit, 10, said.




The Black Knights' displays of aerial derring-do were a crowd-pleaser, with many on the ground at Marina Bay Sands capturing the action on their smartphones. ST PHOTOS: ONG WEE JIN, KEVIN LIM



The traditional fly-past of the state flag, performed by a CH-47 Chinook helicopter escorted by two AH-64D Apache helicopters, passing over Gardens by the Bay. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

Amid the thrilling displays, one man had to keep his eye on the clock. Lieutenant-Colonel Benny Lui, dubbed “Mother Goose”, was tasked with making sure all 51 aircraft’s entrances were spot on. One second too early or late, and months of preparations would be ruined.

“Can you imagine if the helicopters carrying the state flag arrived before the National Anthem? We strive to get the timing down to the second,” the fly-past marshal said. 



31

He flew with the
Black Knights

Standing on the ramp of a C-130 Hercules transport aircraft going at 222kmh, Straits Times photojournalist Alphonsus Chern waited as the six F-16Cs of the Black Knights grew from a speck in the distance until they filled the viewfinder of his camera.

Braving the deafening, cold wind got him these stunning Jubilee pictures of the red-and-white planes dancing through the air. He captured the planes rolling, banking and performing manoeuvres from a unique perspective.

Chern's biggest challenge, however, was trying to endure the gravitational forces the pilots are continuously exposed to.

He detailed his experiences in a first-person account widely shared online. **Tap here to read.** 



TAP HERE TO SEE THE BLACK KNIGHTS IN ACTION
(Internet connection required)







Black Knights Flight Line Crew members doing maintenance work on the ground and pilots flying drills high in the air. ST PHOTOS: ALPHONSUS CHERN





The Black Knights doing their aerial acrobatics in the sky and the pilots back on solid ground.
ST PHOTOS: ALPHONSUS CHERN





The Mobile Column returned to the National Day Parade in the form of a convoy of 179 vehicles from the Singapore Armed Forces, Singapore Police Force and Singapore Civil Defence Force after a five-year absence. ST PHOTO: JAMIE KOH.

32

Mobile Column moves with the times

On Aug 9, the Lows took a ride down the Padang in some very special vehicles. Captain Timothy Low, 26, and his father, retired colonel Edwin Low, were in a Terrex Infantry Carrier Vehicle as part of the Parade's Mobile Column.

Said Capt Low: "Being part of the Mobile Column, seeing the display of the strength of our assets, I realised we've come so far because of the hard work of the earlier generations. There's definitely a sense of pride about being able to take part in it with my father."



One man who had seen first-hand how far Singapore's military might has come is retired Colonel Goh Lye Choon. The 74-year-old took part in the first Mobile Column in 1969, when just 18 tanks rolled down the streets.

"Singapore at that time was a bit unstable, we were not sure how we were going to survive. But with the 18 tanks, we demonstrated to Singapore the confidence and strength of our defence," he said.

This year, he was among those who led the convoy, now 179-vehicles strong. 



The Mobile Column at the Parade: (from left) The Armed Forces, the Police Force and Civil Defence Force. ST PHOTOS: ALPHONSUS CHERN



33

Dressing up for NDP – What MPs wore

Tanjong Pagar GRC MP Lily Neo.
ST PHOTO: YEO SAM JO



Tampines GRC MP Baey Yam Keng.
ST PHOTO: YEO SAM JO

Tanjong Pagar GRC MP Indranee
Rajah. ST PHOTO: YEO SAM JO



The colour scheme was red and white of course, and Members of Parliament who turned up at the Parade were dressed for the party.

Tanjong Pagar GRC MP Lily Neo said her outfit reflected her “joyous celebratory mood”. Fellow GRC MP Indranee Rajah came in a splendid sari. “Back in the 60s and 70s, a lot more women wore traditional dress to work and for everyday wear. My outfit is a modern interpretation of the sari in our national colours, but also a homage to our past.”



Aljunied GRC MP Sylvia Lim.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF SYLVIA LIM



Senior Minister of State for Health and Manpower Amy Khor.
PHOTO: INSTAGRAM



Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC MP Zainal Sapari.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM




Chua Chu Kang GRC MP Zaqy Mohamad.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Tampines GRC MP Baey Yam Keng came in a custom-designed white shirt with red patterns made out of prints of “50”.

Pasir Ris-Punggol’s Zainal Sapari went back to basics with the National Trades Union Congress’ special SG50 red top.

Workers’ Party chairman Sylvia Lim, an MP for Aljunied GRC, opted for a “10-year-old plain red blouse from New Zealand” and added: “Good thing I can still wear it.” 



Red and white wedding: Brothers Safrizan Roslan (in white), 31, and Syazwan Roslan (in red), 26, with their brides Siti Noraisyah Mohd Sanusi (in white), 29, and Mahirah Mohd Helmi (in red), 27. ST PHOTO: YEO KAI WEN

34

Dressing up for NDP – What people wore



Madam Junaidah Mohamed Said looking floral and fabulous in red.
ST PHOTO: YEO SAM JO


Madam Junaidah Mohamed Said always made it a point to dress up for National Day and this year was no exception. The 56-year-old technical executive was looking flowery and fabulous on Aug 9.

For civil servants Thiruselvam Ayasamy and Umar Thiruselvam, who were with their five-year-old son Harisaran, wearing the national colours was a way to show their love for Singapore. Mr Thiruselvam said: “We love the country very much. We try to wear red every year on this day. It’s a way to show our love for this country.”

Mr Chris Ho, 41, opted for comfort first, which was why his linen shirt was pink instead of red. “I wanted to buy a red shirt, but I couldn’t find one in linen, which is more cooling!”

Luckily, there's another upside. "If my kids can't find me in the crowd, it'll be easier to spot pink than red," he quipped.

The outfits of the day had to belong to couples Safrizan Roslan and Siti Noraisyah Mohd Sanusi, and his brother Syazwan Roslan and Mahirah Mohd Helmi. They decided to make the day even happier by having a double wedding, dressed in resplendent red and white.

Mr Safrizan said: "We planned to have our wedding on this date so as to commemorate our nation's success. What better way to celebrate with not just one, but two weddings?" 



Wearing national colours for National Day were couple Thiruselvam Ayasamy and Umar Thiruselvam and their five-year-old son Harisaran. ST PHOTO: YEO SAM JO



35

Ms Emma Lee did not expect to become an Internet sensation when her friends gave her two tickets to the Parade. PHOTO: YOUTUBE

Stand-outs among the crowd

It didn't take long for Ms Emma Lee, 29, to become the breakout star of the National Day Parade. She wasn't a performer, though, just a pretty spectator who caught the eye of the broadcast crew



The happy face of this spectator made the rounds on Twitter. PHOTO: INTERNET




Twitter user Arina posted this photo of her wearing a plastic bag on her foot when her sandals broke. PHOTO: ARINALIN/TWITTER

who cut to her at least five times throughout the two-hour-long event.

“I never expected to become one of the talking points of such an important event in Singapore’s history,” the Chengdu-born, Singapore-based businesswoman said later. Her Singaporean friends had given her two tickets to the parade.

Another spectator also made the headlines, but for a different reason. His happy face at being caught by a TV camera quickly spread online and was retweeted more than 2,700 times.

And then there was Twitter user Arina, who reported: “My sandals broke so I had to improvise... All in the name of #SG50.” A plastic bag wrapped her foot. 



Foreign dignitaries present included (front row, from left) Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor and her husband Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, Laos Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah as well as (second row, from left) Japanese Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso, Australian Deputy Prime Minister Warren Truss, Indonesian Vice-President Jusuf Kalla and his wife Mufidah Kalla, Chinese Vice-President Li Yuanchao, Britain's Prince Andrew, Johor Crown Prince Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim and Johor Sultan Ibrahim Ismail. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG



36 Foreign VIPs in the stands

Mr John Key, New Zealand's Prime Minister, was born on Aug 9, 1961. This year, he spent his birthday celebrating with an entire nation, as one of the foreign dignitaries invited to Singapore's Golden Jubilee celebrations.

Dignitaries from 18 countries sat in the Padang grandstands. They included Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Malaysia's Prime Minister Najib Razak, Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, Chinese Vice-President Li Yuanchao, Indonesian Vice-President Jusuf Kalla and Prince Andrew, the Duke of York, who was here as the representative of Queen Elizabeth II.

President Tony Tan Keng Yam thanked them for their friendship and support in a lunch at the Istana before the parade.

37

LED kids light up the night



More than 500 primary school pupils drew gasps from the crowd as their stick figure LED suits changed colours, from red to blue to green.

Watching the display go off smoothly was a relief for choreographer Gordon Choy. He suffered one headache after another in turning them into performers worthy of a nation's attention.



More than 500 primary school pupils donned LED suits for the display.

PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

Because the LED lights would stop working once bent, the kids couldn't sit while in their costumes - but some did.

They had to press a button to change the costume's colour, and "the kids would press here, press there, messing up the whole picture during rehearsals", he recalled, laughing.

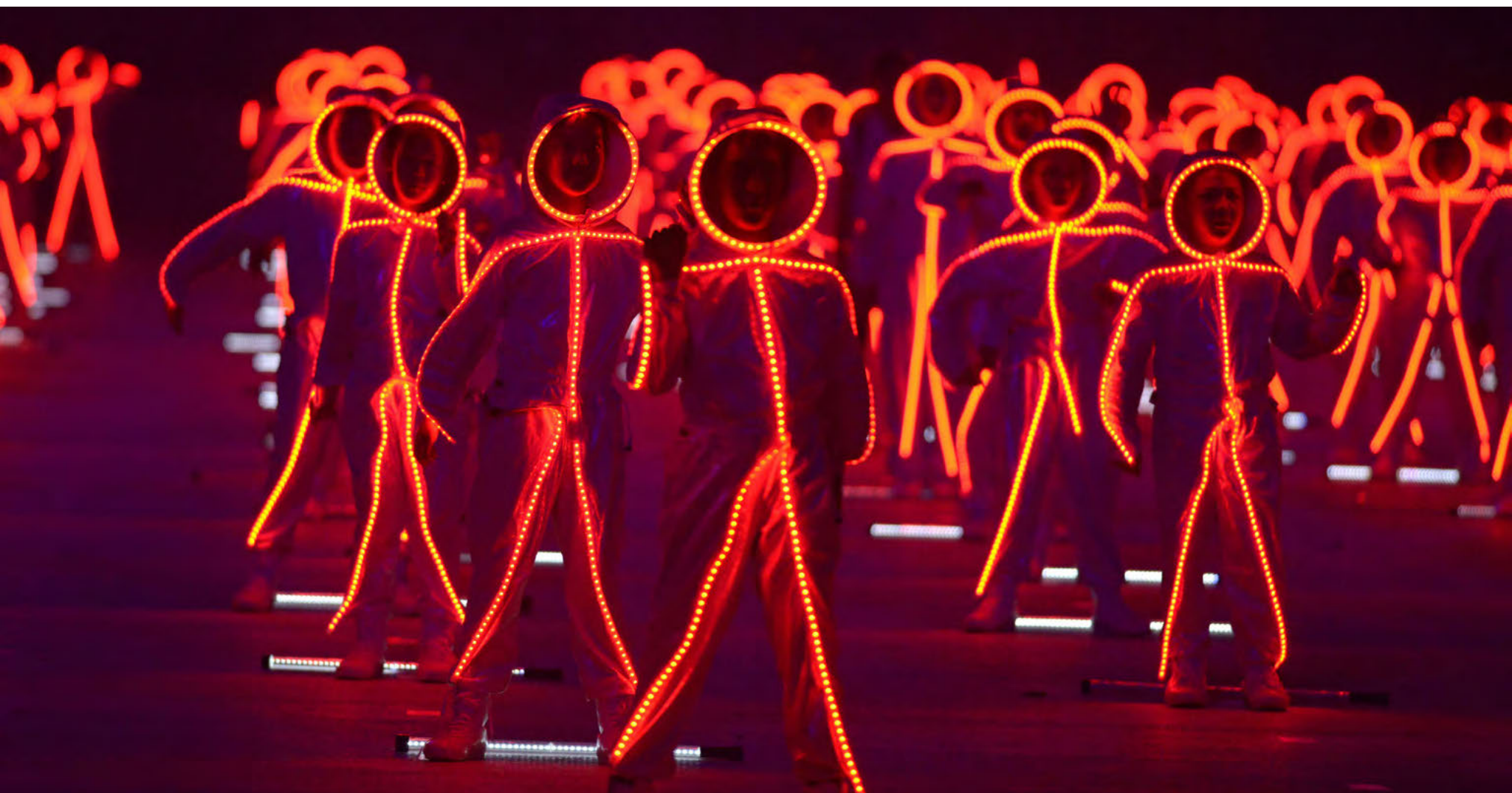
But all went well, and watching them light up the Padang - and the nation - was surely a sweet sight. **ST**



The LED lights could change from red to blue to green. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG



The children could not sit down in their costumes as the LED lights would not work once they were bent. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG




The colours were changed at the press of a button. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

38

Iconic characters on parade

What do chilli crab, Singa the Courtesy Lion and Singlish have in common? Each was part of a rojak mix of Singapore icons that took centre stage as more than 500 performers from the People's Association put up a lively dance at the Parade.

The large props and floats were meant to depict Singapore's unique identity and what locals hold close to their hearts.

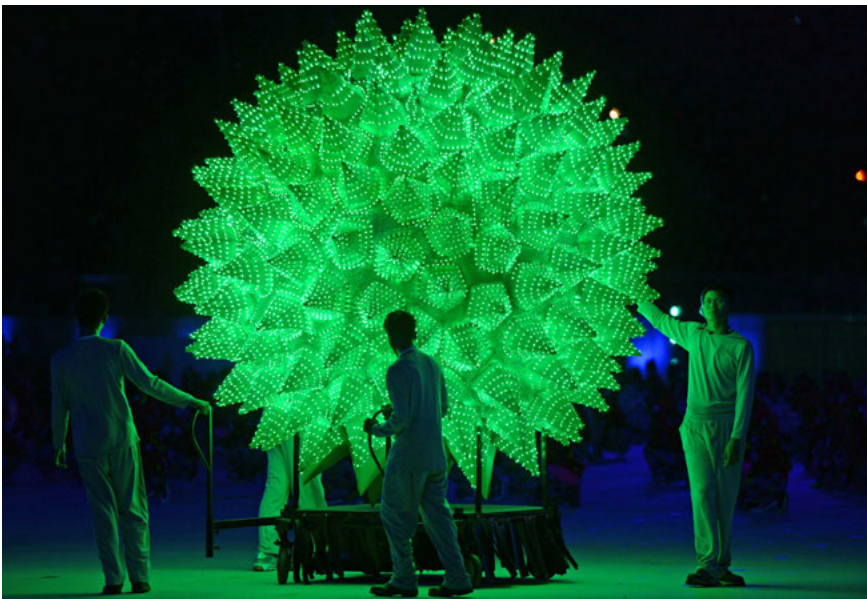
Also present: Changi Airport, a bowl of ice kacang, Teamy the Productivity Bee and a durian. 



ST PHOTOS: ALPHONSUS CHERN



ST PHOTOS: CHONG JUN LIANG



ST PHOTOS: DESMOND FOO



ST PHOTOS: CHONG JUN LIANG



CapitalLand



ST VIDEO: ASHLEIGH SIM



Fireworks set skies ablaze

More than twice the amount of pyrotechnics were set off at 2015's Parade than the previous year, with new formations like a rainbow arc wowing the crowds.


The five-minute grand finale that capped off the Parade began with the characters "SG50" forming in the sky and ended with fireworks shooting continually for 20 seconds. Pyrotechnics were also set off from ring towers around the Padang and from the rooftops of seven buildings in the area.



More than twice the amount of fireworks were set off this year. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM



TAP HERE TO SEE THIS YEAR'S NATIONAL DAY PARADE FIREWORKS
(Available only on desktop and Apple devices)

If you've ever wanted to name the effects instead of calling them the "nice red one" or "big golden one", **tap here** for The Straits Times' guide to knowing your peonies from your crossettes. 



ST VIDEO: ASHLEIGH SIM



The grand finale that capped off the Parade lasted five minutes.

ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG



ST VIDEO: ASHLEIGH SIM



Trash-free aisles after the Parade. ST PHOTO: AUDREY TAN

40

Leave no litter behind

Surprise, surprise! There was no ocean of trash left behind after the Parade this year.

The celebratory atmosphere brought out the best in many, who threw their litter in trash bags held by more than 200 volunteers.

Less trash was picked up from the Padang and The Float @



About 200 volunteers from the Keep SG Clean movement picked up trash in the Marina Bay area.
ST PHOTO: PRISCILLA GOY



Students Tan Jie Ying (right) and Ang Ye Xiang bagged their own trash. ST PHOTO: AUDREY TAN

Marina Bay by cleaners in 2015 than the year before, said the organisers.

“We are just doing our part for a clean Singapore,” said students Tan Jie Ying and Ang Ye Xiang, who were spotted picking up after themselves. 

Overseas and overjoyed




Singaporean Angas Ang (third from left), who moved to Seoul to study Korean in 2013 and stayed on to look for work, was one of more than 60 Singaporeans living in Seoul who gathered to watch the Parade. ST PHOTO: CHANG MAY CHOON

No matter in what part of the world they might be, Singaporeans overseas joined in the Golden Jubilee celebrations, even if it meant staying up till the wee hours like Ms Juliana Tan, 26.

The New York-based photographer said: “I guess there’s more nostalgia when you’re away.”

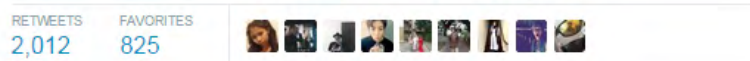
In China, about 100 Singaporeans watched a live telecast of the parade at a Harry’s Bar in Suzhou. Mr Ching Keng Ghee, 51, who has lived in the city for 18 years, said: “Fifty years is a milestone and we wish Singapore a very prosperous future and many good years to come.”

The National Day classic Home took on a Korean twist in Seoul, where more than 60 Singaporeans gathered at a serviced apartment for a screening held by the Singapore Club Seoul. 

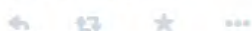
42



this photo of #sg50 slays so hard



6:17 AM - 8 Aug 2015



@s0resouls

Follow

admit it, this year's #sg50 ndp would never be the same without him covering his ears and waving anymore



2:44 AM - 9 Aug 2015



TAP ON PHOTOS TO SEE MORE

(Available only on desktop and Apple devices)

PHOTOS: TWITTER

Fun times on social media

Netizens celebrated SG50 and National Day with songs and lots of locally flavoured wit and humour.

One of our favourite memes showed Singa the Courtesy Lion patting Merlion as it recovers after a night of hard partying.

A digitally altered photo making the rounds put together every aspect of the aerial flypast.

And when a boy in a Parade video said he dreamt of being a soldier when he grew up, Twitter user Zulkarnain Sadali's wry reply of "Don't worry, little boy. You don't have a choice", drew hundreds of retweets.

Here are some of our faves on social media. 

TAP ON PHOTOS TO
SEE MORE
(Available only on
desktop and Apple
devices)



MuttonsInTheMorning

@muttons

Follow

Best pic we've seen today! [#SG50](#)

Credit: Tan Kwang Yang



PARTY HARD.


RETWEETS

292

FAVORITES

119





Zulkarnain Sadali

@mdzulkar9

Follow


"I want to be a soldier when I grow up."
Don't worry, little boy. You don't have a
choice. [#SG50](#) [#NDP2015](#)

RETWEETS

1,054


FAVORITES

335



4:59 AM - 9 Aug 2015

North-East Region, Singapore





jeffcheong

@jeffcheong

Follow

This is the scene I missed most from all the
guns salute. [#NDP2015](#) [#sg50](#) [#LKY](#)



RETWEETS

3,279

FAVORITES

1,377



4:00 AM - 9 Aug 2015

PHOTOS: TWITTER

Did you know we have a national bird? Guess which one. *

☐ Crimson sunbird



☐ Straw-headed bulbul



☐ Black-naped oriole



☐ Pink-necked green pigeon



43

How well do you know Singapore?

Quick, who composed the national anthem and the Children's Day song, Semoga Bahagia? And what is the national bird?

To test your knowledge of Singapore, The Straits Times came up with a Jubilee Quiz with 50 questions in MCQ format.

Tap here to take the test (Available only on desktop and Apple devices). 

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MONDAY, AUGUST 10, 2015

SINCE 1845

THE STRAITS TIMES

GOLDEN JUBILEE SPECIAL COMMEMORATIVE EDITION



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Reliving the day

The fireworks that lit up Singapore's gleaming skyline were captured in the front cover of The Straits Times' Golden Jubilee Special Commemorative Edition on Aug 10 (above), and the day's events were chronicled over 28 pages. **ST**

Then & now: We've marched a long way



Singapore's first National Day Parade after separation from Malaysia was held at the Padang in 1966. More than 23,000 people, including volunteer soldiers in the People's Defence Force, took part in the march-past. ST FILE PHOTO



The spectacular display during the finale was a crowd favourite at yesterday's parade, with more than twice as much pyrotechnics set off compared to last year's parade. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG



COVER PHOTO
BY JOYCE FANG

An extravaganza of light and colour dazzled all who caught the Republic's 50th birthday party at the Padang and Marina Bay area last night. Over 200,000 revellers packed the area - from the Esplanade, to the Marina Bay Sands event plaza and square, to the main venue - the Padang - where the first National Day Parade was held in 1966. Fireworks set off at the Padang, from the rooftops of buildings and barges on water made for a grand spectacle befitting the occasion.

The wet conditions made the 1968 National Day Parade more memorable as the 81 contingents shrugged off the heavy rain to complete their 8km march. ST FILE PHOTO



Highlights of the 1970 NDP included a student dance item, Fountain Of Youth (above), and the V-200 armoured personnel carriers (top). ST FILE PHOTOS

Padang, venue of the first and 50th NDPs

Singapore celebrated its first birthday in front of City Hall on Aug 9, 1966, when more than 20,000 people came together for a thunderous rendition of Majulah Singapura. Contingents of parade participants lined up on the Padang in their now-vintage uniforms to mark the momentous occasion. In the five decades since, Singaporeans have come together every year, rain or shine, on that date for the nation's birthday bash. March-pasts, military vehicle displays, mass performances and fireworks are perennial crowd-pleasers that add to the pomp and pageantry of each celebration. The event has been held at the Padang, the old National Stadium and, in the past decade, at The Float @ Marina Bay. That allowed the parade organisers to take advantage of the water element that the venue afforded, with naval displays in Marina Bay. This year's Golden Jubilee edition makes a return to the site where the very first NDP was held - at the Padang in front of City Hall. It featured a vintage parade segment, where pioneers marched in their old-fashioned uniforms, from policemen in their khaki shorts to firemen in their now-defunct helmets and nurses in their vintage white caps. More than 26,000 spectators watched the SG50 parade at the Padang, while another 25,000 caught the action at the floating platform.



In a lively dance segment, more than 500 performers, with the help of large props, pay tribute to the things that make Singapore unique - from the Singlish "lah" to pop culture, including tracks from TV themes, and the food we love, such as durians. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

Participants, with pioneers among them, marching in the vintage parade segment. Some 450 participants gave spectators a glimpse of what uniforms used to look like - soldiers in the army's first-generation Temasek green uniforms, policemen in their khaki shorts, firemen in their now-defunct helmets, and nurses in their vintage white caps, among other iconic outfits. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN



There's no place like home



Sumiko Tan
Deputy Editor

Typhoon Nangka was moving towards Japan's Shikoku island and my mother was worried.

Her sister, who is 82, lives alone in a house by the coast there.

My mother said she would call my aunt to find out how she was, but I said I didn't think that was a good idea. Imagine the phone ringing while a storm is raging, I said. It might frighten her.

I sometimes wonder what my mother's life would have been like if she hadn't met my father and come to Singapore.

ST ILLUSTRATION: ADAM LEE

By extension, I wonder what it would have been like if I had been born a Japanese.

I suppose the lives of my Japanese cousins are an indication of how I would have turned out.

One is a lecturer at a college in Tokyo, where my mother was born and grew up in. His sister is a housewife in Saitama, on the outskirts of Tokyo, where their late father – my mother's brother – had a small Daihatsu distributorship. Two other cousins are salarymen in Tokyo.

Chances are, I would have become a housewife in Saitama, too.

On the other side of my gene pool are my Chinese relatives.

My paternal grandparents were from southern China. If they had remained there instead of crossing the seas to Singapore, my father would have been born there – and so would I.

Again, my cousins are a good gauge of what my life would have been like.

Last year, some of my Singapore relatives made a trip to Chaozhou to visit the ancestral home. As one of my Singapore cousins puts it: "It's quite sad... I think our relatives haven't done too well for themselves."

One cousin is a farmer while his brother is a butcher. The farmer's wife works in a production line in a factory a long bus-ride away. It is a tough life and money is scarce.

The family home is in a rural village. It is in a shambles, shared by the many descendants of my great-grandfather's seven sons. There is no toilet in the house and they use a public loo in the village square.

My cousin the farmer borrowed money to build a house with more modern amenities not too far away. His daughter is doing better. She went to university and speaks some English.

I suppose if I had been born in China, I would be a factory worker like my cousin's wife.

In terms of education and material comforts, my Singapore cousins have done well. Almost all went to university, many are professionals, and they hold good jobs. Life has not been difficult and the future for their children looks bright.

Would we in Singapore be what we are if we hadn't been born here, I wonder. How much was Singapore a factor in our "success" compared to our cousins in China?

If my farmer cousin and his butcher brother had been born here, would their lives have been easier?

And am I better off here in Singapore than if I had been born in Japan?

I've never ever wished to live anywhere but Singapore. I've never felt the grass was greener elsewhere, and the longest I've been away from home was about a month, when I was on a study tour in the United States decades ago.

Of course Singapore isn't perfect, no country is.

The weather is horribly hot and humid. My Japanese and Chinese cousins are way better off on this score, at least during their spring and autumn.

Unlike those two countries, tiny Singapore also doesn't have areas of outstanding natural beauty that people can be proud of. And being just 50 years old, this is a country that doesn't have much of a culture or even traditions to speak of.

There are social issues. The rich-poor divide is widening and the space for political discourse has always been limited.

There are other things to rant about – from overcrowded trains to the stressful school system to how there are too many foreigners - but despite all that, I thank my lucky stars I was born in Singapore.

It is safe, stable and secure, and everyone has opportunities to get a good education. The system works, is mostly meritocratic, and hard

work is rewarded.

I also like how Singapore is a small pond. It is easier to do well because there are fewer people to compete with. My cousins in Japan and China have it much harder.

I look at my niece and nephew in the United States and H's daughter in Britain and think how much easier it would be for them to shine and stand out if they were living here. Where they are, they are just one in a sea of millions of children.

But while Singapore is a small pond, it is also a shimmery pond, respected around the world and with a reputation disproportionate to its size.

As Singaporeans, we have become blase about hearing how the country is an "economic miracle". We do not pay much heed to those international rankings that place us high on anything from low crime rate to ease of doing business.

But if I am honest, I always feel a prick of pride when I am travelling and some stranger gushes about the good things he has heard about Singapore. It is nice to come from a country that is admired.

Singapore's high standing has come about because its first generation of political leaders were very capable.

You might not have agreed with their policies or politics, but few would doubt their sincerity in wanting to improve the lives of Singaporeans, and by many measures the country in 2015 is vastly better than what it was at Independence in 1965.

In the end, though, it is hard to put a finger on why exactly I love my country – warts and all – and why I have no doubt my cousins in Japan and China love theirs, warts and all too.

Love for country is not dependent on how wealthy or how poor it is, or how many skyscrapers or shanty towns it has, or whether it has

a rich culture or even a good government.

“We love our country, not because it is perfect in everything, but it manages to touch our heart despite all its imperfections in everything,” said Turkish novelist Mehmet Murat ildan.

The reasons are, ultimately, intangible.

You love your country because you were born there, you grew up there, the people you love are there, and because the early memories that make you who you are as an adult were formed there.

You love your country because you know all too well its quirks, its vulnerabilities, its strengths and also its smells.

You love your country because it has given you your identity and your sense of self.

You love your country because it is the place you feel the most comfortable in .

You love your country because it is, simply, home.

I am a week early, but Happy 50th Birthday, Singapore. 

This column first appeared in The Sunday Times on Aug 2, 2015

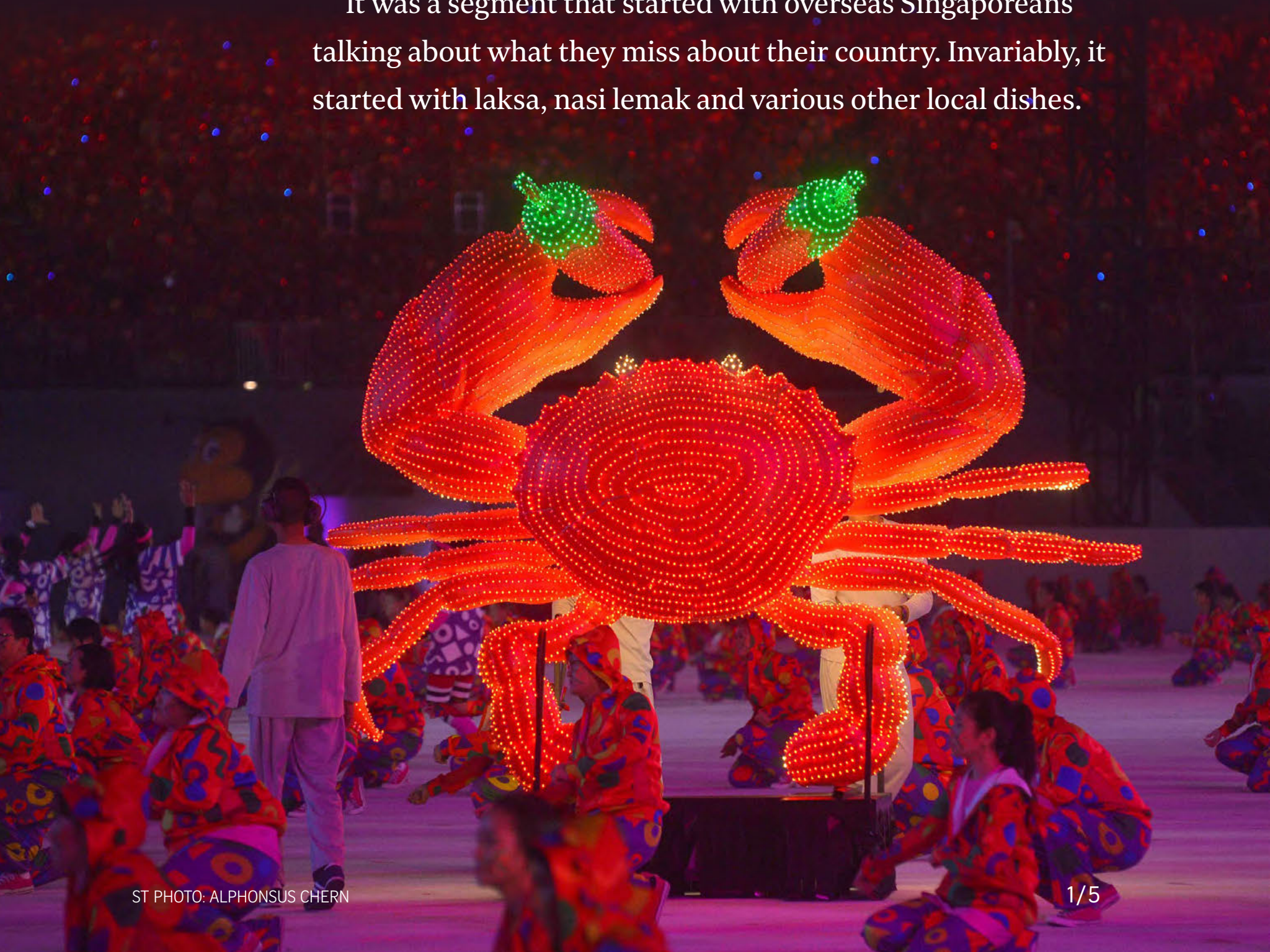
46

A nation at ease with itself – quirks and all

Ignatius Low
Managing Editor

About two hours into the National Day Parade, I realised what the most important achievement of our young nation was as it celebrated its 50th birthday.

It was a segment that started with overseas Singaporeans talking about what they miss about their country. Invariably, it started with laksa, nasi lemak and various other local dishes.



They went on to the national pastime of queueing, of “chope-ing” or reserving seats using umbrellas and packets of tissue paper, and Singlish, our unique vernacular, which they said was a sure-fire way to recognise their fellow countrymen wherever they may be.

Then a giant lighted durian was wheeled out onto the giant Padang stage, complete with dancers frolicking around it, followed by a giant bowl of ice kacang. Amid the pulsating soundtrack, someone was chanting “char kway teow”, “fish ball mee” and “chicken rice” with all the religious intensity of a monk trying to reach nirvana.

Later the soundtrack changed and classic campaign jingles from the 1970s and 1980s came on. I was amazed that I still knew all the words to the “Courtesy is for free” and “Good, better, best” jingles, and even the Mandarin chorus of the Speak Mandarin Campaign song.

Someone had definitely turned up the kitsch factor because a giant lighted Singa the Lion was wheeled out on stage. Then the productivity mascot Teamy the Bee. The next bit of wildlife to emerge was, bizarrely, a big squid - with the words “Blur Like Sotong” on it, as the focus shifted to favourite Singlish phrases that Singaporeans use.

By the time singer Corrinne May emerged atop a dragon in the shape of the slides that used to feature in iconic HDB playgrounds of the 1980s, the “rojak” or pastiche of random Singapore symbols was complete.

There is nowhere else on this planet, I think I can safely say, where a packet of tissue paper (with the word “Chope!” on it) would feature as a national symbol in a country’s all-important Golden Jubilee celebrations. But there it was, in all its giant lit-

up glory – its symbolisation of the national “kiasu” spirit so instantly familiar to Singaporeans.

Finally, the dancers onstage formed themselves in the pattern of a tree, with its “roots in the national identity”, said the parade commentators . One by one the lit-up symbols – Singa, Teamy, the bowl of ice kacang, the durian, the sotong and yes, the packet of tissue paper – became the “fruits” at the tip of the tree’s branches.

In that borderline madcap moment, as I wondered briefly what this must look like to the foreign dignitaries attending the parade, the significance of Singapore turning 50 suddenly dawned on me.

Crazy as they are, these are some of the key symbols of our national identity. We may have been embarrassed by them at some point, but we are over that now.

We now have enough self-awareness to laugh about them, and even quite fondly accept them as part of our history and our DNA. And we also feel relaxed enough to celebrate them on the national stage in what is arguably the pinnacle of the Golden Jubilee celebrations.

At 50, not only has Singapore created a national identity, but we’ve also become mature enough to be happy with it.

To be frank, I was a little worried about this year’s National Day Parade. I was afraid it was going to be one long history lesson about how the nation was built from nothing and how far it has come.

That it was going to rehash the traumatic events of the 1960s that led to Singapore being part of Malaysia and then separating from it. That we were going to see image after image of HDB estates being built, the start of National Service,

the industrialisation of Jurong – you know, the usual events associated with how Singapore went from “Third World to First” in one generation.

We are, after all, at the start of election season and the ruling People’s Action Party will want to remind voters again of its pivotal role in Singapore’s success, especially that of the Republic’s first Prime Minister, the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

It is not that the story of how we built the nation is unimportant. It is just that it is one that has been told many times in the run-up to this SG50 year, and most Singaporeans were also reminded of it during the national week of mourning when Mr Lee passed away in March.

Instead, the SG50 National Day Parade focused on the people of Singapore, letting them explain what it is they like about their way of life on this tiny island and how much it has changed over the years.

In line with this, the organisers cleverly weaved into the pomp and pageantry some nice touches.

The mobile column of tanks and trucks that rolled past City Hall, for instance, was the biggest and most impressive display of hardware I had ever seen. But I felt a surge of real pride only right at the end, when nine relatively nondescript vehicles rolled past, with sets of real-life fathers and sons (who were both in the force) saluting the grandstand.


It showed that a country can have the best weapons and tanks that money can buy, but its defence is only as strong as the willingness of subsequent generations of Singaporeans to man them.

A parade like this is also the epitome of seriousness. Everything is done with military precision according to the book.

So it was a pleasant surprise to see members of the SAF band put down their instruments in the middle of their segment, whip out fans and do a fan dance to the strains of “zhi ma lui dou”, the theme song of the popular Channel 8 drama Neighbours.

A few of the primary school pupils were spotted on television totally out of sync with the music and the others, but they looked like they were having fun.

It was these offbeat moments, as well as other surprises like the “vintage parade” and an out-and-out rave version of Count On Me Singapore, that made NDP 2015 a more playful affair than I thought it would be, and a fitting close to the SG50 nationwide celebrations.

We’ve come this far as a result of hard work, careful planning and disciplined execution. But if you think this is all that Singapore stands for in the next 50 years, think again. 

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I sense, I smell and I hear the changes

Rohit Brijnath
Senior Correspondent



Mr Tan Guan Heng.
ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

Morning has broken on National Day. Two mechanical cranes stand like crooked sentries. Cars hum on finely paved roads. Tall buildings rise like pillars holding up the sky. As far as the eye can see, this is a nation changed. But Mr Tan Guan Heng, 78, well, he cannot see.

His cane tips and taps as he exits his condo just off Serangoon Road and walks beside the Kallang River. Ahead is a narrow bridge which is festooned with Singapore flags. He is blind yet he knows they are there. For when he walks on the bridge “the wind blows the flags across my face”. Nations presumably touch us in different ways.

This may be One Nation but every citizen is a separate spectator to history, experiencing his own land and discovering how it changes in his own unique way.

In the early 1960s, when Mr Tan still had his sight, “very few houses had a phone”. Now this is a nation captivated by gadgets and his introduction to the advance of technology is often amusing. Once, during his morning walk, a man strolling by said “Good morning” and Mr Tan, ever polite, replied “Good morning”. Laughing, he adds, “I didn’t realise he was talking to someone else” on a phone.

Unmarried and silver-haired, Mr Tan lost sight in his first eye at 23 due to a detached retina and then his second at 29 for the same reason. In 1965, he saw Mr Lee Kuan Yew crying on television but, by 1966, he was blind. He saw his nation formed but had to feel it grow and sense it develop. His feet that once walked on muddy tracks and in long grass now tell him of “pavements with no potholes”.

He was the first blind president of the then Singapore Association for the Blind. He founded a library which now has “hundreds of titles”, including braille and audio books. He introduced a low-vision clinic to help those who can barely see maximise their residual vision.

On this National Day, we celebrate the truth that this nation is built, act by act, by a vast congregation of folk.

Change is often a visual exercise – a new mall, for instance, is first examined by the eye. But the windows to Mr Tan’s soul are his ears and his nose. This new Singapore, he’ll tell you, is a noisy one, with its

pile drivers and road diggers and hawker centres where citizens are squashed together. “People talk so loud,” he says with a smile.

You see change, he listens to it. As a young man living in Newton, he could place people through their dialect - Teochew, Hakka, Hokkien – but now amid the babble, he mainly hears Mandarin.

National Day is a public day and yet a private one, a day of revelry yet also of remembrance. And so he recollects the street symphony of a time gone by, as if recalling a precious piece of music. He speaks of the “mee goreng fellow banging his ladle” and the “itinerant hawkers” calling out “chee yoke, kai yoke”. He talks of the “trring” of the ice-cream man’s bell and the bread man’s cry of “roti, roti, roti”. He pauses. “It was nostalgic and quite romantic”, but of course it was, this was the soundtrack of another life.

He could once see so he can visualise shapes and in his mind he knows what a Mercedes looks like or even a building of 14 to 15 floors. Yet Singapore’s progress can defeat the imagination and buildings of 40 to 50 floors he “cannot envisage” and the massive hotels he has heard of he “cannot visualise”.

Change is also revealed through his nostrils. The fumes of old buses no longer linger and the river he walks along does not stink as it once did at high tide. In such small ways a nation advances. Ah, but when it comes to food he “longs for the original smells. Char kway teow, the way they cook, the way they fry. Now it’s all sanitised”. He sighs.

He did not attend the parade for it is too crowded for an old gent with a stick, but is pleased that the public perception towards the blind is gently altering. “People are more forthcoming. If you’re standing alone, they might ask, ‘where do you want to go?’ ”

As a nation looks back and yet forward, he wishes for more opportunities for the blind and for a “caring society where the

disadvantaged and disabled are not left behind”. He wishes, too, for a young generation to strive as hard as his did. “We had to pull up ourselves as a nation,” he says with quiet pride. But it was not just politicians, he insists, who were responsible for this construction. “Not least of all it was your hard-working Singaporean. Let’s not forget the man in the street.”

The morning walk is done and he finds his way back home. Like his nation, he has voyaged well. He sold textbooks, has written four books and last week recited for me lines from a poem by William Wordsworth. And now as I leave, those words hang in the humid air:

*Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven!*





48

Doing the sums for the SG100 celebration

Rachel Chang
Assistant Political Editor

After the nostalgia fest that was most of the Golden Jubilee National Day Parade (NDP) yesterday, one of the final segments,

Chapter 6, sought to evoke the future.

At our annual viewing party, my friends and I were amused by how this segment, titled “Onwards”, was set to generic techno music – because all young people like electronica, of course - and featured primary school kids in LED hooded suits.

One friend joked that the outfits suggested a future environment rendered so inhospitable by climate change that we would all have to wear these hazmat-like suits.

Part of this segment also had adorable kids telling the camera what they wanted to do when they grow up.

One said he wanted to save the forests. To this, a friend quipped that there might not be anything left to save when the child in question had grown up. Ditto the other jobs that they wanted to do – how many will be made obsolete by technology by the time they enter the workforce?

Rather gloomy wisecracks, perhaps, but ones entirely characteristic of my generation, who have known nothing but peace and prosperity and yet are keenly aware that we stand at what could be a cliff’s edge.

What the next 50 years in a chaotic and fast-changing world will bring is as unclear as the neon shapes those children were forming.

The Golden Jubilee celebration was simply spectacular and felt symbolic of some sort of peak, the zenith of a period when everything got bigger and better in one linear direction.

I remember when National Day Parades ended with one fireworks display – fireworks seemed so precious and special that they could be indulged in only once a year, at the NDP.

Last night, there were fireworks after quite a few of the segments, culminating in one long fireworks display at the end.

Scarcity is a concept that no longer means anything to a country like ours.

The most moving moments of this period of national celebration have centred on how far Singapore has come to reach this moment.

One army veteran reminisced in a segment last night about an early parade with only 18 tanks in the military column – but oh how proud they were of those 18 tanks.

I don't know how many tanks we have now, but the military display that followed this interview segment showed that it was definitely a lot more than 18.

I can't help but wonder if there might come a day, between now and SG100, when our tank count might drop, and not rise, from year to year.

Could there come a day when we cut back on the fireworks display, a time when we don't have hundreds of millions to spare for celebrations?

Would we still feel the same surge of pride and unity on National Day? Would we still sing Home in unison with tears in our eyes?

Thinking about what my life might look like from now until SG100, when I will be 79 and, fingers crossed, still alive, it occurs to me that Singaporeans have gone 50 years only adding, never subtracting.

There were periods of crisis and economic depression, but these were dwarfed by massive gains over 50 years. We even added land size through reclamation.

This will not be the story of SG100. Some types of adding will never be had by my generation, like the exponential property value appreciation that our parents enjoyed. And there will be

subtraction – for the Singapore economy is now at a mature stage, where growth must be eked out – for which it remains to be seen if we are steadfast enough to endure.

But the success story of SG50 was unearned by my generation. We Instagrammed all the best moments from the long weekend, but understood only theoretically the journey that led to here.

We were born into a fast-moving current, buoyed along by the waves others made.

It will be SG100 that's our tale to tell. And when I am 79, the story I hope my grandchildren will hear won't be just one of success, of going from Third World to First.

It will also be about how we held together when things seemed to go backwards, if ever they do. About how our identity and resilience as a people were not contingent on growth and constant addition, but were able to withstand scarcity and subtraction – and strengthen through those periods.

That, to me, would be a centennial to look forward to. 

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Standing proud as Singaporeans

John Lui
Film Correspondent

“Welcome! South entrance, move to the left, please!” screams Ms Limin Ng, 21, one of the hundreds of volunteers here at the



ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

Padang. She has been on duty since 10am, and will remain until everyone leaves, at around 11pm.

Who volunteers to do this? To stand in the sun all day, shouting yourself hoarse, giving directions, helping the disabled and elderly get to their seats?

Ms Ng, a biological sciences student at Nanyang Technological University, says she is enjoying it, although her sister told her she was crazy to want to do it.

“When you help someone and you smile and they smile back, you feel like you’ve accomplished something,” she says.

It is as simple as that. Yet, it is not often that you meet people like Ms Ng, who ask for nothing more than a chance to help.

Near her, just before the start of the National Day Parade, is one spectator who has a special stake in today’s Golden Jubilee celebrations.

Mr Ong Eng Hin, 63, marched in the first Parade, in 1966, as a student with Raffles Institution’s semaphore flag group; in the next three Parades, he marched as a scout. Now, after a long break, he has come back, as a spectator.

“No lobang for a ticket lah,” says the accountant, when asked why it took so long for him to return. As luck would have it, this year, a friend gave him two tickets, so he is back - five decades after marching in the new republic’s first Parade.

Others at today’s festivities were not around to witness Singapore’s forced independence in 1965. In fact, some were citizens of other countries until fairly recently.

Twenty years ago, Ms Jasmine Lin, 45, had just arrived from China, and thought it might be interesting to watch the Parade at the National Stadium. Having been given a ticket by her boss, the marketing executive at a food and beverage company is back this

year – this time as a citizen of Singapore.

Now a mother of a 17-year-old daughter (“made in Singapore”, she quips), she became a Singaporean in 2003, and came here today to mark her 20 years of residency.

“I just want to celebrate with other Singaporeans,” she says.

Travelling to more than 30 countries for work has opened her eyes to how much her adopted home has to offer. “It makes me think more about what I have in Singapore,” she says.

Among the spectators is a Singaporean family who live in New York City but return regularly during the summer school holidays.

On this vacation back home, the children are here to see their grandparents and “go swimming”, says daughter Kai-Lin, 11 - just as management consultant father Kwek Ju-Hon, 40, prompts her to add “and SG50!”


In spite of the cue, they seem genuinely excited to be here, along with mother Stephanie Rupp, a professor of anthropology. Son Kai-Shan, nine, is looking forward to the mobile military display.

Snare drummer Leonard Chen, who marches with the Singapore Armed Forces Central Band, was in one of the early displays. He is just one dot on a field composed of hundreds of dots - but that is fine with him. The baby-faced 25-year-old, whose main instrument is actually the piano, has performed in three Parades, so he considers himself a veteran.

Today’s programme – featuring complicated marching and musical synchronisation with the Silent Precision Drill Squad and the Association for Persons with Special Needs – will not be a problem for the band. He and his team have been training since April to make sure the six-minute sequence is perfect.

No, he will not be that guy on the field who marches left when the whole company marches right, he says. Not today.

“This is the biggest show in Singapore history, and I’m proud to be part of it,” he says.


Overseas citizens returning here for a once-in-lifetime event, foreigners who became Singaporeans by choice and a middle-aged man who was there as a boy at Parade No. 1 – I suppose, for volunteer Limin Ng, now hours into her shift, they are three reasons she does what she does. 



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24hrs of the Golden Jubilee

And so Aug 9, 2015, came and went, strains of Kit Chan's Home lingering in the air.

How did Singapore spend its 50th birthday? The Straits Times captured every hour of Aug 9, 2015, in 24hrs, a special video of the big day. **Tap on the page** to watch it. 

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