

THE NEW EURASIAN

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APRIL - JUNE 2011

Remembering President Benjamin Sheares

PLUS

RULING THE WAVES
EA Dragons' epic boat trip

UNIVERSITY OF LIFE
Engineering scholarship
student plans his career
with precision



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On the Cover

THE NEWEURASIAN

The quarterly magazine of
The Eurasian Association,
Singapore

The NewEurasian is published
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It is also circulated to senior
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community organisations and
self-help groups.

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President's *message*



It has been a year since the current management committee took office, and a year since I took the position of President of the Eurasian Association. This month, we will be holding our annual general meeting on 26 April at the Eurasian Community House at 7.30pm. I hope that we have a good turnout of members so you can participate actively in steering the association into the future.

In this issue, regretfully, we have had to deal with a couple of matters concerning funding. In January this year, the EA sent out letters to various individuals to appeal for funds to support the various projects and activities organised to improve the lives of Eurasians in Singapore.

Although we are more than two years away from the great economic downturn of 2008, the acquisition of funds to support the association remains challenging. The Eurasian Community House has also been ageing over the years. Not only do we continue to need funding for our programmes, but we also have to maintain the building granted to us by the Ministry of Community, Youth and Sports, which houses many of the activities we organise.

Moreover, the Family Support Services has recently been faced with budget cuts from funding agencies and organisations. We are saddened to hear the announcement of these cuts, and the situation remains challenging as we try to find alternative means of funds to support our FSS programmes and the Eurasians who have come to the EA for help. I would like to appeal to our Eurasian community to reach out and provide a helping hand to the association. No amount is too small and every contribution will be greatly appreciated.

If we need inspiration for what Eurasians can achieve, we need only look to former President of Singapore Benjamin Sheares. This May marks the 30th anniversary of Dr Sheares' death and we have chosen this occasion to commemorate his exemplary life in our cover story this issue.

We also celebrate the achievements of a number of Singaporeans in these pages, from the book launch of Joe Conceicao, one of our oldest and most revered members, to younger members who have triumphed in educational, sporting and other fields. And we record the work of a PhD student who is looking for participants to feature in her thesis that includes the lives of local Eurasians, a subject which continues to be of interest for academics and laymen alike.

We are a small but important force in Singapore and the more that people become active in the EA, the more influence we will enjoy in the community. We hope you enjoy this issue of *The NewEurasian*, continue to take part in our social events – that we Eurasians, especially, know how to enjoy! – and please dig deep into your pockets to help the less fortunate members of our community if you can.

Best wishes

William (Bill) Jansen,
President

The ECF – 16 years on

The Eurasian Community Fund is a monthly contribution automatically deducted from the wages of working Singaporean Eurasians. EA trustee *Timothy de Souza* explains how the ECF contribution began and EA Vice-President *Benett Theseira* explains why the association now needs to raise the level of donations

The Eurasian Community Fund came about after the Eurasian Association became a self-help group (SHG). In 1991, when I took over as President, the EA had some enrichment activities, such as the tuition classes, but they were available only to EA members and not to the whole Eurasian community.

The management committee felt that the EA had a wider role to look after all Eurasians in the community who needed help.

Educational bursaries and grants for Eurasians once existed in the 1930s and 1940s. However, they were not sustained, and lasted only for about a decade.

Education and family support

We wanted to provide help for families in two important aspects: the educational advancement of children at all levels and of different socio-economic backgrounds, from secondary school to university students; and social assistance for needy Eurasians. These were our community's two most important needs. At that time, Mendaki had been providing these programmes for the Malay community for nearly two decades. In the early 1990s, SINDA was formed to focus on educational advancement for the Indian community. CDAC followed with similar programmes for the Chinese community, although neither SINDA nor CDAC had any social assistance programmes.

The Eurasian community was the only recognised local ethnic group in Singapore that had no form of official educational advancement support and no self-help group.

Becoming a self-help group

We approached the government for help to turn the EA into a self-help group. We explained that the EA already had a structure, had been around for a long time, and that we were keen to make this happen.

Self-help group status came in 1994. It was a huge achievement: we had demonstrated that we could raise money, gather volunteers, and implement tuition and welfare assistance programmes, bursaries and awards

The government responded most favourably. It supported the idea of educational advancement, but did not think there were sufficient needy Eurasians to justify the creation of a social assistance programme, which was championed by Bryan Davenport.

We knew of a number of Eurasians who needed financial assistance. We established the welfare task force, which raised donations for needy Eurasians. Generous donors helped out, but we needed sustainable funding. At that time, the EA did not have any premises – we were working out of members' homes and had only a mailing address.

Producing evidence of need

To explain the magnitude of the problem, the EA commissioned a study undertaken by Dr Myrna Braga-Blake, a doctor of sociology. The research proved that a substantial number of Eurasians were in need (more than 100 families were living below the poverty line). The study was sent to the government which, on seeing the evidence, granted social assistance programmes to the EA.

We then looked to support our two objectives by disbursing cash in the form of an endowment fund. We proposed a \$2 million endowment fund, and the government approved it. The fund required trustees and EW Barker, Herman Hochstadt and Oscar



Timothy de Souza

Olivero took on this role. Some \$1 million was raised in the first few months and the endowment fund stands at \$1.7 million today.

As the endowment fund was insufficient to support the day-to-day running of the programmes, we sought to establish an additional operating fund called the Eurasian Community Fund (ECF), which was similar to those of the other self-help groups. At the time there were some 7,000 working Eurasians. The government agreed to match contributors' donations.

Self-help group status came in 1994. It was a huge achievement for us: we had demonstrated to the government that we could gather volunteers, raise money, and put together a core team to implement and sustain tuition and welfare assistance programmes, bursaries and awards.

The government gave us temporary headquarters at Mountbatten, then the permanent Eurasian Community House in Ceylon Road after about eight years.

The ECF rate of contributions has not been revised since its launch in 1995. What has gone up is the number of Eurasians being helped by EA and the cost of running the various programmes. The rate of ECF expenditure is rising faster than the contributions. If we are to continue with our mission, an increase in rates is necessary.

EA should consider doing this now as Singapore is economically in a good position this year and it is a good time to do it.

I believe that in asking for money it is important to justify our demands. You can see from the reports in *The New Eurasian* how the money is spent on good causes for the Eurasian community.

We wanted to provide help for families in two important aspects: the educational advancement of children and social assistance for needy Eurasians

The need for change

Benett Theseira explains that since its launch in 1995, the ECF's contribution rates have not been increased; what has increased is the number of Eurasians contributing to the fund, which raised \$457,000 via the CPF check-off scheme in 2010.

These funds are used to support EA's three key pillars: educational advancement, FSS and community development.

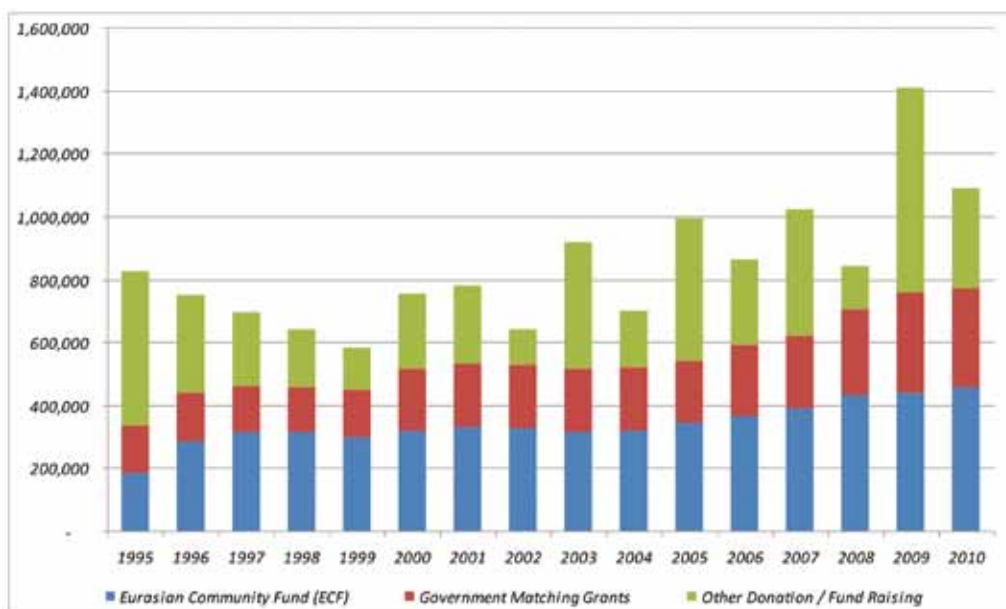
Over the last 16 years, EA's community programmes have expanded significantly. Last year the association helped some 250 people in its education advancement programmes and more than 300 with FSS funding

"The costs of running EA's programmes have risen significantly over the last 15 years, as can be seen in the chart, and we also have the ECH to maintain," says Benett. "Every year the EA has to find \$200,000 to \$300,000 in

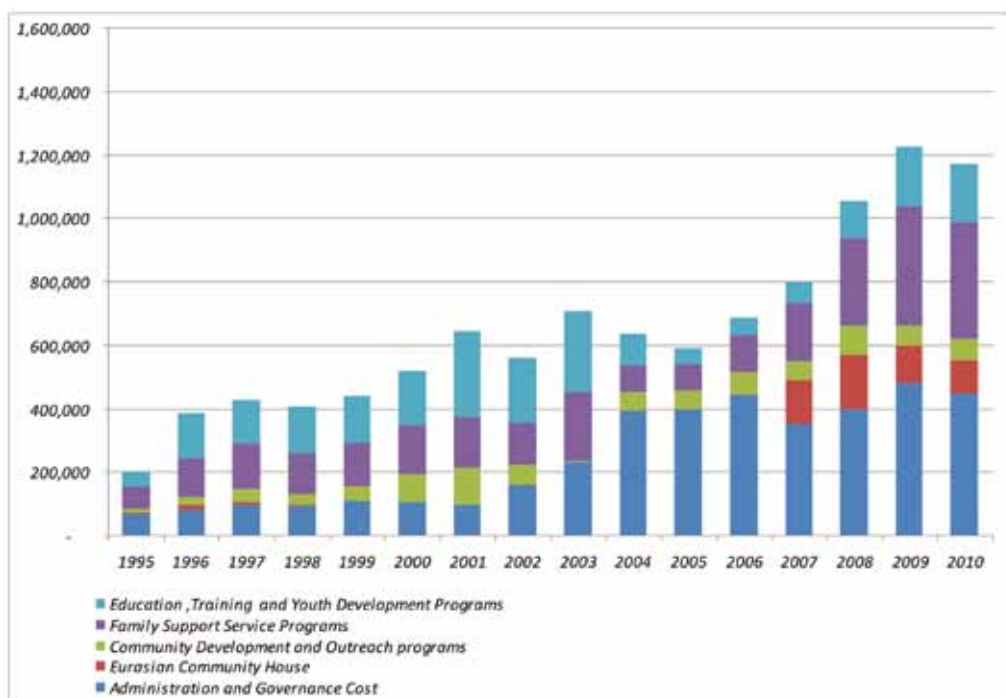
additional donations to fund the programmes' expenditure. This does not provide EA with a stable financial base and makes long-term planning of its community programmes more difficult.

"To strengthen its financial position, the EA is looking to increase the ECF contribution rate by an average of 30 to 50 per cent this year. Current contribution levels range from \$2 to \$10 per month. The management committee is currently discussing this with the relevant government agencies and is seeking the support of the Eurasian community for this initiative."

EA's Financial Resources



EA's Programme Expenditures





Jeremy Monteiro

All that jazz

Jeremy Monteiro's jazz organ trio Organamix's debut album has been nominated for the Independent Music Awards 2010, one of the most prestigious international awards for independent musicians and record labels.

Organamix comprises Singaporean guitarist Andrew Lim, Thai drummer Chanutr Techatana-nan and of course, jazzman Jeremy himself.

The judges for the IMA 2010 are jazz giants McCoy Tyner, Lee Ritenour and Arturo Sandoval, which makes the nomination a major accomplishment and milestone for Jeremy and his Singapore-Thai trio.

Take part in EA's AGM

Find out what's happening at the EA – and have the chance to have your say – at the Annual General Meeting on 26 April.

The event starts at 7.30pm and dinner will be served afterwards.

The meeting is open to EA members only. Please bring your Identity Card (IC) in order to register.

Donate through SG Gives

From 5 April 2011, Singaporeans who are eligible for the 2011 Growth Dividend will be receiving letters from the government informing them of their payout.

You may donate all or part of your Growth Dividend to the EA by visiting www.sggives.org/eurasians

Role model

Cool youngster Gerald Pereira has been voted top male model by readers of Teens magazine.

The 17-year-old Temasek Polytechnic student – and self-confessed movie junkie – was the only Eurasian out of 65 semi-finalists to make it to the finals in the competition run by the magazine.

Gerald, who coached his former school's primary school pupils in track and field events, cites footballer and style icon David Beckham as his role model. But he isn't planning a career on either the football pitch or on the fashion show runways. His ambition is to run his own company.



Gerald Pereira

News in brief

Mandarin lessons

The EA is planning to hold a 10-week course in Mandarin at the ECH, tentatively scheduled to begin on Saturday 11 June between 3.30pm and 5pm. Topics will cover food, shopping and travel.

The cost for the 10 classes will be \$350. If you are interested, please contact Jacqueline Peeris, tel: 6447 1578 or e-mail jacqueline@eurasians.org

Classic burghers

Do you have any old photographs – maybe in your attic or in that old suitcase full of family treasures – of the Ceylon Dutch Burghers from Malaya and Singapore during the period 1865-1941, preferably of the older generations?

The EA needs them for an exhibition in Amsterdam in 2012.

If you have any such old photos you can lend, or know of any sources of such photographs, please contact Jacqueline, tel: 6447 1578 or e-mail jacqueline@eurasians.org

Fusion food

Lionel de Souza has proved how culturally adaptable Eurasians are by being appointed the organising chairman for Hougang Citizen Consultative Committee's Yusheng Lunar New Year Dinner.

The guest of honour was Eric Low Siak Meng, advisor to Hougang Grassroots Organisations, and the special guest was minister Lim Hwee Hua.

Correction

In the January – March 2011 issue of the *NewEurasian*, our story Eurasians in the Heartlands on page 15 included a photograph with the erroneous caption 'EA dancers put on a show'. The dancers at the event are from the Kristang Cultural Troupe from Siglap South CC.

Ground control for a high-flying career

The EA's first University Award Scholarship recipient Christopher Andrade talks about his plans for the future

Knowing what you want to do early in life can give you the focus to get a head start in your career.

Already, Christopher Andrade, the inaugural winner of the annual EA University Award Scholarship, talks in terms of organising his time so he can fit in work and play.

Christopher, 22, is currently a second year Mechanical Engineering Student at the National University of Singapore, having already studied Aeronautical Engineering at Singapore Polytechnic.

He is currently under contract as an engineer with SIA Engineering Company, where he will be working in various departments of the nation's airline to get a general grounding in how the company works.

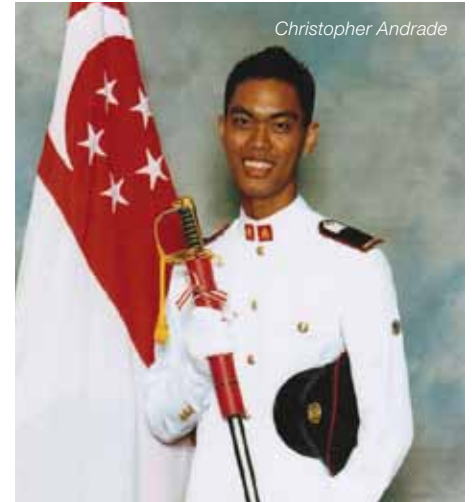
"I have had an interest in aircraft since I was young, out of curiosity of large flying metal objects," he says. "I made my decision to take a diploma at Singapore Polytechnic with the intention to pursue a career in the aviation

industry. If given the opportunity, I would also be interested in obtaining a private pilot's licence so that I can better understand the fundamentals of flight."

He adds: "By being efficient with my school work and through proper time management and planning, I am able to have some spare time to participate in other activities besides studying."

"During the semester, I like to keep fit by either swimming or running and in doing so, I am able to keep my mind active and refreshed. I use the time in between classes to exercise and my time after school to study. In the semester breaks, I plan my time such that it allows me to spend more time with my family and friends and if possible, to pick up a new skill or hobby. Over the December holidays, I spent time refining my swimming skills and techniques."

Winning the EA award has taken some of the pressure off studying, he says. "The generous scholarship provided by the



Christopher Andrade

Eurasian Association has financially eased the burden on my family to fund my university education, thus allowing me to focus better on my studies."

"In addition, the scholarship has also inspired me to do well in my studies and to contribute back to the association in the future," he adds.

Top performer

Nikhil Hogan, a music therapy student whom we featured in the January issue of *The NewEurasian*, has been awarded the prestigious Gary Burton Scholarship from Berklee



Nikhil Hogan

College of Music in Massachusetts, where he is studying. He received the scholarship – the college's top award, which recognises outstanding achievement by a music education and/or music therapy major – from Ronna Kaplan, President of the Music Therapy Association in the US.

Taking pride in education



A group of young schoolchildren enjoyed a ceremony in March at which they collected transport vouchers, thanks to the Temasek Cares Education Bursary.

The bursary exists for primary school students from lower-income families to help households with the cost of primary education and to encourage the pupils to study hard for their examinations and progress to the next stage of their education.

Nearly 30 recipients have been selected by the EA for this academic year, some half of whom were able to attend the ceremony. The bursary also covers school fees, meals and uniforms and a cheque to cover these costs will be presented to parents later this year.

Family research

A Eurasian academic is seeking local families to be the subject of her research

“My Masters degree focused specifically on Eurasian communities in Malaya and Singapore during the 1920 and 1930s. I am trying to expand on this, and also focus more specifically on the family”

The domestic lives of Eurasian families form part of the research a student is undertaking for her doctorate at the prestigious Cambridge University in the UK.

Kirsty Walker is based in Singapore this year and is looking for families who would be willing to be interviewed about their Eurasian backgrounds for her fieldwork.

She explains: “My research explores ‘Creole family histories across Southeast Asia and beyond, 1890-1960’, and Eurasian communities are an important part of my work.”

She adds: “I did a Masters at USM (Universiti Sains Malaysia) in Penang, which focused specifically on Eurasian communities in Malaya and Singapore during the 1920s and

1930s. In my History doctoral research, I am trying to expand on this, and also focus more specifically on the family. I am interested in the ways in which cultural exchange shaped the intimate, domestic lives of creole families.”

She is hoping that through the EA she will find some Eurasians who will be willing to share their own family histories with her and help to add to the body of knowledge about the Eurasian history and culture.

Kirsty herself has an English father and a Malaysian Punjabi mother from Kuala Kangsar. She grew up in Surrey, in south-east England, took her undergraduate degree in history at Clare College, Cambridge, and now, after her MA in Malaysia, is



Kirsty Walker

studying again at Cambridge for her PhD.

If anybody would like to share their family histories with Kirsty, please contact Rachel Chen at the EA, tel: 6447 1578 or e-mail rachel@eurasians.org

Drum role

Youngsters from low-income families who have a passion to play the drums are being offered a once-in-a-lifetime chance to learn from one of the most famous musical names in the region

One of South-east Asia's leading drummers and drum teachers is offering needy Eurasian youngsters free lessons.

Singapore Eurasian Kenny Hogan, who has played all over the world alongside world-class musicians, wants interested youngsters who cannot afford to take lessons to benefit from his skills. Not only that, he plans to perform and carry out workshops when renowned international artists come to Singapore.



In July, one of the world's most celebrated taiko drummers, Japanese Hidano Shuichi, is performing with Kenny in Japan and Singapore, after which they hope to hold a workshop at the EA.

Kenny says: “I have been a regular volunteer for a school for the blind for five years and with a girls' home. Now that I am back in Singapore from my international shows, and being a proud Eurasian, I want to contribute and give something back.”

Those who would like the chance to be considered for the classes should contact Patch Tan, tel: 6447 1578 or e-mail: patch@eurasians.org.

The classes will be conducted in the evenings at the ECH and Kenny will loan one of his drum sets. Kenny's website is www.kennyhoganumi.com

A Quiet Determination

Dr Benjamin Sheares, Singapore's second president, who served from 1971 to 1981, died 30 years ago this May. *Rachel Chen* looks back at the life of the shy, modest man who rose to take the nation's top job

Many Singaporeans were surprised when Eurasian Dr Benjamin Sheares, a well-known doctor, became President of Singapore in 1971. He was not a high-profile man, nor was he prominent in political or diplomatic circles; indeed, he was shy in public – far from the obvious choice for a head of state.

Yet beneath that quiet veneer, Dr Sheares was for many reasons the ideal candidate. Steadfastly loyal to the state and with a fierce sense of duty, he also possessed the leadership skills required to serve his country as its foremost citizen.

As a six year-old, his favourite game was playing doctor, and it is recorded that he even persuaded his sister to swallow a coin as 'medicine'

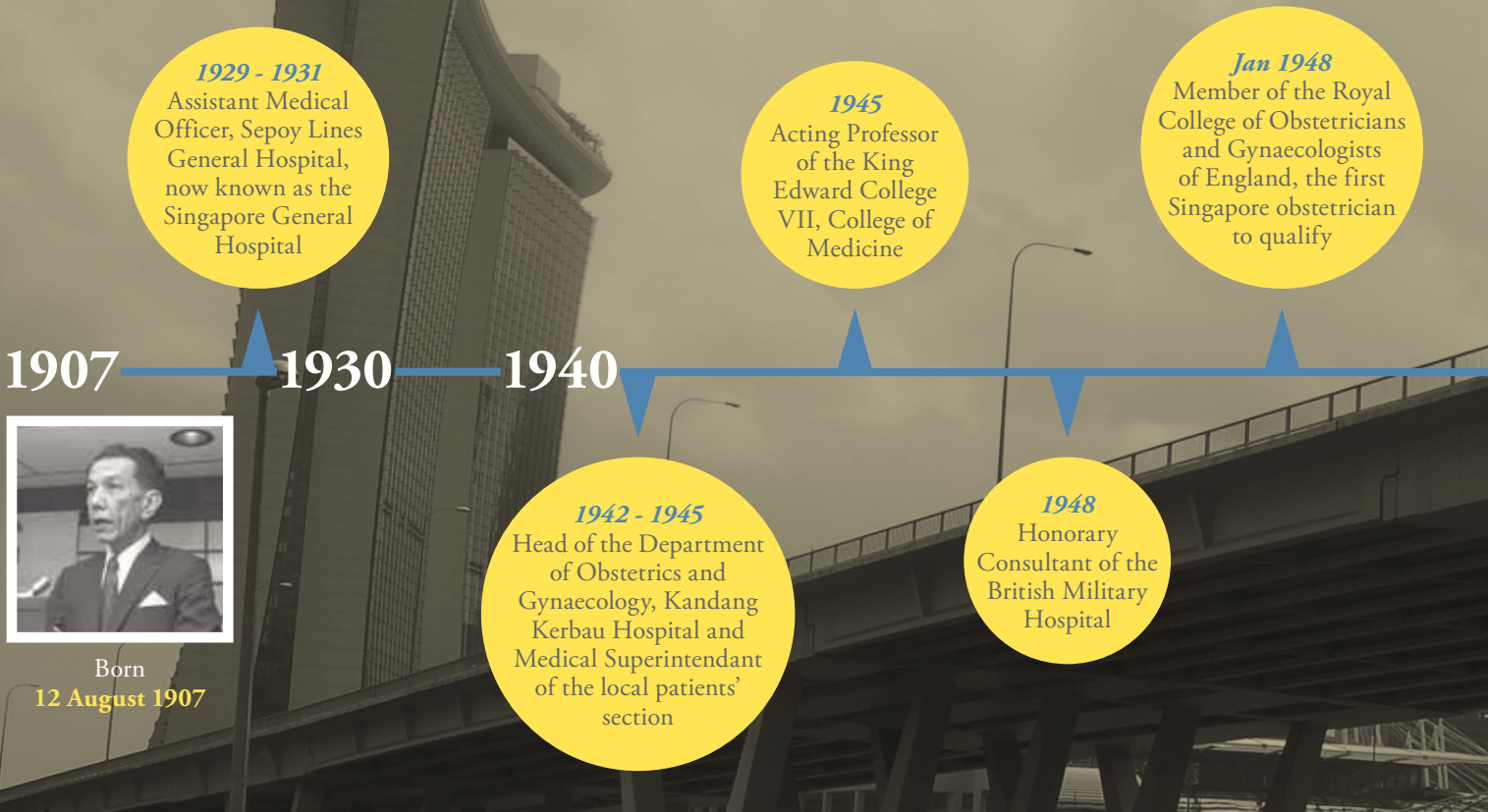
Modest origins

A Eurasian of British descent, President Sheares was born into a humble family in Singapore. His grandfather Henry was born in England, but settled in India, where Benjamin's father, Edwin, was born. Edwin moved to Penang, then Singapore, where he worked as a technical supervisor in the Public Works Department. Benjamin's mother Lilian was born in Singapore but was brought up in Sumatra. Money was tight as Edwin did not bring in a large salary and had five children to support.

The young Benjamin's ambitions to become a doctor were evident in his early years. As a six year-old, his favourite game was playing doctor, and it is recorded that he even persuaded his sister to swallow a coin as 'medicine' – an escapade that incurred the wrath of his mother!



BENJAMIN HENRY SHEARES: *Timeline*



The President's elder son, Dr Joseph Sheares, says: "There was no doubt that his ambition was to become a doctor, an almost impossible dream in those early colonial days for one from an impoverished family and where Asians were marginalised." The President had not only to overcome his personal economic barriers, but also to succeed in a British colonialist profession that discriminated against Asians.

In his early years, President Sheares was educated at the then co-ed Methodist Girls' School, St Andrew's School and Raffles Institution. His medical training was completed in King Edward VII College of Medicine Singapore, for which he won a scholarship from the council of the college.

A glittering medical career

In 1929, aged 21, he began his career at the Singapore General Hospital as an assistant medical officer and began an impressive ascent in his chosen field, becoming the first Singaporean and only assistant in the Obstetrics & Gynaecology Department. In 1937 he became responsible for all obstetric patients in Kandang Kerbau Hospital (KKH). Two years later, he was awarded the Queen's Fellowship, which would grant him a two-year postgraduate training in Britain.

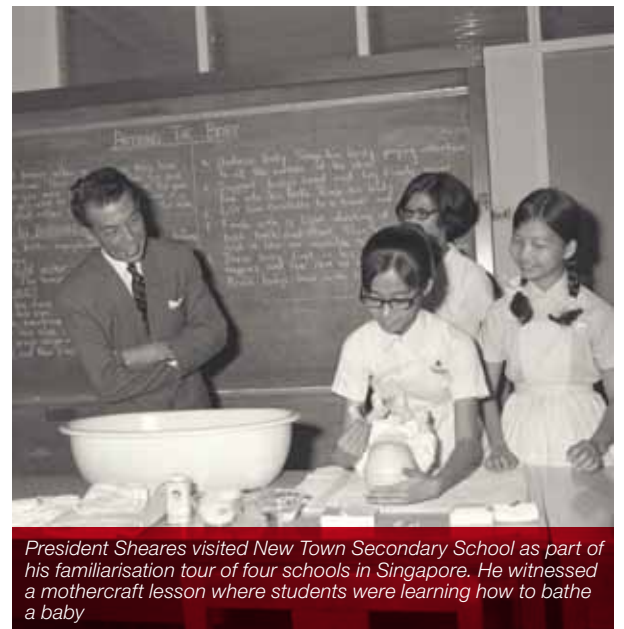
The Second World War brought a halt to his plans. In 1941, KKH suffered bombing from

the Japanese and temporarily became a general hospital for war casualties. During the Occupation, KKH became Chuo Byoin (General Hospital) and Japanese patients were treated alongside Singapore patients. The British doctors were sent to Changi Prison.

At this time, Dr Sheares worked on a relatively new surgical technique: the lower Caesarian section, which resulted in a lower mortality and morbidity rate in pregnant women than the upper Caesarian section.

During the Occupation he met his wife Yeo She Geok, a Chinese national who had come to Singapore to escape the Japanese in China. They had three children, Constance, Joseph and Edwin.

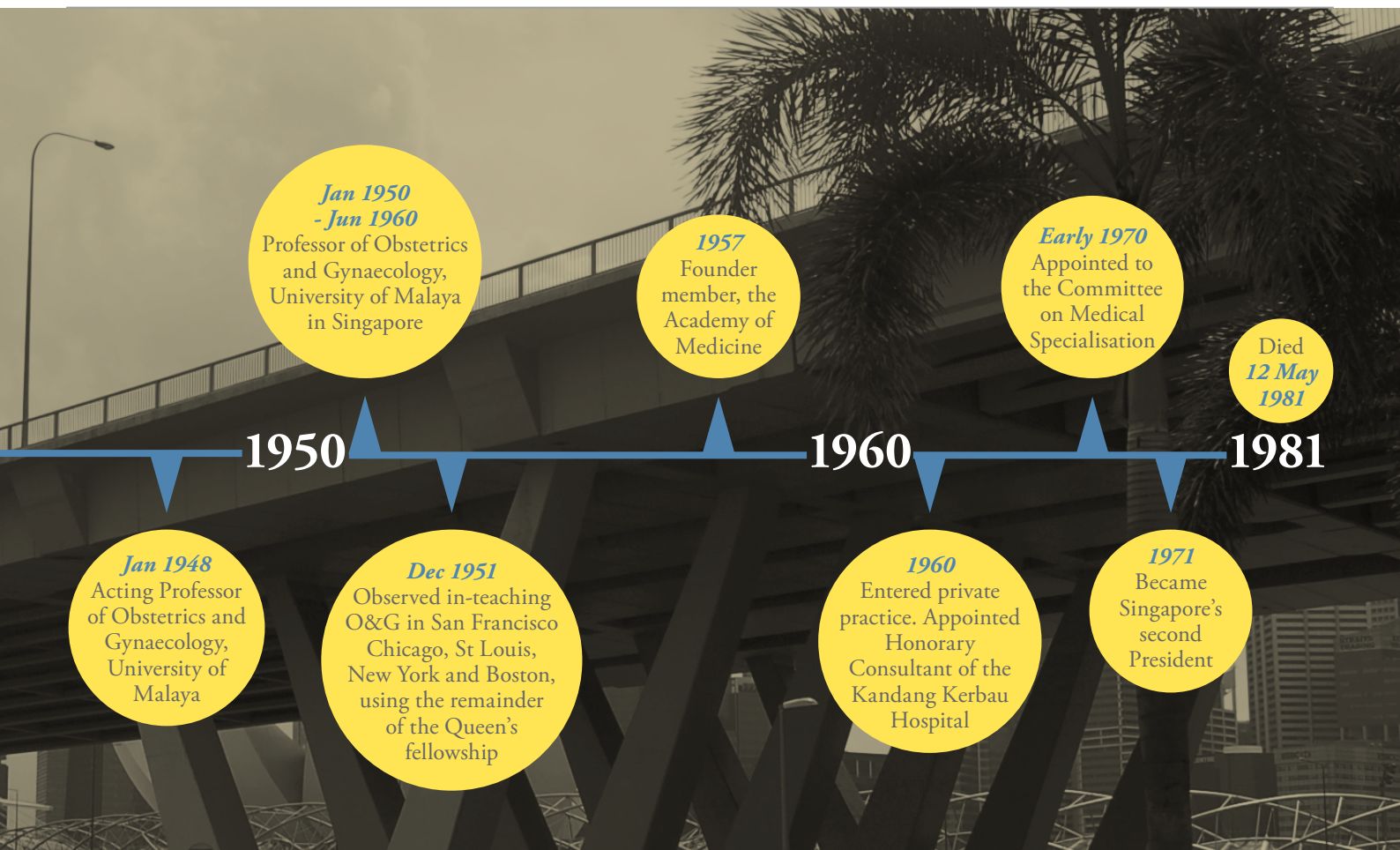
Dr Sheares was a pioneer in his field. He pressed for a minimum requirement of two years' training in a teaching hospital and a primary English education for midwives. Thanks to his proposed improvements in antenatal and postnatal outpatient care the mortality rate of mothers reduced from some 70 to 80 deaths per 10,000 deliveries in the



President Sheares visited New Town Secondary School as part of his familiarisation tour of four schools in Singapore. He witnessed a mothercraft lesson where students were learning how to bathe a baby

1930s, to 9.5 deaths per 10,000 deliveries by 1955. In 1951, he was appointed professor at the University of Malaya in Singapore.

A private man, Dr Sheares was shy and uncomfortable in crowds, but charming and entertaining among small groups of friends



Joseph comments: "Few would dispute he was the father of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Singapore."

Dr Sheares was also known for his legendary surgical precision, making what became his trademark small, neat incisions that left minimal scars. And his famous "golden fingers" often picked up signs during pelvic examinations that others missed.

In 1956, he received a Master of Surgery (MS) from the University of Malaya in Singapore as a result of a seminal thesis on the construction of a vagina in females with missing or malformed genitals.

He advocated voluntary sterilisation to parents with at least three children and the Voluntary Sterilisation Act was passed without opposition in 1969 despite criticism from some colleagues and religious communities. Until then, there had been no successful birth control programmes.

A man of honours

During his life, Dr Sheares earned numerous honours for his work, not only from Singapore but also from Indonesia and the Philippines, Malaysia, where was made a dato, and the UK, where was awarded the prestigious GCB (Knight Grand Cross), one of the country's highest honours.



Deputy leader of Australia's Labor opposition party Lance Barnard calls on President Sheares at the Istana. Mr Lance arrived in Singapore on a two-day visit

The family man

A private man, Dr Sheares was shy and uncomfortable in crowds, but charming and entertaining among small groups of friends.

His daughter Constance says: "He was kind and tolerant, had a sense of humour and time for everyone, high or low. Yes, he valued his privacy and lived in his own house during his tenure as President but he always made

himself available to those in genuine need and whom he could legitimately help. His humility, integrity and sense of duty have been attested by those who were closest to him – his colleagues and his students."

"He was a highly responsible father, deeply concerned about our physical as well as mental and moral well-being. Most of all, he was concerned for our education and

would invariably question us on our studies whenever we had a meal together – which was not always possible when he had to attend to emergencies at the hospital. His work occupied the bulk of his time but he would always make up for his weekday absences at the weekends when we would go out to lunch or dinner together. Those were indeed happy times for all of us, although there were times when he had to leave before finishing his meal to attend to a patient in an emergency.”

She adds: “When my brother Joseph and I were 17 we were sent to private boarding schools in the UK. Edwin, the youngest, went even earlier, aged 12. My father wanted to provide us with the best education, something that he had to struggle to find for himself. The cost of sending the three of us to school in the UK was quite beyond his means as professor at the University of Malaya in Singapore and

as head of KKH. He decided reluctantly to retire and go into private practice in 1961. In spite of his heavy schedule he would write to us at least once a month to ask for a report on our studies.”

Life at the top

Although initially surprised when Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew asked him to serve his country, Dr Sheares’ sense of duty overrode any doubts he might have had. His wife was uncertain that he would be at ease in a position that brought with it constant public scrutiny. She knew that he felt uncomfortable with crowds and in formal situations. Moreover, he had not been in public office before and had no experience in diplomacy.

Yet, a sense of loyalty and patriotism encouraged him to answer Mr Lee’s call. The then Prime Minister thought very highly of

him and was confident that he would make a good president.

After serving two terms, the Prime Minister called upon him to serve for a third term, but Dr Sheares was then aged 70 and felt he did not have the energy to continue for another four years. However, Mr Lee persuaded him to stay on and Dr Sheares took on a third term, and continued with the dedication the country had come to expect.

But in November 1980 he was found to have tumours in his lung. He went into a coma on 3 May 1981 and passed away on 12 May. He had served 10 years as President. At his state funeral on 15 May, 85,000 people attended to pay their respects.

On 12 June that year, Mr Lee gave a moving tribute to the quiet, private man who came to hold the nation’s highest public office. He recalled: “I used to call on him regularly, about once a month, to keep in touch. He received copies of all important papers and knew of Cabinet decisions. Whenever I referred to sensitive developments concerning our security or our economy, there was always immediate cognisance of the dangers that could unfold, and he would twinkle his eyes or give one of his quizzical looks.”

Mr Lee added that President Sheares was “conscientious by temperament and soft-spoken by habit. He applied himself to his duties as President and discharged them with distinction.”

All images courtesy of Singapore Press Holdings



It was an evening of fun and games on May Day for President Sheares (centre) and Mrs Sheares (right) as he opened the May Day celebrations at the Wonderland Amusement Park at Kallang. But there were tense moments as the President guided his nimble surgeon’s hands in a test-your-nerve game



President Sheares (centre) and Mrs Sheares on a familiarisation tour of the People’s Association



Benjamin Sheares Bridge

Opened in 1981, and named after the President, Benjamin Sheares Bridge is the longest bridge in Singapore, spanning 1.8 km, and the tallest, at 20 m. The bridge is part of the East Coast Parkway and was built at a cost of \$177 million.

FSS faces budget cuts

The recent economic crisis has put significant pressure on the EA's Family Support Services and the management fears it can no longer continue its current level of funding.

Francesca Eber, who chairs the FSS committee, says: "Expenditure in the last two years has been substantial compared to our annual income and we regret that we may not be able to continue the same level of expenditure in 2011. The FSS review team has started reviewing all its cases with a view of reducing the level of financial assistance, food vouchers and dry food rations."

"With the improvement of the Singapore's economy, the agencies from which we have been receiving assistance have discontinued some of their financial schemes."

Francesca adds: "We are continuing to negotiate with these agencies for continued assistance; the scope of FSS is widening and we are looking towards assisting the less privileged in our community to live healthier, meaningful lives."

For further clarification or query, please contact the FSS case work executive Jagannathan Ramakrishnan, tel: 6447 1578.

Hot topics

Zaf Coelho is emerging as an eloquent and persuasive public speaker, having won a runners-up place for his Table Topics speech at the annual area competition of the Toastmasters Club in Singapore on 19 March.

Two months earlier, Zaf had won the Table Topics prize for his impromptu speech on the subject 'It is better to burn out than rust' at the EA's annual International Speech & Table Topics club contest.

The EA Toastmasters Club is now two years old and Zaf represented the association at the Area D2 competition with Michelle Tessensohn (who won the International Speech prize at the EA Toastmasters contest with her oration on 'Discovering your visionary self').

Both Zaf and Michelle were competing against members of the Singapore Recreation Club, Singapore Management University, Cartusian and Vietnam Toastmasters Clubs.

At the event, EA member Crispin Rodrigues was also unanimously elected as Area D2 governor for the term 2011-2012 and will play a critical role in maintaining club quality in the area.



Michelle Tessensohn and Zaf Coelho

The time of their life

A group of under-privileged children enjoyed a magical performance of *Voyage de la Vie* (Journey of Life) at Resorts World Sentosa during the school holidays in March, thanks to a joint venture between the company and Central Singapore Community Development Council to invite children of families supported by the four self-help groups.

Nearly two dozen children were left spellbound by the show – a circus theatre, which charts the story of a boy's metaphoric journey to becoming an adult in an energetic performance of song, dance and athletic circus acts.



Youngster enjoy Voyage de la Vie



Paddle Power

Three Singaporean adventurers take a trip to Phuket – by kayak

When most of us were keeping ourselves away from the recent, wet monsoon, three Singapore athletes were heading straight into it.

Calvin Palyama, 37, a freelance photographer and noted kayak coach and Andrew Chng, also 37, an outdoor adventure director and mountaineer – who are both members of the EA Dragons, the association's dragonboat team – set off with Elsie Lim, a two-time SEA Games rowing medallist, for an epic paddle from Johor, Malaysia to Phuket, Thailand.

And as if that were not enough, they trucked their kayaks overland to Surat Thani on Thailand's east coast and paddled back home to Singapore, arriving to a heroes' welcome three weeks later at Changi Beach.

The trio believe that they are the first paddlers to have succeeded in navigating the entire Straits of Malacca.

The team, which called itself X-pedition 2 (X2 for short), left Singapore on 1 January for an adventure that took them through the treacherous Straits of Malacca and the southern reaches of the Andaman Sea. The self-supported, 3,200 kilometre expedition took 51 gruelling days – 30 days travelling north and another 21 back to Singapore.



"The north-east monsoon gave us everything it had, from 40-knot winds to swells up to 3.5 metres high"

A normal day for the team saw them paddling eight to 10 hours (without leaving the kayak), having lunch on the move, setting up camp once they landed on shore in the evening or night, cooking or scouring for food and showering with only 1.5 litres of water.

Calvin, the team navigator, said: "The north-east monsoon gave us everything it had, from 40-knot winds to swells up to 3.5 metres high. The longest paddling day was 16½ hours when we went through three changes of tide; and after covering more than 80 kilometres of the thick mangrove swamps that line the west coast of peninsula Malaysia, we navigated in total darkness to find a safe landing spot for the night. "It was an adventure – 24/7, 360 degrees!"

Join the crew!

New and novice paddlers are always welcome to join the EA Dragons at any time. "It's a cool way to exercise and build fitness, while having fun with a great bunch of zany guys and girls," say the team. It's open to anyone over 18yrs and the equipment is provided. "Just bring yourself, and we guarantee plenty of laughs and fellowship." The first training session is free. More details are available from captain Clifford Le Cain, tel: 9450 3076, e-mail: clifford@templar.com.sg



Tales of conquest, love and resilience

Author Joe Conceicao's books offer glimpses into the Kristang past

Joe Conceicao, former Singapore ambassador, former EA president and author, recently launched two books, *Love and War in Old Malacca* and *Sang Dol* at the ECH at a grand ceremony attended by President SR Nathan, Professor Tommy Koh and members of the Peranakan Association

His stories are not merely flights of fancy, but offer an insight into the beginnings of the Eurasian culture. At the launch, Joe offered his thoughts on life as an early Eurasian.

"I have been musing over what made me write *Love and War in Old Malacca*. I feel it is important for Eurasians to feel something in thinking over their Kristang forbears.

"When the Portuguese arrived in Malacca, they built a fortress to repel their foes in Aceh and the Johore Sultanate. But just outside these walls were people – Malay, Javanese and Sumatran – who were prepared to be friendly, after the initial 40 days of fighting were over.

"When the Portuguese arrived in Malacca, they built a fortress to repel their foes But just outside these walls were people – Malay, Javanese and Sumatran – who were prepared to be friendly"

"Life in the fort would have been miserable, but for the friendship and co-operation of the locals. They planted rice, fished and produced many useful things for themselves – and for the fort-dwellers."

"And thus a process of integration took place between those inside the fort and those outside. The result was the Kristang people. In the Malay language the Kristang were called Nasrani, from the word Nazarene. This became Serani. Both Serani and Kristang meant 'Christian'."

"I have often wondered who the first Eurasian was. I may have hit on the answer. In those



very early days, a trader-adventurer called Joao Eredia roamed the seas around the Spice Islands. He fell in love and eloped with a princess from the Moluccas Islands, whom he called Dona Elena. The couple had many children, including an outstanding son, Emanuel Godinho de Eredia."

"Emanuel Godinho studied at a Jesuit College in Malacca, and then in Goa and became a well-known geographer and cartographer. Some records, including Australian, say he was the first European to have glimpsed the north Australian coastline. If so, could he not be considered the first Eurasian to sight Australia?"



"Much of the Kristang history is one of stoic suffering. When the Dutch conquered Malacca, Kristang Catholics suffered from Calvinist (Dutch) persecution and had to worship in the jungle. Later a crucifix was found on a rubber estate, which had been converted from jungle, in Tanjong Malim. The Kristang built a chapel here, and each year thousands of visitors from Malaysia and Singapore and elsewhere make a pilgrimage on the feast of Santa Cruz (Holy Cross) to venerate the crucifix."

"Much of the Kristang history was one of stoic suffering. When the Dutch conquered Malacca, Kristang Catholics had to worship in the jungle"

"The Dutch persecution of the Kristang lasted a few decades, after which the settlers became more interested in the pretty Kristang ladies, and married them, leading to the many Dutch names in Kristang families. The integration of the Dutch into Kristang society became even firmer when the first Catholic Church in Malaya, St Peter's, was built on Malaccan land – donated by a Dutch merchant."

"A final thought: after the Dutch conquest of Malacca the new rulers sent some Kristang to work as slaves in Batavia. They were joined by other slaves from other parts of Asia, all speaking a Portuguese patois. Eventually, the Dutch freed the slaves. The freed men continued to stay in Batavia, speak Portuguese, and attend the 'Portuguese' church. They were described by a Sanskrit term borrowed by the Dutch: word mardhikker was badly pronounced by the Dutch as mardijker to mean 'freed slave'. This word later became the cry Merdeka!"

View from **the top**

Military man, lecturer, marketer, pilot, sailor, and now charity director, Lester Low, the EA's Director of Operations, is a man of many talents

Like many a young boy, Lester Low dreamed of learning to fly a plane. And while studying for his Diploma in Maritime Studies at Singapore Polytechnic in the 1980s, he was also spending time high up in the air taking flying lessons with the then Junior Flying Club at Seletar air base. Keen to try out new things, he later passed his powered pleasure craft driving licence (PPLC), which allows him to take up to seven passengers on a powerboat within Singapore water and port limits.

After graduating from the polytechnic, he took a degree in Business Administration followed by an MBA, majoring in International Marketing, at the University of Hull in the UK.

Military man

Lester began his career as a commissioned military officer with the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF), where he served for 11 years as a logistics officer in various squadrons and participated in many overseas detachments. "Looking back today, I feel it was one of my most enriching experiences," he says.

After his retirement from the RSAF, he turned to the private sector, putting his degree to use in a multinational company as its regional marketing manager of wine related products. After seven years, he joined a non-profit membership-based club as its club general manager, where he stayed for five years before joining The Eurasian Association in 2007.

Managing the EA office

Now, he heads the EA's secretariat, where he is responsible to the EA's president and management committee for all management-related matters concerning the association and where he oversees the work of the EA staff and the running of the ECH. He also represents the President and the MC in various external meetings and functions. It's a job that needs finely tuned administrative and diplomacy skills in equal measure.

Lester says: "I always find it a 'balancing act' being a connecting point between the members of the management committee,



Lester Low

While studying for his Diploma in Maritime Studies at Singapore Polytechnic, he was also spending time high up in the air taking flying lessons with the then Junior Flying Club

other members of the various sub-committees, external and government agencies, media and of course, the EA staff. But it's nice working with so many friendly volunteers and friends as I get along well with the very natural and fun-loving character of most Eurasians."

A co-ordinating role

"One of my jobs here is work with the various chairs of different sub-committees in planning and co-ordinating of events, programmes and projects to better serve the needs of the Eurasian community and I am grateful for their support over the years."

Sharing his knowledge

Lester presently also lectures various business modules at a private business school once a week on a weekday. He has never taken on more than this as he feels his work at the EA will always come first.

He has recently been appointed to the National Committee on Youth Guidance and Rehabilitation for a three-year term, for example, where he joins representatives from different government ministries, members of parliament, law enforcement agencies, the academic field and chiefs of the other self-help groups to determine appropriate measures to control and eliminate youth crime. The committee monitors these measures, which include training, networking, research, and conducting programmes targeted at at-risk youths.

The committee meets quarterly to deliberate on youth crime and youth at-risk issues, and Lester looks forward to contributing to the committee, bringing useful ideas back to EA.



Thanks for your help

Some three dozen members of the EA's volunteer force enjoyed tea at the ECH in March at the annual volunteer appreciation ceremony that recognises their work. They were formally thanked by President Bill Jansen and each received a certificate. Vice-President Benett Theseira, EA trustee Gerald Minjoot, and two representatives from SINDA also attended the event.



Snapshot of history

Singaporean Yolandar Danker is asking for help in identifying some people posing with her in an old family photograph

How often have we come across a fading group photograph at home and wondered about the identity of some of the people, who must have been important to us when the image was taken?

Yolandar Danker has been looking at a couple of childhood photographs and is asking help from readers who may be able to identify the subjects. The first picture was taken at the birthday party of Malcolm Neubronner, a family friend in Lavender Street in 1953 when Yolandar was four years old. The second was taken a year earlier at Telok Kurau. If you can help, please contact Rachel Chen at the EA, tel: 6447 1578 or e-mail rachel@eurasians.org



Yolandar Danker flanked by her parents

Dancing in the rain



The 8,000 strong Chingay Parade – billed as the largest street party in Asia – included an EA contingent of 40 participants.

The EA's group comprised students and teachers from Cedar Girls Secondary School, the International School of Singapore and two volunteers from the dance school at EA. They both danced on the go and also stopped to perform their flamenco-style routine to a delighted audience.

Even the rain didn't stop the show. The dancers simply donned a thin poncho over their colourful costumes.

More than three-quarters of the EA's troupe comprised foreign nationals, from as far

apart as China, Vietnam, Angola and the UK.

The Passing of the Lamp included a poignant moment when 87-year-old Joe Conceicao as the Master passed the Lamp to Julian Schurmann, the Disciple, signifying EA's belief that the present youth are the Eurasians' future leaders and keepers of its heritage.

Burton Westerhout secured an exhibition booth for the EA, Elizabeth Schurmann rounded up the ISS students and Julia Sheikh choreographed the dancing. It took her just five rehearsals to turn the amateurs into dancers who were watched by some 60 million viewers across Asia.



Chingay – the first steps

The festival of *chingay* – which is taken phonetically from the Hokkien expression meaning 'the art of costume and masquerade' – first appeared in South-east Asia, in Penang, in the 19th century.

entertained the crowds in what was essentially a religious celebration.

Chingay came to Singapore in 1973 as a secular festival and was championed by the then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. The firecrackers that had traditionally been used to see in the Lunar New Year had been banned the previous year on safety grounds and in their place Chingay became a major part of the season's festivities. Originally, performed by the Chinese community, it now includes performers not only from all sections of Singapore, but also from overseas.



It originally alluded to Chinese-style decorated miniature floats that were borne on the shoulders of performers during New Year processions in old China, while dancers, jugglers and magicians

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Ring in the new

The New Year's Eve Ball is not just the highlight of the EA's social calendar; the event also netted a cool \$10,400 for the association's coffers, thanks to generous donations by sponsors.

Some 300 members and friends arrived dressed to the nines at the Mandarin Orchard Hotel Grand Ballroom to enjoy the sumptuous buffet and the evening's festivities.

Guests enjoyed an exotic show by Julia's Dance Studio, and then kicked up their heels to the music of Gerard Danker and his band MSG and DJ Alan Marshall, spurred on by lively MC Jude Paul.

An array of prizes for lucky winners included holiday packages to Bali, Phuket and Bangkok, courtesy of Glenn de Souza and the Best Western Hotels Group.

Father Time (aka Paul Rodrigues) appeared on the stroke of midnight to represent the passing of 2010 – and time for new adventures in the next decade.

