

HEARTWARE

Banding together to give back to the community

Such actions will shape character and bond us with nation

BY KEN KWEK

SINGAPOREANS feeling passionate about some aspect of Singapore were urged to band together with others and do something for the community.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong is certain such actions will forge in them an emotional bond with the country.

However, developing these ties that binds involves "getting all Singaporeans to engage and par-

ticipate in shaping the character and life of our society", he said.

It has begun and a pleased Mr Lee cited examples of groups who were making their mark "without fanfare or publicity".

One of them is humanitarian youth group Coast2Coast from West Coast GRC. The youths got together to help in the rebuilding of tsunami-shattered Aceh in Indonesia.

Through rebuilding two kindergartens and a local radio station together, the volunteers had nurtured close friendships, Mr Lee said and added to laughter: "Two of them even got married recently."

The couple Mr Chia Song Yu-

an, 29, and Ms Neo Chia Ying, 25, are both teachers.

Mr Chia told The Straits Times: "There's no reason why ordinary Singaporeans can't get out there and apply themselves to helping our neighbours. We learn from them too, and the shared experience brings all of us closer.

"Of course for me, I got a wife out of the trip as well!" he quipped.

The Prime Minister also praised the achievements of environmental group Waterways Watch Society, founded by retired bank executive Eugene Heng.

The group, with more than 100 members aged 18 to 65, spends weekends patrolling the Kallang



PHOTO: BRYAN VAN DER BEEK

PASSIONATE ABOUT FOOD: PM Lee greets members from the Singapore's Culinary World Cup team. (From left) Mr Eric Teo, Mr Randy Chow, Mr Kenny Kong, Ms Nicole Wong and Ms Ivy Wong.

Basin and Singapore River, picking up litter from the waterways.

Mr Lee noted its efforts to get schools involved in environmentalism, for example, getting St Andrew's Secondary to "adopt" a stretch of the Kallang River which flows past the school near Jalan

Toa Payoh.

Said Mr Heng, 57: "I'm very humbled that we were mentioned by the Prime Minister.

"Hopefully, this will encourage greater participation, not just from public and private corporations but also from individuals, to take

part in projects that involve protecting Singapore's environment.

"This is our home, and the challenge is for all Singaporeans. It cannot solely be the responsibility of the Government or environmental agencies," he added.

PM Lee was also encouraged by projects started by universities and their alumni, such as accountancy graduate Darren Lim from Singapore Management University.

The 24-year-old, an investment banker with HSBC, pledged \$4,000 a year from his paycheck to start a scholarship that will cover part of the tuition fees for one accountancy student every year.

"He benefited from education and so he now wants to do his part to help others have education too. It was his way of thanking his parents for his education," said Mr Lee.

Such initiatives were the key "ingredients" for building strong bonds among Singaporeans.

"They are individual pieces. They are not all organised, top down plan but they show people who care, they show people who are doing things and they show people who will get together and will feel that Singapore is a place where I did these things and I belong because I contributed and I made it happen and I made it different."

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