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By JEREMY AU YONG

SINGAPORE and China have started a new phase in their long history of bilateral collaboration by inking new initiatives that would introduce closer financial cooperation and see them work together on joint projects in third countries in Africa and South-east Asia.

The biggest strides forward yesterday – a day when the two sides put pen to paper on seven deals – were the announcements that the two sides will begin trading directly in each other's currencies, and that Singapore will be included in a programme that allows financial institutions here to invest up to 50 billion yuan (\$510.2 billion) directly in the Chinese securities market.

They were among the many outcomes from a morning of high-level meetings chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean and visiting Chinese Vice-Premier Zhang Gaoli.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting of the Joint Council for Bilateral Cooperation – the top

Pacts include direct trading between currencies, projects in third countries

bilateral body – DPM Teo said that this year's talks were especially significant given that both countries are in transition.

“Both Singapore and China are going through transformations, and China, in particular, is going through a new phase of its devel-

opment under a dynamic new leadership. Therefore, there are new connections, new types of exchanges that China is seeking to make and there are many opportunities where we can work together for this purpose,” he said.

The other two meetings held in the morning were those of the

15th Suzhou Industrial Park Joint Steering Council (JSC) and the sixth Tianjin Eco-City JSC.

The agreements boosting financial links mean that Singaporean businesses looking to deal in yuan would no longer have to first convert their Singapore dollars to a different currency, such as the US dollar. Singapore's inclusion in the Renminbi Qualified Foreign Institutional Investor programme would allow local investors to gain access to opportunities in China.

Said Trade and Industry Minister Lim Hng Kiang: “The big picture is that China is embarking on a very dramatic reform of its economy, and the MTEI economic agencies have been working with their counterparts to see how Singapore can weave itself into and support China's reforms.”

Among the other noteworthy agreements unveiled was a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed between International Enterprise Singapore and the China Development Bank to help companies from both countries break into emerging markets, starting with South-east Asia and Africa.

The deal has two planks. The first would involve the sharing of expertise and networks: Singapore will help Chinese companies gain a foothold in South-east Asia while China will do the same for Singaporean firms in Africa where it is already established.

The other seeks to give firms easier access to financing when investing in infrastructure in third countries. Few details were available although officials said it is unrelated to the idea of an Asian infrastructure investment bank mooted recently by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

There were also agreements to start a “smart city” within the Suzhou Industrial Park and an MOU to establish a Trade in Services Working Group, meant to promote exchanges in sectors such as education, health care, finance and urban planning.

Yesterday, Mr Zhang, a member of China's elite Politburo Standing Committee, also met President Tony Tan Keng Yam and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

He will wrap up his three-day official visit today with a tour of Anchorvale Community Centre and the Sengkang Floating Wetlands.

By JEREMY AU SPH.COM.SG
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China, Singapore ink 7 deals to boost ties

Trio of veterans honoured with Cultural Medallion

By CLARISSA OON
SENIOR WRITER

THREE veteran artists, representing the fields of English-language theatre, Malay literature and Chinese orchestral music, have received this year's Cultural Medallion.

Theatre practitioner Ivan Heng, 50, poet and novelist Mohamed Latiff Mohamed, 63, and conductor Yeh Tsung, 63, received their awards from President Tony Tan Keng Yam at the Istana last night.

The Cultural Medallion is the nation's highest cultural award, given out to Singapore citizens or permanent residents. It recognises excellence, commitment and leadership in the arts, and has been conferred on 112 artists since it was instituted in 1979.

Family members of all three men were present at yesterday's ceremony, including Yeh's wife of 30 years, Saulan, who flew in from the United States. The China-born Yeh, who is music director of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra, is a Singapore PR whose family lives in the US.

In his thank-you speech, Heng, the artistic director of theatre company Wild Rice, called the award “a great recognition, not only of my life's work, but also of the vital role that theatre plays in our society.”

Theatre “has made me a better person by challenging me to put myself in another's shoes – and sometimes high heels – and enabled me to see the world through another's eyes,” said the actor-director. He is best

remembered for his gender-bending portrayal of a steely Peranakan matriarch in *Emily Of Emerald Hill*, having played the role several times over 13 years.

Speaking in Malay and English, Latiff called it a “momentous and most meaningful day” and said the award was “a recognition of my 42 years contributing to literature”. A three-time winner in the Malay category of the Singapore Literature Prize, he is also the vice-president of Asas '50, a long-established Malay literary association.

As for Yeh, he said he believed the award “will open a new chapter in my life”. He thanked, among other people, his wife “who has stood by me all these years through the ups and downs of my music career”.

Seven Young Artist Awards were also given out at the ceremony by Mr Lawrence Wong, Acting Minister for Culture, Community and Youth. The award honours arts practitioners of distinction aged 35 and below.

One of them was Koh Hui Ling, 34, the associate artistic director of Mandarin theatre group Drama Box. The award was “double happiness” for her – in July, she received the Singapore Youth Award, administered by the National Youth Council, for her work in community and youth theatre.

“It's a pleasant surprise to receive two prestigious awards in the same year. I couldn't believe my ears when I found out,” she told *The Straits Times*.

By CLARISSA OON
SEE LIFE C6B7



President Tan with (from left) conductor Yeh Tsung, 63, theatre practitioner Ivan Heng, 50, and poet and novelist Mohamed Latiff Mohamed, 63, at the Istana last night. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

2013 Young Artist Award recipients

- Sound artist Bani Haykal, 28
- Pipa musician Chua Yew Kok, 35
- Visual artist Grace Tan, 34
- Theatre practitioner Koh Hui Ling, 34
- Visual artist M. Zaki Razak, 34
- Music producer and composer Ruth Ling, 33
- Urban artist Zul Othman (Zero), 34

US job figures show economy losing steam

THE latest United States job report indicates that the American economy was losing momentum even before the fight over the government budget that led to the recent shutdown. Employers added 148,000 workers to their payrolls last month, far fewer than the 180,000 expected by economists.



Harbin closes schools, cancels flights

AIR pollution in Harbin, China, has hit “hazardous” levels, forcing the closure of thousands of schools and the grounding of hundreds of flights in the north-eastern Chinese city. The smog got much worse over the past few days, with visibility dropping to 50m.

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Life!

CULTURE CHAMPIONS

Three arts veterans received the Cultural Medallion, the highest cultural award in the country, last night. **CLARISSA OON** reports. **C6&7**

Lives spent in the arts: (from left) maestro Yeh Tsung, writer Mohamed Latiff Mohamed and director-actor Ivan Heng.

Carrie remake

Chloe Grace Moretz plays girl with supernatural powers



C3

Ex-NMP on the big screen

Eunice Olsen stars in movie on human trafficking



C5

Like Father, Like Son

Moving drama about babies swapped at birth



C9

DESIGN: SALLY LAM PHOTOS: DESMOND WEE, ASSOCIATED PRESS, WOMENTALK, GOLDEN VILLAGE

YEH TSUNG, 63, conductor, music director of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra



Maestro Yeh Tsung has his mother to thank for making him take piano lessons at the age of five.

"Music was not my choice to start with, but became my choice because I loved it," says the 63-year-old China-born music director of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra.

His mother, Madam Zhang Renqing, now 88, was a vocal professor at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, where she still teaches today.

His passion for music led him to graduate from the conservatory at college level in 1972, amid the chaos of the Cultural Revolution which saw European music banned and large chunks of the conservatory's library destroyed.

It led him to study conducting in the United States in the early 1980s, winning full scholarships to the Mannes College of Music in New York and then Yale University, where he received his master's degree in music.

Yesterday, he reached yet another milestone in his music career, receiving the Cultural Medallion in recognition of his 11 years at the helm of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra. He is credited with giving the country's only professional Chinese orchestra international heft and a more contemporary direction through pop, jazz and South-east Asian influences.

Yeh's late father was a businessman who later became a professor at the Shanghai Institute of Foreign Trade. He acknow-

ledges that his father "taught me the skills of organisation. I didn't like it at first, but I realised it was important for me as a music director and conductor".

The maestro, who speaks fluent American-accented English, became a Singapore permanent resident in 2004 and now shuttles between here and the US. His family lives in South Bend, Indiana. He has been music director of the South Bend Symphony Orchestra for the past 25 years, making him one of the rare conductors to helm both a Western symphony orchestra and a traditional Chinese one.

The Cultural Medallion is given to Singapore citizens or permanent residents who have excelled artistically and contributed distinctively to the cultural scene. Past permanent residents who have received the award include contemporary dance choreographer Angela Liang, artistic director of the Arts Fission Company, and the Singapore Symphony Orchestra's music director Shui Lan.

Yeh describes receiving the award as "a great honour" and plans to tap the \$80,000 Cultural Medallion Fund to "invest in innovative research and to enhance creativity to produce better productions".

As for his mother in Shanghai and family in the US, they are "proud and happy" for him. His wife of 30 years, Saulan, a housewife, was at the Istana last night to witness him receiving the award from President Tony Tan Keng Yam. They have three children. Mona, 29, works at a youth media non-profit company in Washington D.C., while Melina, 20, is a Northwestern University undergraduate. Their son, Joseph, 16, is in high school.

Yeh spends 18 to 20 weeks a year in Singapore with the Chinese orchestra. "It's work every day, even on weekends,

but it's definitely an enjoyment to make music," he quips.

His tenure as music director has seen the 78-member orchestra chalk up several firsts. One was its world premiere of Shanghai-based composer Liu Yuan's East-meets-West, genre-busting symphonic epic Marco Polo And Princess Blue, commissioned by the Esplanade to raise the curtain on its concert hall in 2002.

In 2007, Yeh became music director for the National Day parade, the first time a classical conductor was appointed to the position. He brought together, under his baton, all the national orchestras - including the Singapore Chinese Orchestra and Singapore Symphony Orchestra - as well as local classical vocalists.

Then in 2009, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra under him created history by being the first Chinese orchestra in the world to perform in the main programme of the prestigious Edinburgh Festival.

He and the orchestra are currently rehearsing for Tunes Of Teochew, a concert of Teochew opera classics next month.

They are also gearing up for a major tour of China in May, followed a month later by the orchestra's largest-ever concert at the newly built National Stadium in the Singapore Sports Hub. For the local concert, Yeh will be conducting 4,000 musicians and choral singers, drawn from his orchestra as well as amateur Chinese music groups all over Singapore.

He says he is "willing to stay for as long as the orchestra needs me".

His wishlist for it? "To soar new heights and go international, be innovative in our programmes and engage and serve the community."