



Dr Tan presenting a Lao edition of the book, *From Third World To First: The Singapore Story From 1965 To 2000*, which was written by founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, to Mr Thongloun. PHOTO: MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION

S'pore firms making their mark in Laos

S'poreans based overseas, like those in Laos, bring 'little red dot' to world: President Tan

Nur Asyiqin Mohamad Salleh
In Vientiane

Vientiane, with its squat buildings and narrow roads buzzing with carts and tuk-tuks, seems to have little in common with Singapore.

But familiar names – from the Management Development Institute of Singapore to SilkAir – appear on signboards and banners that adorn the Laotian capital.

They reflect Laos' steady opening of its doors to the world over the

past few decades.

The move has attracted Singaporeans and Singapore companies, which have made their mark in a range of sectors, including hotels, education and the retail business, said President Tony Tan Keng Yam yesterday at a reception for Singaporeans in Vientiane.

He cited several Singapore brands present in Laos, such as Somerset serviced apartments, Banyan Tree resorts and Tiger Beer.

Dr Tan, who is on a state visit to Laos, told about 50 people at the

reception: "Singaporeans like yourselves, who are based overseas, will continue to play an important part in bringing our 'little red dot' to the world."

He was also heartened to find that Singaporeans have volunteered their time and resources to improve the lives of Lao communities.

The goodwill generated from such acts contributes greatly to strengthening people-to-people ties between both countries, Dr Tan said.

He cited several examples, including Singaporeans supporting the Lao Disabled Women's Development Centre.

Dr Tan also spoke of how relations between Singapore and Laos have grown in breadth and depth since diplomatic ties were established more than 40 years ago.

"Now that there are almost daily flights connecting Singapore and Vientiane, I hope that many of you have the chance to return home for festive seasons, including the upcoming Lunar New Year," he said.

He is confident the greater air connectivity will promote more trade and investment flows, as well as people-to-people exchanges.

"Singapore and Laos have come a long way, and there are still more areas of collaboration for our public and private sectors to develop," Dr Tan added.

Earlier in the day, he visited Laos' University of Health Sciences to look at how specialist volunteers from Singapore Health Services are helping to improve the quality of physiotherapy education in Laos.

Since the three-year project by the Singapore International Foundation, SingHealth and the university was launched last August, about 136 people – nearly half of the 284 physiotherapists in Laos – have attended training workshops.

Dr Tan was hosted to lunch yesterday by Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith. In the evening, he headed to Luang Prabang, where he will wrap up his visit this afternoon.

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Nur Asyiqin Mohamad Salleh

LKY memoir launched in Laos

Founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew's 2000 memoir, *From Third World To First: The Singapore Story From 1965 To 2000*, is now available in Laotian.

The translation of Mr Lee's book, about Singapore's progress since its independence in 1965, was a project by the Singapore Embassy in Vientiane, the Lao Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, the Lao Writers' Association and copyright holders Straits Times Press.

Minister of State for Manpower Teo Ser Luck and Lao Vice-Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism Savankhone Razmountry were guests of honour at yesterday's launch at Mercure Hotel Vientiane.

In his speech, Mr Teo, who is accompanying President Tony Tan Keng Yam on his state visit, recounted Singapore's early days.

"Few people had confidence that an independent Singapore could survive. However, with determination, appropriate policies, together with help from our friends, we were able to slowly develop our country," Mr Teo said. Laos and Singapore share common experiences in their modern histories, he added.

Both countries weathered tough times in the early days of independence, grappling with issues such as poverty and social tensions. In his book, Mr Lee recounts how Singapore dealt with these challenges.

There are lessons to be learnt from each other, Mr Teo pointed out. He said: "I believe our experience – both our successes and especially our mistakes – could serve as a useful reference for both countries."

He added: "Let us then work hard together, so our countries may have an even brighter future."

The project was funded by 11 sponsors, mostly Singapore companies with a presence in Laos such as SilkAir. The book has been translated, or is being translated, into over 10 languages.