

Swiss-Singapore ties at a new high

Switzerland and Singapore enjoy long standing broad-based bilateral relations and the visit of Singapore's new Deputy Prime Minister, Heng Swee Keat, to Switzerland in May this year soon after taking up his new position has further strengthened them, says Switzerland's Ambassador in Singapore, Fabrice Filliez, in an interview with *The Business Times* on the occasion of the Swiss National Day today. BY NARENDRA AGGARWAL

SWISS Ambassador Fabrice Filliez says: "We were delighted that Mr Heng Swee Keat was in Switzerland in May this year so soon after taking up his new office. The visit was another proof of our strong and long lasting Swiss-Singapore friendship and will further inspire our bilateral cooperation in many fields."

"Deputy Prime Minister Heng was the guest of honour at the St Gallen Symposium. The symposium, that celebrates its 50th anniversary next year, has a strong connection with Singapore."

"It is a unique event exclusively organised by students of the University of St Gallen. It is aimed at encouraging intellectual openness, integrative thinking and entrepreneurial spirit, while recognising the utmost importance of human capital."

"It was especially valuable that, being accompanied by government officials, Mr Heng visited Swiss actors in the field of business and education."

"I had the privilege to attend the symposium and interact with the high-level Singapore delegation. It was a great joy to see the deputy prime minister's energy and interest in the Swiss economy and his exchanges with the students at the St Gallen Symposium. That was an exemplary case for opportunities that can arise once decision makers from our two countries meet."

"The next high-level visit on the Swiss-Singapore agenda will be the participation of Ms Daniela Stoffel, our State Secretary for International Finance at the Federal Department of Finance, to this year's Fintech Festival in Singapore. Moreover, I may confirm that we are planning further high-level visits in the mid- and long term."

DPM Heng led a government and business delegation to Switzerland on a five-day working trip, during which he also spoke at the 49th St Gallen Symposium. The delegation engaged various research institutes and companies in Switzerland to study the Swiss system, which excels in productivity, R&D and industry development efforts."

Mr Heng, who is also Singapore's Finance Minister, in comments released to *The Business Times* for this supplement, says: "I had a fruitful visit to Switzerland earlier this year, where I attended the St Gallen Symposium as well as visited research institutes and companies."

"Singapore and Switzerland have much in common – we are both small states. We are both multilingual, multiracial and multicultural. We are also strongly focused on technology and innovation to drive our economies."

"Singapore and Switzerland can continue to learn from one another, and work together on mutual areas of interest, including productivity, innovation and the use of technology."

"On the joyous occasion of Switzerland's National Day, it is my wish that Singapore and Switzerland continue to deepen the partnerships and ties between our two countries."

Ambassador Filliez, who has been here for a year, says he feels privileged that relations between Singapore and Switzerland are doing so well."

"Our two countries cooperate on a wide range of issues, with lively exchanges not only on a governmental level but also between agencies and institutions, companies and individuals," he says.

"Given our similar outlook on the



Ambassador Filliez says: "We all are witnessing a heavily changing environment worldwide. Major disruptions such as digital transformation, have greatly altered the global landscape. Singapore and Switzerland have much to gain from exchanging views and joining forces." BT PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

world as efficient and open economies, we are natural partners. This logic also applies as we seek to forge deeper ties in the future."

"We all are witnessing a heavily changing environment worldwide. Major disruptions such as digital transformation, have greatly altered the global landscape."

"Singapore and Switzerland have much to gain from exchanging views and joining forces in meeting these challenges."

Much has happened in the development of bilateral relations since Ambassador Filliez's last interview with *The Business Times* soon after arriving in Singapore last year. Highlighting some of such key elements, he says:

"We look after bilateral relations

and constantly care for nurturing the existing cooperation and extending it to new fields of mutual interest."

"In this sense, we enabled, among other things, a series of fruitful exchanges on specific issues such as Singapore's Asean Chairmanship, global governance, opportunities and challenges surrounding the Belt and Road Initiative, our free trade agreement, education and vocational training, cyber security, fintech and smart cities."

In June 2018, shortly after Ambassador Filliez's arrival, Federal Councillor Guy Parmelin attended the 17th IISS Shangri-La Dialogue. There were also the visits of four State Secretaries to Singapore: Ms Pascale Baeriswyl for the Asean Foreign Affairs meeting; Ms

Marie-Gabrielle Ineichen for bilateral discussions and Business China Roundtable on BRI; Mr Jörg Gasser for the Fintech Festival; and Mr Mauro Dell'Ambrgio for various meetings on education, science and innovation."

Other prominent Swiss visitors to Singapore have been the President of ETH Zurich for the World Education Summit; the President of EPF Lausanne, the Director General of the Swiss Federal Customs Administration; the Mayor of Montreux for the

World City Summit; as well as a delegation that attended the 1st Singapore Cyber week."

"At the same time, we could welcome important high level visits to Switzerland for the World Economic Forum led by then-Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, accompanied by Minister Heng Swee Keat and Minister S Iswaran."

"In early May, Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat was again in Switzerland for the first time in his new capacity."

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New growth areas for Switzerland and Singapore

Swiss Ambassador Fabrice Filliez highlights many new opportunities for mutual benefit.
BY NARENDRA AGGARWAL

The Business Times: In your view, what are some of the new areas that Swiss and Singapore businesses can tap on with each other's help to grow further?

Ambassador Fabrice Filliez: The world economy is undergoing a major shift in dynamics, and technology is at the forefront of this change. With both countries' excellent standing and expertise in the verticals markets such as fintech, artificial intelligence (AI), medtech, biotech and urban solutions, companies can and should find areas to collaborate and to scale. These are definitely the sectors where Switzerland and Singapore have common interests.

Geographically, both Switzerland and Singapore share being in the heart of their continents. South-east Asia is an exciting region with a vibrant middle class appeal. Their purchasing power is growing and with it, the desire for more specialised consumer and lifestyle products and services. This environment welcomes Swiss companies to leverage on Singapore's strength as a leading trading hub and to explore the use of e-commerce as a tool to reach out to potential customers.

At the same time, Singapore companies should count on Switzerland's pro-business policies, highly skilled workforce and excellent connectivity as a smooth gateway to Europe's markets.

BT: Switzerland is focusing on fintech and participated in the Singapore Fintech festival last November – how can the two countries collaborate to reap advantages for mutual benefit?

Ambassador Filliez: Singapore and Switzerland are two important global

financial hubs, flirting with top positions in various international rankings. No doubt, both of them can efficiently complement each other and get stronger together, by stimulating excellence and efficiency on a regional and global scale.

According to a recent study by the Institute for Financial Services Zug (IFZ) at the Lucerne University of Applied Science, both our countries distinguish themselves as forerunners with top spots in the Ranking of the Global Fintech Hubs 2018.

As the fintech sandbox is evolving constantly, I am pleased to note the robust collaborations at all levels of the ecosystem, which I see as one of the most important factors for the benefit of our states. For example, Swiss F10 Fintech accelerator (Zurich) will hold in Singapore this September the 2nd edition of its Fintech Hackaton.

Our financial authorities have regular consultative dialogues. Our regulators, the MAS and the FINMA signed a Memorandum of understanding (MoU) in 2016 that commits to speed up the time-to-market for new and innovative fintech solutions.

The Fintech festival is a great platform for exchange. It has drawn a strong interest from Swiss fintech companies. The development of the Swiss Pavilion over the last three years is impressive. And this year, we are confident of breaking new grounds with the number of companies represented and the spectrum of solutions that will be on offer. State Secretary for International Affairs, Ms Daniela Stoffel, will be joining us for this occasion.

BT: As a leading global financial centre, can your country help to promote cyber security for banks in

Singapore and the region?

Ambassador Filliez: Cyber security is one of the central topics in Switzerland. That's why the Swiss Federal Council published in 2018 a corresponding National Strategy. It follows a three-pronged approach for the protection of Switzerland against cyber risks. Broadly, it aims to early identify threats in the cyber field, to improve resilience of critical infrastructure and to effectively reduce cyber risks, especially cyber crime and cyber sabotage.

In order to succeed with our strategy we naturally need partners from the private sector. Fortunately, we have a very stimulating ecosystem for new innovative firms and thus already house some of the indisputable industry leaders.

As an example, NetGuardians, a Swiss fintech company, has inaugurated its new Asia Pacific Headquarters in Singapore in February 2018 to boost its capacity in bringing smart fraud preventing AI solutions to more financial institutions across the region. Also Swiss FTS (Forensic Technology Solutions), one of the leading corporate investigations firms in Switzerland in IT Forensics and eDiscovery, opened an office in Singapore last year.

So yes, we can and we do already.

BT: The Embassy of Switzerland organised a Swiss Week this year. What was its purpose and how did it go?

Ambassador Filliez: The Embassy presented a Swiss Week in April this year. The purpose was to showcase Switzerland as an open, innovative and contemporary country and to enhance our visibility in Singapore through a series of diverse actions.

This Swiss Week – a week-long festival featuring design, architecture, culinary experiences and link with nature – was quite a success, as more than 30,000 visited the various activities that centered on Swiss excellence in the above areas.



Ambassador Filliez says more than 400 Swiss companies in Singapore employ over 26,000 people here.
BT PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

The activities ranged from exhibitions of contemporary photography by Cortis and Sonderegger and "ECAL Design for Luxury and Craftsmanship" at the National Design Centre to a master class at SUTD by the Swiss renowned contemporary architect Mario Botta, as well as some Swiss chocolate making sessions and sewing workshop for guests of all ages.

There was also the Swiss Singapore friendship hike in the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve valuably supported by Senior Minister of State Sim Ann. We were happy how the week turned out. For the many visitors it was an immersion into Swiss culture.

BT: Over 400 Swiss companies are already based in Singapore. What is attracting a new wave of Swiss SMEs here and what businesses are they in?

Ambassador Filliez: Switzerland has a strong economic presence in Singapore already. More than 400 Swiss companies employ over 26,000 people here. Not surprising that many of these firms have made Singapore their regional hub for South-east Asia.

At the embassy we have our finger on the pulse of new developments

thanks to our Swiss Business Hub for the Asean region. The hub supports Swiss SMEs' plans to venture into Singapore and is thus always in the know. What we see is that the new wave of Swiss SMEs is definitely driven by the digital economy. In general the make-up of the firms mirrors the structure of the Swiss economy which is an extremely vibrant and a multi-track business community.

To illustrate the diversity of Swiss companies in Singapore, I can mention some of the new openings in the last 12 months.

In October 2018, ABB inaugurated its Customer Innovation Center showing how it is pioneering digitalisation and driving unprecedented revolutionary change in the energy and industry space in the region. Givaudan, the global leader in the creation of flavours and fragrances, opened in February this year its first fragrance encapsulation centre in Singapore for the Asia Pacific market. In March, V-Zug, Swiss high quality and innovative household appliances company, opened here its state-of-the-art Zugorama along with a concept restaurant V-Dining. Same month, Omya, a world leader in supplying industrial minerals, chose the city-state to locate its new technological centre.

Other sectors include Swiss design furniture company, Vitra, with a recent flagship store in Singapore; premium Swiss chocolate maker Läderach with its new boutique at Jewel Changi Airport; Swiss-made herbal creams and essential oils at Just's new store; and Bernina, the world's leading manufacturer of sewing machines, with the official opening of a showroom at Funan Mall on 1 August 2019.

BT: How will Switzerland's EHL opening of its first overseas campus in Singapore help in the growth of bilateral relations?

Ambassador Filliez: The EHL project in Singapore will be the first campus of a Swiss university overseas ever. This shows how strategically important this beautiful island is for Swiss institutions in their internationalisation. Beyond the institutional ties, the EHL campus will mean hundreds of additional bachelor's students coming to Singapore, as well as staff and a faculty to develop pro-

grammes in hospitality. They will also provide executive and continued education tracks. Finally, the school will be able to showcase here the Swiss values of education and to act as a bridge between our two countries.

BT: Your Defence Minister regularly attends the Shangri-La Dialogue – how does Switzerland see its importance?

Ambassador Filliez: The annual Shangri-La Dialogue is one of the major events for our Embassy every year. It represents for us a unique opportunity to get together with other states to discuss and assess security trends regionally and globally. It provides a necessary platform for our defence representatives to hold formal and informal talks, to test ideas and to sharpen their understanding on how to advance security policies. The forum's relevance is clearly on the rise at a moment when new threats, notably in the cyber domain, are placing themselves high on the agenda. In the broader context, I am glad to inform that a post of Defence Attaché has been established at the Swiss Embassy in Singapore as of August 2019 and will handle defence, security and military relations.

BT: Are there any new bilateral agreements coming into force this year?

Ambassador Filliez: Yes, indeed. The bilateral agreement on the introduction of the automatic exchange of financial account information (AEOI) between Singapore and Switzerland enters into force on 1 August 2019.

Signed in July 2017, this instrument was provisionally applied pending the completion of the parliamentary approval procedures. The Swiss Parliament approved the agreement in the 2018 winter session. After the expiry of the referendum deadlines in spring 2019, the required notifications were exchanged between the parties in July 2019.

Based on this agreement, Switzerland and Singapore will exchange in September 2019, on a reciprocal basis, information on financial accounts collected in 2018. This agreement forms part of the global implementation of the internationally agreed Common Reporting Standard, endorsed by the OECD and the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes.

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Top Swiss university forges strong links with Singapore

ETH Zurich is ranked No 6 globally. Its centre here is its only research institute outside Switzerland. BY NARENDRA AGGARWAL

SWITZERLAND'S top university, which has a presence here in Singapore since 2010, has been named the sixth best university in the world in the recently released latest edition of the closely watched QS World University Rankings.

This is the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, or ETH Zurich's best performance in a global university ranking. Moving up from 7th position in the previous prestigious ranking, it is once again the top ranked university outside the English-speaking world and in continental Europe. The university can count over 20 Nobel Prize laureates as alumni, including Albert Einstein.

The Swiss institute established the Singapore-ETH Centre (SEC) here in 2010. The centre was set up at the invitation of Singapore's National Research Foundation to be a part of its Campus for Research Excellence and Technological Enterprise (CREATE), which is an international research campus and innovation hub.

As ETH Zurich's only research centre outside of Switzerland, the centre has strengthened the research capacity of ETH Zurich to develop sustainable solutions to global challenges, particularly in the context of the rapidly urbanising Asian region.

ETH Zurich president Joel Mesot says he sees three main reasons for the continued success of his institute.

First is having excellent students and faculty. "Students at ETH Zurich have to achieve a lot with a strong willingness to persevere. Our students develop critical thinking skills based on the fundamentals of mathematics and physics, which serve them well beyond their degrees. We know this because graduates of our university are in great demand in the job market and often reach positions of great responsibility," he says in an interview with *The Business Times*.

Second is intellectual freedom and autonomy. High-quality research can only be achieved in an environment with free competition of ideas and solutions, unhindered by external

control and pressure, which are counterproductive. Research breakthroughs often occur at the margins of the disciplines, where they are not expected. Another condition that goes hand in hand is the unhindered access to the global talent pool, he adds.

The third prerequisite is strong support and secured funding. For more than 160 years, the Swiss parliament, government and society have been ensuring that ETH Zurich can concentrate on teaching and research of the highest quality and on the transfer of knowledge to society.

ETH Zurich has been actively involved in promoting and fostering scientific cooperation with key institutions in the Asia Pacific region as the leading house for the Swiss Science and Technology Programme with Asia since 2008.

"Setting up the Singapore-ETH Centre in 2010 has helped us to further broaden and strengthen our network in the Asian region," says Gerhard Schmitt, founding director of the Singapore-ETH Centre.

"The Asia-Pacific region is among the most dynamic regions of the world, with megacities like Shenzhen, Shanghai and Jakarta requiring innovative solutions to keep pace with their growth.

"Our presence in Singapore, therefore, also provides our students with a unique opportunity to be close to where rapid urbanisation is unfolding and where research plays an important role in informing and shaping more sustainable development and more resilient cities."

Professor Dr Schmitt says: "Bringing together researchers from diverse disciplines, the centre provides a multidisciplinary, multicultural and collaborative environment for research and innovation.

"Our first research programme, the Future Cities Laboratory, combines science and design to shape a sustainable urban future with an Asian perspective. This is followed by the Future Resilient Systems programme, aimed at making infrastruc-

ture systems more resilient to ensure the reliable delivery of energy, transport, water, finance, and other critical services."

Researchers at the centre actively collaborate with universities and research institutes, and engage with industry and government agencies to translate knowledge to practical solutions for real world problems.

As part of the CREATE programme, the centre also benefits from the opportunities to collaborate with centres established by Singapore and leading international universities. These include the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Shanghai Jiaotong University, Technical University of Munich, UC Berkeley, University of Cambridge, University of Illinois, and the French National Centre for Scientific Research.

Currently, SEC is looking at conducting research in the field of digital health.

"SEC is working on a research proposal on future health technologies. We feel that research in this area is timely as Singapore is actively looking at shaping the future of healthcare in the country. It aims to address healthcare challenges of the urban and ageing population by developing health technologies geared towards a people-centric healthcare model," says Prof Schmitt.

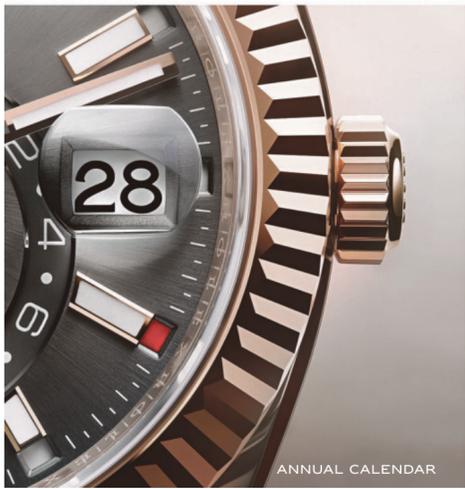
"The high level of digitalisation and digital literacy in Singapore makes it viable to bring the screening, monitoring, diagnosis and intervention of diseases outside of hospitals, and closer to patients through smart mobile digital health technologies.

"The research seeks to develop wearable sensors, wearable robotics, intelligent diagnostics and other health technologies to prevent falls and fractures, reduce diabetes and obesity, and rehabilitate stroke patients.

"To ensure that the new health technologies are meaningful for patients and can be integrated into the Singaporean healthcare system, we will work closely with local stakeholder groups and healthcare providers to test these technologies in proof-of-concept studies and ultimately in clinical trials."



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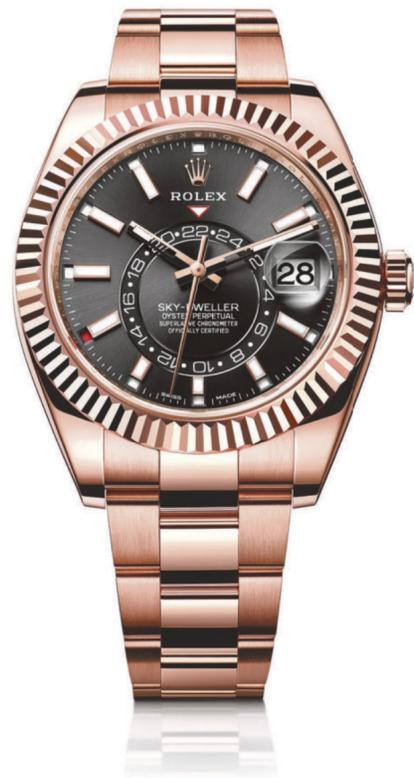


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St Gallen holds the key to freshest ideas for the hottest issues in the world

While Davos plays host to an annual gathering of global bigwigs, St Gallen is where the VIPs chew over ideas with some of the brightest young minds in the world. **BY NARENDRA AGGARWAL**

WHILE the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos is the most prestigious gathering of top global thinkers, political leaders and businessmen, Switzerland is host to another unique annual gathering that promotes inter-generational conversations on key current issues with participants from around the world.

What is special about the St Gallen Symposium is that it is a student-driven initiative for inter-generational debates on key current global economic, political and social developments. The student-run annual meeting takes place annually in May at Switzerland's University of St Gallen, one of Europe's leading business universities.

"The Symposium is important because it enables a dialogue over three generations by bringing together key decision makers, thought leaders, and brilliant young minds. In 2020, the St Gallen Symposium will celebrate its 50th anniversary," says Singapore-based businessman Alexander C Melchers, a graduate of the University of St Gallen who has been associated with the event since 1992.

"The St Gallen Symposium is a not-for-profit organisation and it is organised and run by students. This makes this event different from all other similar management symposia, most notably the World Economic Forum held in Davos," he says in an interview with *The Business Times*.

"Recently, a prominent Singaporean told me: 'I must go to Davos, but I want to go to St Gallen'."

Mr Melchers is general manager of the C.Melchers Group of Companies in Singapore. C.Melchers GmbH & Co. is a diversified trading, development and services company established in 1806. It is headquartered in Bremen, Germany, and has offices across Asia.

When Mr Melchers was studying at the University of St Gallen, he was a member and head of the organising committee of the 22nd and the 23rd St Gallen Symposiums in 1992 and 1993. He now heads the St Gallen alumni group in Singapore. There are around 200 alumni in Singapore. For the past 20 years, he has been advising the symposium and its foundation on an honorary basis.

Singapore has had a strong rela-

tionship with the event over the past 20 years. Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Kiat was there this year, making it his first overseas trip after taking up the new post. He spoke on preparing citizens for future challenges, as well as Asia's growth and its implications.

Mr Melchers says the event's long relationship with Singapore rests on three pillars. "Student participation, or 'Leaders of Tomorrow'; business participants and financial support from the business community; and faculty presence by outstanding Singaporean leaders and representatives of the Government."

This relationship was built with the strong support of the National Youth Achievement Award Council and its executive director, James Soh, says Mr Melchers. Since 2000, almost 200 students from Singapore have qualified – through a highly competitive essay competition – to be invited for an all-expenses-paid trip to attend the St Gallen Symposium.

Over 100 Singaporean business leaders have participated and joined the various delegations. Many Singapore based companies are "partners" and "benefactors" of the symposium. These contributions allow the symposium to invite the leaders of tomorrow, says Mr Melchers.

"The first Singapore Minister to represent Singapore at the St Gallen Symposium was Teo Chee Hean in 2000; then Mah Bow Tan gave the Singapore record during SARS in 2003. This was followed by two significant presentations by Minister of Finance Tharman Shanmugaratnam. One of them was in the BBC Hardtalk format and had over 700,000 views online. Following him, the 4G leaders, Ong Ye Kung, Lawrence Wong, Chan Chun Sing and Heng Swee Keat represented Singapore."

During the symposium the students have the opportunity to provide their views and the finalists are asked to defend their innovative and creative ideas in front of a large audience.

"Furthermore, the students benefit from the inspiring atmosphere and from becoming part of the global community of outstanding leaders.

"One of the most exciting events for students from Singapore is the Singapore gathering. It is the opportunity for them to build up their net-



Singapore DPM Heng Swee Keat attended this year's event and spoke on preparing citizens for future challenges, as well as Asia's growth and its implications. With him is symposium chairman Dominic Barton. PHOTO: MINISTRY OF FINANCE

"The symposium also acts as a platform for Singapore's young leaders to interact and connect with today's political and business leaders to gain their insights and to discuss global issues at large and find solutions together."

James Soh, executive director, National Youth Achievement Award Council

work and to talk to government and business representatives

"Last but not least, participating students will spend a week in Switzerland free of charge. After the event, the alumni regularly connect and meet in Singapore to continue to build on the strong idea of St Gallen, which is dialogue and liberalism."

About five years ago, Mr Soh of the NYAAC initiated the St Gallen Singapore Forum, which is a dialogue session held typically in January and leading up to the Symposium topic. This year Temasek Holdings CEO Ho Ching spoke on the topic: Capital for Purpose.

The NYAAC was launched in 1992 for youths to develop into well-rounded individuals and realise their potential through three key domains built on: developing personal qualities, learning new skills and serving the community. This is to empower youth to take action, and create meaningful change within their community and the world, says Mr Soh.

"The symposium also acts as a platform for Singapore's young leaders to

interact and connect with today's political and business leaders to gain their insights and to discuss global issues at large and find solutions together.

"Young leaders invited to the symposium also forms part of our NYAAC leadership capacity training programme for our younger generation, to provide exposure to the highly interconnected and globalised world.

"Each May, over 250 outstanding university students from around the world selected through this process attend this programme which enables our students to interact with their counterparts from all over the world."

Mr Soh says past speakers include Christine Lagarde, then Managing Director, International Monetary Fund; and Tony Tan Keng Yam, then President of Singapore.

"What impressed the Singapore leaders is that the entire event is completely run by students from the University of St Gallen. The students selected for the organising committee take a year off from their studies to work on the symposium," says Mr Soh.

"Dialogues like these, broaden the horizons for our youths and is a good platform to expose them to the varied approaches towards solving problems. Youths get the opportunity to make new friends from all walks of life and various backgrounds, enriching their experience at the symposium, and networking with political and business leaders, learning from everyone. We hope our students return to Singapore with fresh insights and experiences to share with a wider audience."

The St Gallen Symposium started in 1969, when five students from the university saw the need to bring discussions about the future from the street to an organised setting.

"This was the beginning of the St Gallen Symposium which was founded as a response to the international student unrests of 1968," says Mr Melchers.

"Since then, the Symposium has been organised by the International Students' Committee, a student initiative at the university. During the past years we welcomed more than 1,000 participants each year."

Building across East and West

Swiss architecture outfit makes its mark on Singapore landscape. **BY NARENDRA AGGARWAL**

NOT known to many people in Singapore, a boutique agency founded by two Swiss architects has been successfully working on public housing projects here, combining the best of Western and Eastern knowledge in the field.

The expansion of Geneva-based architectural firm group8 to Singapore got off to a great start when its Asian offshoot won the international competition for Punggol Waterway Terraces in 2009.

Over the next six years it was responsible for planning and designing Punggol Waterway Terraces I & II, which is a HDB large-scale social housing complex.

The firm's work in Singapore includes GreenRidges, another large-scale HDB complex from 2013-19, and The Alps Residences, a private apartment block which is under construction.

Mr Manuel Der Hagopian, Singapore-based managing director and co-founder of G8A Architecture & Urban Planning, says: "Punggol Waterway Terraces is a 2,000-unit project completed in 2015, which proposes a new interpretation of what can be the identity of public housing evolving from a built form to a landscape identity.

"We have extended this reflection to the private residence sector with The Alps Residences proposing an open courtyard to create an Alpine oasis for Singapore."

Group8 was born in the year 2000 when Mr Der Hagopian and Grégoire Du Pasquier, both Swiss architectural graduates, joined six friends in Geneva to form it.

"It was more of an architectural collective than a formal corporate practice. We shared ideas, engaged in debate, contributed to each other's projects. The main focus of this working group was to channel the intensity of the creative processes and enhance the quality of built projects in the Geneva region."

In 2007, he and Mr Du Pasquier branched off from Geneva and opened a studio in Hanoi under the name group8asia, retaining their collaborative role in the Geneva partnership. In 2009, they won the international competition for Punggol Waterway Terraces.

Now known as G8A, the thriving offshoot from the original practice, became an independent partnership in 2014. Headed by Mr Der Hagopian, Mr Du Pasquier and four international directors, G8A has offices in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Singapore, and Geneva.

The boutique agency now has a team of more than 50 people of nine nationalities, contributing to the overall East-West transfer of knowledge within the four locations.

"We see Singapore as a cultural halfway house between Switzerland and Vietnam. It is often referred to as a 'Tropical Switzerland'. But Singapore's heat is merciless, and the condi-



The expansion of Geneva-based architectural firm group8 to Singapore got off to a great start when its Asian offshoot won the international competition for Punggol Waterway Terraces in 2009. PHOTO: G8A

tions demand an architecture with a diametrically dissimilar structural approach than that required for a cold climate," says Mr Der Hagopian.

"Both culturally and architecturally, in our research of cohesion between East and West, we see Singapore as a very important location for G8A. There is also something quite fascinating about this utopian construct that Singapore's creation and built environment embellishes, a vision that is incredibly different from Switzerland or Vietnam.

"We have positioned ourselves as an 'in-between', as a link with satellite posts in each different city. The creative and production team is based in Hanoi, where the environment is less regulated and full of energy, which is better for creativity.

"Nevertheless we believe that,

even if we have been living and working in these three environments for more than 10 years, we still have faith in our local partners who help the implementation phase of each project.

"We have four to five privileged partners in each of the three countries that we regularly collaborate with. They complement our work with their local knowledge. And nothing can replace homegrown understanding."

Looking ahead, he thinks that the future of architecture and the world can no longer be asymmetric. "The understanding of East and West is a must in order to propose the built environment of tomorrow. G8A has embraced this as statement and throughout all projects, explorations, exhibitions – to reveal and enhance the awareness of the new world that we are living in."

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The Swiss Re Institute estimates that Asia – led by China – will account for around 42% of global insurance premiums in 2029, up from 32% currently. This market is valued at over USD 5 trillion currently. In addition, China remains poised to overtake the United States as the world’s largest insurance market by the mid-2030s, the institute estimates.

Swiss Re’s commitment to Asia puts it in a good spot to grow as Asia does.

“Asia is incredibly important to Swiss Re. Since I left the region, almost exactly nine years ago, the growth has been tremendous, particularly in our Life & Health Reinsurance business,” said Mr. Higginbotham, whose previous Asia-Pacific stints saw him based in Tokyo and Sydney.

“Many Asian markets are growing much faster than mature markets in other parts of the world. Swiss Re has been and wants to continue to be a part of this growth and to see our businesses across Asia flourish and increase in its importance and weight to the wider Swiss Re Group.”

Swiss Re is one of the world’s largest reinsurers and other insurance-based forms of risk transfer. Its innovation and partnerships with global insurance companies has been frequently cited as market-leading and making a difference to societal resilience, especially in emerging Asia.

“For Swiss Re, we’ve been in Asia for many decades, dating back to 1913 and have over 2 000 people in Asia. In this sense, I think that understanding that the markets are different and adapting to them appropriately, coupled with bringing the knowledge and expertise that we have, as well as a very strong balance sheet, are the three key things that I would say helps us be a good business partner for our clients in the region.”

The company recently structured the first catastrophe bond – at USD 100 million – under Singapore’s new insurance-based securities framework, marking a new chapter in its Asia relationship. Swiss Re reported net income of USD 429 million for the first quarter of 2019. Net premiums earned increased by 5.5% to USD 8.8 billion for the same period. In 2018, gross premiums written for the Group increased by 4.7% to USD 36.4 billion, primarily driven by premium growth across the life and health businesses.

Growth in the near-term will be led by Asia, the company has said.

But Mr. Higginbotham cautioned that its not just about growth.

“We want to write the right business at an appropriate margin... we need to make sure that the quality of what we put on the books is good too,” he said.

Swiss companies, Mr. Higginbotham said, have “a long-term mindset and commitment plus a reputation for high quality.”

The Swiss-Singapore relationship is unique. Swiss Re Asia chairman Lim Siong Guan has said there are striking similarities between the two countries – their relatively small size, openness to doing business, global workforce, efficient governments with low corruption rates, among others.

Mr. Higginbotham adds: “There’s a Swiss Re business culture that’s for sure. We’re quite a technical organisation with a huge amount of knowledge embedded within the professionals that work for us around the world.”

And one of his goals: to grow Swiss Re’s Asia talent.

“We have great people in our team already and naturally as we grow, we will need to find more talented individuals and provide exciting careers and development opportunities for them.”

Russell Higginbotham is no stranger to Asia. But he returns to a region that is vastly different from the one he left behind.

Innovation is everywhere. Megacities pockmark the Asia map. The region has a burgeoning middle class, and at the same time, is more susceptible to natural catastrophes. Asia’s citizens too are living longer, and with increasing affluence, are looking to protect themselves and their assets like at no other time in history.

“I left the region some nine years ago, and while parts of my roles have always kept me in touch and involved, the one thing I reminded myself about when I took on my new role, was that a lot has changed,” said Mr. Higginbotham, named Swiss Re’s Asia CEO and Regional President in July this year. “While I have some history in the region, I should not come in with any fixed views at all.”

The 52-year old is now based in Singapore, where Swiss Re had decided to set up its Asian entity – with its own regional board of directors that he will report to. Swiss Re has been in

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World's top hotel school to set up first overseas campus in Singapore

Partnerships with local industry experts will help complement lessons with practical applications for the Asia-Pacific. **BY NARENDRA AGGARWAL**

SWITZERLAND'S EHL, the famous Lausanne-based hotel school – ranked the world's best hospitality and leisure management university – has just got Singapore's approval to set up its first overseas campus here.

Founded in 1893, the Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL) has 25,000 graduate alumni worldwide.

It was ranked at the top position in the 2019 QS World University ranking for Hospitality & Leisure Management Universities, after celebrating its 125th anniversary and earning the extremely-sought-after Michelin star for its educational restaurant on campus.

EHL says it has got the EduTrust certification needed by private education institutions to offer its Bachelor of Science in International Hospitality Management course in Singapore. The first cohort of students is expected to start in Singapore in 2021.

Dr Juan F Perellon, chief risk and compliance officer, EHL Group, and member of the board of directors of EHL Campus (Singapore), says: "The EduTrust certification scheme sets very high standards and is usually only granted after several years of operation in Singapore. Receiving the certification prior to the campus opening is a great demonstration of confidence in the quality and excellence of our institution."

André Witschi, chairman of the EHL Group board of governors, says: "We are grateful for the Singaporean authorities' go-ahead in this exciting project and we are very much looking forward to establishing a strong international foothold in one of the world's most dynamic and competitive countries."

"Receiving this certification is a

great milestone which allows us to move forward with the next steps of the project, namely confirming the location of the premises of our campus in Singapore".

EHL says its Singapore campus will offer the same internationally recognised Bachelor of Science in International Hospitality Management degree as offered at the EHL campus in Lausanne, adding first hand local market knowledge and experience to the curriculum. The new campus aims to expand opportunities for future hospitality leaders to thrive in an international landscape.

Candidates can submit an anticipated application to start their preparatory year at the EHL Campus Lausanne in September 2020 and then begin their Bachelor course as the first cohort at EHL Campus (Singapore) in 2021.

In an interview with *The Business Times*, EHL Group CEO Michel Rochat says: "We began searching for a campus in the Asia Pacific region to address an increased demand from students for international exposure and know-how. The search for an overseas campus fulfils EHL Group's vision of academic excellence, sustained innovation, global exposure and exceptional community building with industry stakeholders in one of the most dynamic hospitality markets in the world."

While global demand for hospitality professionals continues to grow, Asia is the fastest growing market and continues to show a strong need for talent. Singapore was selected as the preferred location for EHL's first international campus outside Switzerland thanks to its stringent educational quality standards, quality of life, sta-

bility, attractiveness to students, and values, he adds.

"EHL Campus (Singapore)'s facilities will be true to the EHL spirit and high standards. The location of the campus is currently pending final confirmation. While the Singapore campus will be smaller in size, both the location and services available on-site and off-site will ensure students settle smoothly and enjoy a student life as rich and stimulating as in Lausanne," says Mr Rochat.

"The initial intake should welcome about 60 students in September 2020 starting their preparatory year in Lausanne and 40 students in February 2021, with plans to grow to about 100 and 60 students per respective intake in the future.

"The EHL Singapore cohorts shall maintain the enriching diversity of our student body with a balanced mix of students from western and eastern countries. Partnerships with local industry experts will help complement course content with practical applications relevant to the Asia Pacific region."

The Bachelor's programme tuition fees applicable to international students will be identical in Lausanne and Singapore.

"Swiss citizens and residents will, however, not benefit from Swiss government subsidies (AHES) if studying in Singapore," says Mr Rochat.

"Scholarship opportunities for Swiss or Singaporean students are being evaluated and further information will be given closer to the campus confirmation date.

"Industry experts will help complement course content with practical applications relevant to the Asia Pacific region. The Singapore campus will have autonomy to provide optional course units in the 6th semester that are aligned with local needs."

On what is so special about the hospitality programmes offered by EHL, he says: "Switzerland remains an ex-



EHL Group CEO Michel Rochat says that as an example of how innovative concepts are brought into the classroom, EHL is currently running two AI-related projects which will help students acclimatise to new technologies disrupting the sector.

ample in terms of academic excellence, competitiveness and innovation. EHL's programmes instill the right mix of industry know-how, creativity and entrepreneurial spirit.

"Students are not only trained in technical know-how of the sector, they are also given a solid training in business management, communications, and other subjects that will help them develop leadership qualities and soft skills to succeed as a leader in the hospitality sector.

"For example, students apply what they learn through student business projects. They offer consulting style services, conduct research and propose practical and actionable recommendations to industry partners under the guidance of experienced faculty.

"The nine-week programme allows students to gain professional experience. Students have received over-

whelmingly positive feedback from leading businesses based in Switzerland such as Nestlé, Credit Suisse, Swisscom Hospitality Services and Philips Hospitality."

Mr Rochat says that as in Lausanne, "it is a priority to maintain the level of academic excellence across all EHL campuses. EHL Campus (Singapore)'s faculty will be recruited locally and internationally prior to its opening. Exchange opportunities for faculty members will also be available, providing professors with the possibility to teach in Singapore."

Since the degree will be the same as the one in Lausanne, students from the Singapore campus will benefit from the same curriculum content, quality and recognition of their diploma. Local examples like case studies used in classes, will be embedded in the teaching content, to add further insights into Asian markets.

On what has enabled EHL to be ranked the No 1 hospitality school in the world: "Our founders identified the need to professionalise the industry at the turn of the century when Europe was going through massive social changes and economic development. This pioneering spirit continues as we leverage 125 years of innovation and focus on innovation, academic excellence, and deep industry partnerships to take the industry forward."

"The future of hospitality and the future of education remains the driving force behind every thought, every action and every investment at EHL. We bring innovative concepts to the classroom and the hospitality industry through research and collaboration."

Faculty members, students and industry partners are also invited to participate in conferences, applied research projects, contests and EHL's Innovation Hub, which is an incubator for hospitality start-ups.

As an example of how innovative concepts are brought into the classroom, EHL is currently running two AI-related projects which will help students acclimatise to new technologies disrupting the sector.

One is a virtual personal assistant named Amelia, which initially will help guests and students connect to Wi-Fi, and at a later stage will answer questions from potential students and parents about the school's courses. The hope is to be able to train a robot concierge that has self-learning capabilities and mobility to move across the campus.

The school launched a virtual reality class for first-year students, which is based in a five-star hotel and deals with housekeeping issues. Students work in a team of five to solve challenges. One student wears Oculus glasses, and the others see what he or she is seeing on a screen.

"We have received excellent feedback from the students who appreciate the use of technology in the class. The whole student team is involved from the start of the experience and they can quickly see the benefits of working as a team to succeed in the game," says Mr Rochat.

"Any educator or trainer will tell you that it is hard to get students' attention with distractions coming from cellphones, computers and other devices. The virtual reality class has led to greater participation from teams, promoting team work among students. Virtual reality, we believe, may be the way holidays will be sold in future and we want students to be familiar with the technology."

Vitra pushing boundaries of design discipline

Buoyed by its opening in Singapore, the company plans to open more stores in the region. **BY NARENDRA AGGARWAL**

SWISS family-owned design company, Vitra has seen an enthusiastic response since opening its store in Singapore, its first outlet in South-east Asia. "Our customers and fans have finally found a place to experience our collection of classic and contemporary design pieces," says Vitra CEO Nora Fehlbaum in an interview with *The Business Times*.

"The architecture and design community will develop projects, both in the office and residential fields, in our store. For end consumers, it is a place where they can learn about our heritage and the value of the authentic product."

Buoyed by its opening in Singapore, Vitra is planning to open more stores in the region this year, in cities

such as Beijing as well as in key South-east Asia markets such as Malaysia and the Philippines.

"In recent years, we have experienced growing interest in the mission of Vitra from our client base in Asia, which has encouraged us to take the next step in this part of the world," says Ms Fehlbaum.

"When we held the exhibition Project Vitra at the National Design Centre in Singapore last year, the positive response led us to find a partner, W Atelier, and together we created a permanent home for Vitra in Singapore."

"The store introduces our collection of furniture classics by designers such as Jean Prouvé and Verner Panton as well as contemporary designs



Vitra CEO Nora Fehlbaum says: "Our work is based on the conviction that everyday life holds great potential for inspiration and aesthetic enjoyment, and that design can discover and develop this potential." PHOTO: VITRA

by such figures as Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec, Hella Jongerius, Jasper Morrison and Konstantin Grcic."

She says creating innovative products and concepts with great designers is Vitra's essence. They are developed in Switzerland and installed worldwide by architects, companies and private users to build inspirational spaces for living, working as well as public areas.

"With its classics, Vitra represents groundbreaking 20th century design. Today, in combining technical and conceptual expertise with the creativity of contemporary designers, Vitra seeks to continue pushing the boundaries of the design discipline.

"A family business for 80 years, Vitra believes in lasting relationships with customers, employees and designers, durable products, sustainable growth and the power of good design."

The Vitra Campus in Weil am Rhein, with buildings by some of the world's leading architects and the Vitra Design Museum, with its exhibitions on design and architecture, design archives and a comprehensive furniture collection are all part of Vitra. They inspire visitors, inform the design process and create an atmosphere in which innovation flourishes, she adds.

In Singapore, Vitra's products were installed at Changi Airport's Terminal 4 which opened in 2017. It is at the colourful waiting areas influenced by local art and culture that Vitra installed 4,500 seating units from its Airline and Meda Gate waiting area ranges.

"More than 65 million passengers passed through Changi Airport in 2018, and the number of visitors continues to rise. In order to sustain this development, the operating company is investing heavily in the maintenance and expansion of the hub's high quality infrastructure.

"Our products respond to this need for longevity and quality. We are proud to contribute to the success of this international airport, regu-

larly ranked as one of the best in the world," says Ms Fehlbaum.

She says that as a Swiss family-owned company, Vitra is dedicated to improving the quality of homes, offices and public spaces through the power of good design.

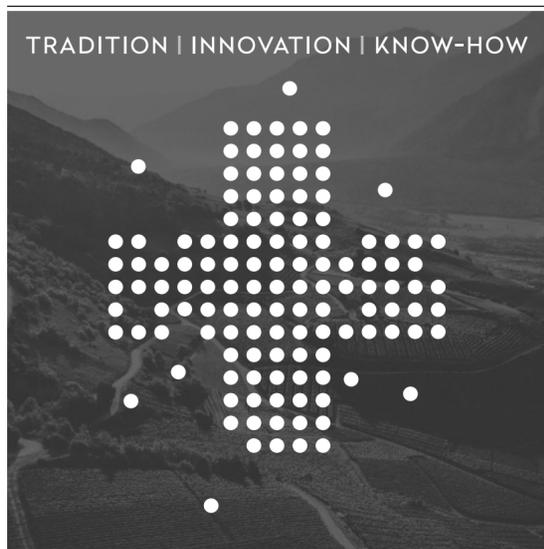
"We therefore take great pride in the fact that our products can be found in cultural institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Tate Modern in London; in companies such as the Fendi Headquarters in Rome and the Amorepacific headquarters in Seoul; in research hubs such as the Future Cities Laboratory in Singapore or in large public infrastructure projects such as Dubai International Airport; and of course in private homes of design and interior aficionados around the world."

Vitra products are designed, developed and tested in Switzerland in collaboration with world renowned designers. The furniture is manufactured in Europe. This is the only way to ensure that Vitra products fulfil the high standards of the brand name, from the smallest details to the production methods, she adds.

The company was founded by Willi and Erika Fehlbaum in the 1930s, and after they retired, Ms Fehlbaum's father and uncle led the company, internationalising it and founding its cultural mission with the Vitra Design Museum on the Vitra campus in southern Germany which draws 400,000 visitors every year.

"In 2016, I became CEO and since then my team and I have been able to position our brand in the market with collaborations such as the most recent exhibition and collection with Virgil Abloh," says Ms Fehlbaum.

"During the past few years we have also pursued the development and expansion of the Vitra Accessories Collection and the worldwide launch of Vitra's online shops. Our work is based on the conviction that everyday life holds great potential for inspiration and aesthetic enjoyment, and that design can discover and develop this potential."



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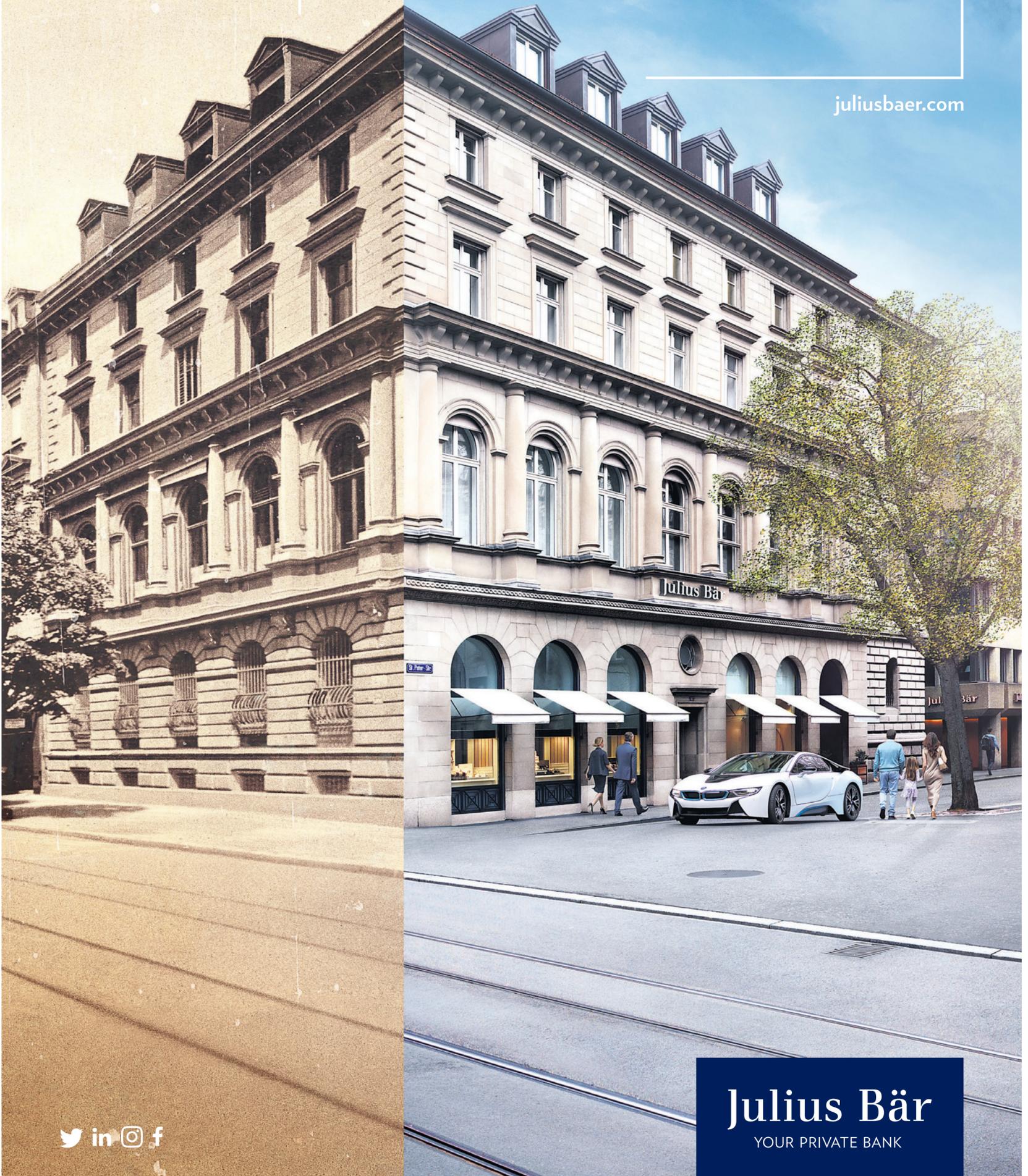
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Singaporean is new director of Olympic Museum in Lausanne

Senior director with Singapore's National Heritage Board is first Asian to be picked for the position. BY NARENDRA AGGARWAL

SINGAPOREAN Angelita Teo has been chosen to lead the Switzerland-based Olympic Foundation for Culture and Heritage from October this year, managing the Olympic Museum, Olympic Studies Centre, international programmes and heritage.

She is Senior Director, Museums and Festivals with Singapore's National Heritage Board (NHB).

The first Asian to be picked for this position, Ms Teo will be based in Lausanne, Switzerland, and will report to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Director General.

IOC Director General Christophe De Kepper says: "I wish a warm welcome and every success to Ms Angelita Teo. Her operational and strategic competences in the areas of culture and heritage will be valuable to enable the Foundation to pursue its development and address its future challenges."

Announcing the appointment, the IOC noted that "Ms Teo has acquired extensive experience in museum management, especially at the National Museum of Singapore, where she has been director for the last six years."

"She has also worked on the renovation of several galleries and initiated many innovative digital experiences.

In addition, she has been responsible for organising three large festivals: the Singapore Heritage Festival, the Singapore Night Festival and Children's Season."

The International Olympic Committee is a not-for-profit independent international organisation made up of volunteers, which is committed to building a better world through sport. It redistributes more than 90 per cent of its income to the wider sporting movement, which means that every day, the equivalent of US\$3.4 million goes to helping athletes and sports organisations at all levels around the world.

The Olympic Museum was inaugurated in 1993 and is the embodiment of the universal values of sports, culture, sharing and education.

Chang Hwee Nee, CEO of NHB, says: "Angelita has been an energetic leader with a strong focus on innovation and experimentation. She has shown us that by putting history and technology together, we can enhance knowledge and increase enjoyment and access for audiences."

"I thank her for her strong contributions and congratulate her on her new role with the Olympic Foundation for Culture and Heritage in Lausanne. This speaks highly of Singapore's cul-



Angelita Teo believes her 17 years of experience in the culture and heritage industry was a definite advantage as her new role includes the management of the Olympic Foundation for Culture and Heritage.

tural professionals. I look forward to her flying the Singapore flag high and further strengthening international collaboration with Singapore."

In an interview with *The Business Times*, Ms Teo says the opportunity to work overseas and gain international

exposure is beyond amazing.

"The Olympic Museum is a world class museum that shares inspiring stories about the history of the Olympics, and more importantly the strength of the human spirit over body and mind. I think there will be so many opportunities for collaborations and to spread this message internationally."

She believes that her 17 years of experience in the culture and heritage industry was a definite advantage as her new role includes the management of the Olympic Foundation for Culture and Heritage.

"There are many qualified museum professionals for this job, but I think I had an added advantage because of my eight years of experience managing both the Singapore Heritage Festival and the Singapore Night Festival. I dare say there are not many museum directors who are festival directors as well."

She is going to be busy when she joins on Oct 1. There is the Youth Olympic Winter Games in Lausanne

in January 2020 and the Olympic Games in Tokyo in July 2020. "But I think the most important and immediate priority goes to knowing my new colleagues and creating opportunities to better understand the role that the museum and the Foundation play in contributing to the goals and aspirations of the International Olympic Committee."

She says the Olympic Museum is housed in a beautiful building. "The sense of arrival when you see the museum can be emotional. The other thing that struck me was how engaged visitors were with the exhibits. I saw many parents explaining and sharing stories with their children while going through the exhibition, and that's a very good way to judge if a museum is doing its job well."

On the significance of her appointment for Singapore: "I think it is such an honour to be the first Asian taking on a Director role at the IOC. Since the announcement, both Sport Singapore and the Singapore National Olympic Council (SNOC) have reached out to

me... The SNOC has been doing a great job in promoting the value of sports and the Olympic Games in Singapore for years, and I will definitely continue to work with them."

She says her role in Lausanne will involve the implementation of the IOC's cultural action plans, facilitate synergies between various cultural platforms and departments within the IOC, including the academies and Olympic museums internationally, and coming up with new ideas to develop cultural activities to promote Olympism in society.

On her interest in museums and heritage: "I have loved watching documentaries since I was a child, and studying anthropology and archaeology in school made it very natural for me to join this industry."

"I must say I have been very fortunate because I found my calling where doors have opened and opportunities presented themselves for me to contribute to the sector."

"I have loved watching documentaries since I was a child, and studying anthropology and archaeology in school made it very natural for me to join this industry."

Angelita Teo, on her interest in museums and heritage

Pianist-composer tunes in to her Swiss-Singapore roots

She's signed to Sony Classical; is a Young Steinway Artist; and grew up in Switzerland speaking Mandarin and Hokkien at home. BY NARENDRA AGGARWAL

M EET talented young pianist Rahel Johanna Kai Zhih Senn who is making waves in the music world. The daughter of a Swiss father and a Singaporean mother, she grew up in Switzerland's largest city - Zurich - in a multicultural and multilingual environment.

Rahel Senn, as she is popularly known, was trained in classical piano by Russian piano maestro Konstantin Lifschitz at the University of Lucerne. She graduated with a Master of Arts degree in 2011 and has been performing in Asia, Europe and South America since then. Her repertoire is wide and ranges from classical to pop.

"Since graduating, I've been touring the world and releasing my own piano CDs. In 2018, I've been exclusively signed to Sony Classical which means a big change for me: an international label, a new management and new people to support my career," she tells *The Business Times* in an interview from her home in Zurich.

"I try to practise as much as possible, but lots of my time is invested in composing and producing new songs, too."

"Being a Young Steinway Artist means carrying responsibility too. I have a super international team from Steinway supporting my career through providing me the best instruments to play on and having me perform around the world."

She says her family isn't into the arts at all. In fact both her parents wanted her to become a doctor. When she started to study law at the University of Lucerne, she also received the opportunity to study under Lifschitz.

"I had to decide: either music or law. During the years of my studies my concert career started to grow,

and quite soon I could make a living by playing the piano."

"It was my mum who introduced me to the piano - she is a big fan of Richard Clayderman. My parents always supported me in my musical education, and later I met people who supported me and pushed me forward."

"This positive energy keeps me going. My way is rather formed by destiny than through decisions. I believe in good forces and in predestination. Being named Young Steinway Artist in 2012 is an example. Being signed by Sony Music is another."

She says she grew up in Switzerland and "spoke Mandarin and Hokkien at home and visited Singapore for five weeks every year. Thus, we had a very close relationship to our Singapore family".

"As a composer, you're being inspired by: your childhood, your adolescence, your environment and experiences. I grew up with a heart half Swiss, half Singaporean, finding home nowhere but in music."

"When I was young, I had some bad experiences, too, due to my two-race background. In Switzerland, people shouted "Ching-Chang-Chung" at me, and in Singapore people spoke to me in English."

"Nowadays, I am thankful for who I am. Times have changed in the past 20 years, I have the impression that people everywhere have become more open minded and that borders begin to vanish. But sure, the feeling of not finding home here or there has influenced my style of composing."

On her music: "Music comes from the heart, for this reason I am not keen to categorise it. My work is called neoclassical... I currently find



Rahel Johanna Kai Zhih Senn's earlier CDs - *Retour à l'Art Brut*, *Temps*, *Opus Z* and *Patagonia* contain her first piano works. Her new album, *Lightness* (below), is her first to be released under a major label, Sony Classical, in September 2019.



myself in the comfortable situation that my music is being loved and distributed by Sony. A strong partner lets your confidence grow and you stop thinking of categories. It allows me to work genuinely and be myself. I'm enjoying this moment and hope to continue as long as possible."

Her earlier CDs - *Retour à l'Art Brut*, *Temps*, *Opus Z* and *Patagonia* contain her first piano works. But as she got more and more into producing (generating electronic sounds via computer and electronic instruments), she stepped away from the classical form of composing.

"In this sense, I see my works as a panorama of my growth. My new CD *Lightness* is the first one that I will release under a major label, Sony Classical, in September 2019. Through Sony, I can reach many more people than I did before."

She says the CD is so named "because now is the right time to spread our wings and fly, and dream. I hope

that through my music I can share some of the feeling of lightness with all those who feel or are captured in dark space, anxiety, stress, hate or fear."

She believes in working hard to achieve her dreams. "My philosophy is that every human being should continue learning no matter how old you are. Never stand still in life. Everything is possible if you work hard. As a pianist, I keep practising since there is so much to learn from the classical literature and through the ancient composers."

"As an artist, I wish to meet and work with as many people as possible. Fellowship is one of the most important things in today's life, I guess."

While she lives in Zurich, she says she spends at least a month in Singapore every year as she feels a strong connection. Her mother has spent half her life in Switzerland. Her father worked as a physics professor in Zurich.

Ms Senn and her younger brother lived in Singapore for a year in 2011. "That was a special experience for us as we came to know where we come from, spent time with our Singapore family and actually saw our bonds become firmer."

"This gave us the possibility to meet our relatives in our daily life. Before, we used to spend our summer holidays in Singapore."

"My brother and I speak Mandarin and Hokkien fluently. We love the Singapore lifestyle, and sometimes we feel sad about things changing and the loss of heritage in Singapore. There are so many hawkers centres and wet markets which we knew since our childhood closing nowadays."

"I perform here regularly, most often in collaboration with the Embassy of Switzerland in Singapore. I'm planning my next concert at Shaw Symphony Stage at the Botanic Gardens in 2021."

Leading Swiss chocolate brand finds a home at Jewel

Läderach's newly opened boutique at Jewel in Changi Airport aims to be a small piece of Switzerland for all chocolate lovers. BY NARENDRA AGGARWAL

AMONG the new wave of Swiss companies coming to Singapore is leading chocolate brand, Läderach, which has set up shop in the newly opened Jewel mall at Changi Airport. It is the chocolatier's first boutique in South-east Asia.

Läderach is well-known for its wide range of visually stunning slabs of FrischSchoggi (fresh chocolate). Each slab is handcrafted by chocolatiers in Switzerland and flown to Singapore for freshness.

A mouthwatering 20 flavours made from the finest chocolate and various ingredients like crunchy nuts and fruity berries are available at the Jewel boutique, an increase from the selection of 12 flavours that were previously available at pop-up stores in Singapore. Läderach previously debuted in Singapore with pop-up stores at Takashimaya and Orchard Central in 2017 and 2018.

Founder Rudolf Läderach started

the business in 1962 in Glarus, Switzerland. The family business has been handed down from generation to generation, and is now led by the founder's grandson, current CEO Johannes Läderach.

Läderach Singapore is managed by Royal Insignia, a Singapore-based luxury brand specialising in medals, jewellery and fine gifts. Founded by Mr Ivan Hoe, it is being transitioned into the hands of his three children and second-generation owners – Rachel, Shawn and Charlotte.

The company says that as part of the unique Läderach experience, customers choose their preferred flavours and its staff weigh the chocolate pieces and sell them by the gram. As the chocolates are made with no preservatives or additives, fans enjoy the fresh taste the brand is known for.

Adding to the range at the Singapore boutique are 26 flavours of exquisite pralines and truffles, along with the ChocoBijoux range of individually wrapped chocolates and

other special treats not previously sold in Singapore, says the company.

"We started testing the Singapore market in 2017 successfully with pop-up stores. Singaporeans have embraced Läderach chocolates as they travel the world – and Switzerland in particular – with an open mind and are known for their high awareness with respect to quality brands," says Mr Läderach.

"Some had heard of our brand from their friends who brought home some of our chocolates.

"Singapore was also chosen for the first South-east Asian boutique as it is celebrated as a business and education hub that is well connected to countries in this region, making it easy for our fans to visit us and bring home their favourite chocolate once again."

The reception has been overwhelmingly positive. "We have really enjoyed seeing all the photos and videos of our Läderach boutique and chocolates that are being shared on-



Läderach Singapore brand manager Shawn Hoe with Swiss Ambassador to Singapore Fabrice Filliez.

line. We are looking forward to our boutique at Jewel continuing to be a convenient destination for all lovers of finest Swiss chocolate in South-east Asia.

"To expand our customer base in Singapore and the region, we have focused heavily on digital marketing.

"Top quality from the cocoa bean to the chocolate shop is the most important thing for us and as a family-owned and independent company we directly shape and control every link in the value chain."

Mr Läderach says the company has "been extremely lucky to have a very strong European and Swiss community in Singapore that has welcomed us with open arms. They have supported us with valuable business and social opportunities that have allowed Läderach to integrate much easier here.

"As a business hub, Singapore is a wonderful place for Swiss companies to develop and thrive if they wish to expand to South-east Asia. We are

happy to provide now a sort of Swiss chocolate home in Singapore for this particular community as much as for all other Singaporeans and Asian lovers of artisanal Swiss chocolate."

Mr Shawn Hoe, brand manager of Läderach Singapore, says: "Other than having an ardent fan base in Singapore, we have many Läderach lovers all around Asia who have been reaching out to us whenever Läderach chocolates were available here. We even have fans who shared with us that they've chosen their next travel destination based on whether there's a Läderach store in that country.

"Jewel is the perfect first home that caters not just to our Singapore fans, but also to our Läderach family across Asia.

"Fans here can expect a similar comforting familiarity of being in a store just like in Läderach's homeland. With the same fresh taste in every bite of our artisanal Swiss chocolate, everyone can enjoy the Läderach experience that many have come to know and love."

Swiss quality, Singapore opportunity

AS Switzerland is known for precision and quality, it was the inspiration to plan it the Swiss way that motivated an SME events company to be called planitswiss.

"With our two companies – imavox and planitswiss – we offer a wide range of services related to multimedia and events. The fact that we are near to decision makers in Singapore helps us a lot in supporting them in their operations in the region," says Mr Michel Huguenin, CEO and co-founder of planitswiss.

"We simplify the communication with our customers by having our office just a few minutes away and then implement the agreed concepts from India to Australia."

The company was incorporated in 2012 with one fulltime employee. "The journey has been very exciting, and our team today counts 15 full-time employees. With our innovative angle we do believe that Singapore and the region has been a boost to grow this part of our activities and we want to keep on growing in the region out of Singapore," Mr Huguenin adds.

planitswiss is a full service hospitality solutions provider that specialises in the planning and execution of tailor-made corporate, public and exclusive events.

Headquartered in Switzerland with offices in Europe, Africa and Asia, it operates all around the world. It has been based in Singapore since 2012 and just opened an office in Shanghai.

As an SME, planitswiss always had in mind to expand its activities beyond Europe. Asia was top of the list. After a few months of analysing the different markets, a few cities were shortlisted. Singapore was one of the top options.

"The main attractions were the similarities to how we do business in Switzerland and the fact that Singapore is a corporate hub where many decisions are taken for the region. This has been a crucial aspect in the decision taking and supports our growth up to today," says Mr Huguenin.

"We are aiming to open new offices to better serve our customers. There are so much synergies between our four offices with Switzerland as our headquarters, our Singapore regional office and lately with our African hub based in Rwanda and our China office which opened a few months back in Shanghai."

He would encourage other small Swiss companies to consider coming to Singapore once they decide on expanding into the Asia-Pacific.

"I believe that Singapore is a great place to start new activities and a good way to enter the region. It is easy to create a business in a location with good business ethics.

"The multiculturalism is also truly appreciated as Singapore offers the possibility to meet people from any origin and from any industry."

By Narendran Aggarwal

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