

Senior Chinese diplomat Liu Jianchao calls on DPMs Wong and Heng

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Senior Chinese diplomat Liu Jianchao called on Deputy Prime Ministers Lawrence Wong and Heng Swee Keat on March 26, reaffirming the relations and cooperation between both countries.

Mr Liu, 60, who is Minister of the International Department of the Communist Party of China, is in Singapore from March 25 to 28 at the invitation of Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan. Mr Liu's department is in charge of cultivating and maintaining relations with foreign political parties.

Mr Liu and DPM Wong, who is also Minister for Finance, reaffirmed the warm and longstanding relations between their countries and looked forward to the further strengthening of bilateral cooperation, said Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

They noted that 2024 marked the 30th anniversary of the Suzhou Industrial Park (SIP), the first government-to-government project between both countries, and expressed confidence in the project's continued growth and development, said MFA.

The SIP is the oldest of three flagship government-to-government projects; the other two are the Sino-Singapore Tianjin Eco-City and the China-Singapore

(Chongqing) Demonstration Initiative on Strategic Connectivity.

Mr Liu and DPM Wong both look forward to the successful convening of the 20th Joint Council for Bilateral Cooperation meeting to be held in Singapore later in 2024, MFA added in its statement.

The previous year's edition was co-chaired by DPM Wong and Chinese Vice-Premier Ding Xuexiang in December and included meetings held in Beijing and Tianjin.

Besides affirming the extensive people-to-people interactions between both countries at all levels, including youth and party-to-party exchanges, DPM Wong and Mr Liu also discussed the importance of an open, rules-based multilateral trading system and Asean-China relations for the region.

Mr Liu, widely seen as a possible contender for the post of China's foreign minister by political pundits, also called on DPM Heng, who is also Coordinating Minister for Economic Policies.

Both welcomed "the strong momentum in bilateral cooperation, and reaffirmed both sides' commitment to continued high-quality and forward-looking collaboration in both traditional and emerging areas".

"They also agreed that despite the differences in size and socio-economic contexts of both countries, there was much that each side could learn from the other to address the needs of our popula-



Mr Liu Jianchao, Minister of the International Department of the Communist Party of China, calling on Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong on March 26. They reaffirmed Singapore and China's warm and longstanding relations. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

tions and uplift their lives," said MFA.

Both sides can work together to foster closer collaboration with re-

gional and international partners to tackle shared challenges such as climate change, said the ministry.

Other topics discussed include

the importance of citizen engagement, good governance, and investing in people and institutions, it added.

Dr Balakrishnan hosted Mr Liu to dinner on March 26.

During his time in Singapore, Mr Liu is also expected to call on Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Born in north-eastern Jilin province, Mr Liu has extensive diplomatic experience, having served as ambassador to the Philippines and Indonesia.

A fluent English speaker, he is a former chief foreign ministry spokesman and studied international relations at the University of Oxford.

He has made several high-profile trips, including to the United States in January, where he met US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Deputy National Security Adviser Jon Finer, and spoke at an event organised by the Council on Foreign Relations think-tank.

In July 2023, Mr Qin Gang was abruptly removed as China's foreign minister and Mr Wang Yi was reappointed as foreign minister.

Mr Liu is said to have been sharing some of Mr Wang's heavy diplomatic load as he heads the Communist Party of China's international liaison department.

Separately, China's new ambassador to Singapore, Mr Cao Zhongming, arrived in the Republic on March 24, filling a post that had been empty since his predecessor, Ms Sun Haiyan, left in July 2023.

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Specialised unit helps to wean patients off the ventilator earlier

Early rehabilitation enables their overall hospital stay to be cut by average of 81 days

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Shipyards engineer Jaime Mendoza, 57, suffered a stroke in September 2020.

The stroke affected his brain and his ability to breathe, so he was given a tracheostomy, where a tube is inserted into his windpipe to allow air into his lungs. He was kept in the intensive care unit (ICU) for about a month before he was moved to the general ward.

The family had been out celebrating his daughter's birthday when he suddenly felt unwell and was hurried by taxi to the emergency department of Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH).

"He was in (the) hospital for the next three months. He came home for a month before being hospitalised at Ang Mo Kio Rehabilitation Centre from March to May 2021," his wife, Mrs Edna Mendoza, 57, told The Straits Times.

His seven-month stay, first at TTSH and then at the rehabilitation centre, would have been cut by close to three months – or an average of 81 days for such patients – if he had been taken directly

from the ICU to the Ventilatory Rehabilitation Unit (VRU).

Patients with conditions and injuries that affect breathing, such as head injury, stroke, lung diseases, heart attack, pneumonia and spinal cord injuries, would do better when they are moved directly from the ICU to a specialised rehabilitation unit once their underlying conditions are stable, said Dr Lui Wen Li, a consultant with the department of rehabilitation medicine at TTSH.

"In 2019, the average stay in hospital for patients needing ventilators to breathe was more than 200 days. We realised that rehabilitation is not the main focus of acute (care) hospitals," she said.

"They cater more to managing acute medical and surgical issues rather than specialised rehabilitation. Often, patients are not able to work towards improvement in speech, mobility and swallowing."

In 2020, the rehabilitation medicine team started a pilot programme at Ang Mo Kio Rehabilitation Centre to provide specialised, intensive and advanced service to wean patients off their reliance on ventilators early and restore them to health. It worked on two ventila-

tor-assisted patients with complex rehabilitation issues at a time.

The programme led to the setting up of the VRU, and it came with specialised equipment and a dedicated team. When the unit moved to TTSH Integrated Care Hub in September 2023, the number of patients who could be taken care of grew to five.

Since the pilot project in 2020, 23 patients have been admitted to the VRU.

Dr Lui listed the results of their VRU care:

- More than nine in 10 patients spent time out of bed within the first day of admission and all were standing up or even moving around, with assistance, within the first week, compared with less than half doing so before the unit existed.
- More than nine in 10 patients had their ventilation hours significantly reduced, compared with previously, when most were weaned off the ventilator and had the tracheostomy tube removed only after discharge from hospital.
- Caregiver training started as early as the first week that the patient was in the VRU, unlike previously, when caregivers were trained only after acute medical or surgical issues had been settled.



Stroke survivor Jaime Mendoza, 57, seen here on a recent outing to Bird Paradise with his family, is a beneficiary of the Ventilatory Rehabilitation Unit (left) at TTSH Integrated Care Hub. The unit has had 23 patients since a pilot programme in 2020. PHOTOS: COURTESY OF EDNA MENDOZA, GIN TAY

- All the patients had a mode of communication established and could speak while on the ventilator.

One patient who benefited from going into the VRU early is retiree Lau San Heng, 71. He fell off his motorcycle in August 2023 and suffered injuries to his head and chest. He required a tracheostomy tube and was dependent on a ventilator.

His daughter Vivian Lau, 50, said he was admitted to the ICU at TTSH and remained unconscious even after surgery.

"His doctor told us to be prepared that my father would have to rely on machines for a long time to help him breathe," she said.

"We were also prepared initially that we might have to place him in a nursing home that could take care of his ETT (endotracheal tube)."

Ms Lau learnt that there was only one step-down care institution that could manage such patients and there was a long queue for the beds there.

Fortunately, Mr Lau went through a month of intensive rehabilitation at the VRU, including mobilisation, swallowing and speech therapy, and was able to reduce his need for ventilation support.

He eventually managed to breathe on his own and no longer needed the tracheostomy tube. His family was relieved that he could

return home without the need for a ventilator.

As for Mr Mendoza, he joined the VRU for his rehabilitation when he was admitted to Ang Mo Kio Rehabilitation Centre in March 2021, and with help from both the unit's team and the home care team, he is slowly regaining strength.

"At the latest check-up last month, the doctor said he can travel, but only for short distances on the plane," Mrs Mendoza said.

"We wanted to take things slow, so we had a family outing to Bird Paradise. If things continue to go well, perhaps we will take a trip to the Philippines at the end of this year."

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Trail grouped into three thematic routes

FROM A13

port's aviation hub.

Twenty-two stories from community members such as Madam Isiah are found in the guide.

While six of the 23 sites, including Kampong Ayer Gemuroh, cannot be visited, their histories are still documented in the guide. The public also has no access to sites such as Changi Prison or the bungalows near Changi Beach, but these places of interest can be observed from the outside.

NHB curated three thematic routes for the self-guided trail. Participants can opt to take public transport to reduce the distance covered on foot for each route.

The first route, Bungalows And Beaches In Changi, covers about 4km around the area's coastline, taking visitors by recreation clubs, decades-old chalets and the coas-

tal views that have drawn holiday-makers to Changi since the mid-1800s.

Along the way are Changi Cottage, which the late founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew once called home for a few months, and chalets at Fairy Point that date to the late-1920s, when they were built as accommodation for senior British military officers.

The second thematic route, War And Peace In Changi, takes participants over about 7.6km, starting from Changi Prison.

NHB said that in the 1920s, the British chose Changi as the site for a cantonment, or military quarters, and artillery emplacements to protect a then upcoming naval base in Sembawang.

Barracks that were part of the cantonment – such as Block 42 in Hendon Road – are part of this route, along with the former Chan-



Madam Isiah Majid grew up in Kampong Ayer Gemuroh in Changi, and her memories of the village are captured in a guide for the new heritage trail. ST PHOTOS: GIN TAY

gi Hospital, completed in 1962 for the British Royal Air Force.

Also remembered are darker periods of Changi's history. Changi Beach, one of many sites where the Japanese carried out the Sook Ching massacre during WWII, closes off the route.

The third route, Gateways And Communities In Changi, delves in-



Mr Joshua Woo with photos of his late father and Changi Airport's control tower. The late Mr Woo Chee Yong had a hand in building the tower, and his story is also featured in the guide.

to the communities that lived and worked in the area.

Of note are two temples with decades-long connections to the area.

Yan Kit Village Chinese Temple, a Taoist temple near Changi Prison Complex, was founded in 1939 by residents of the former Yan Kit village, located in the area.

Meanwhile, Sree Ramar Temple, completed in 1946, has its roots in a tree shrine regarded as sacred by Hindu residents of Changi Point.

Mr Thalpathi K.V, a temple volunteer of about two decades, said the ficus tree still sits at the front of the temple, with two small shrines dedicated to Buddha and Guan Yin at the base of the tree. This is a rarity in Hindu temples here and a testament to the multiracial appeal of the temple, said the 67-year-old.

A former army regular, Mr Thalpathi said he grew up in Changi Village watching British soldiers in nearby camps marching, and then mimicking them, which inspired him to embark on a 37-year career with the Singapore Armed Forces.

Changi Airport, the last stop of this route, officially opened in 1981 and has since become a national icon.

Among the airport's landmarks is its 81m-tall control tower. Sitting atop the tower is a three-storey bowl-like structure that houses the control cabin.

Mr Joshua Woo, the son of former contractor Woo Chee Yong, who had a hand in building the control tower, said the tower would always

remind him of his late father, whose story is also featured in the guide.

The 38-year-old headhunter said his father would never fail to bring up his involvement in the tower's construction when their family was at the airport. "It's like just yesterday that he told those stories to us," he said of the elder Mr Woo, who died in 2016.

Mr Alvin Tan, NHB's deputy chief executive for policy and community, said the 22 community stories featured in the trail's guide will help to make historical narratives more relatable to trail-goers.

Mr Tan added that NHB will in 2025 refresh two of its 24 trails – Yishun Heritage Trail and Jubilee Walk, an 8km trail curated to mark Singapore's 50th birthday.

Before launching the Changi Heritage Trail, NHB unveiled the refreshed Ang Mo Kio and Toa Payoh heritage trails in 2023.

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- To download Changi Heritage Trail's guide and map, go to go.gov.sg/roots-changi-heritage-trail