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PRESS RELEASE

15 November 2007

SINGAPORE PHILATELIC MUSEUM LAUNCHES “ASEAN: WHAT WE HAVE IN COMMON” EXHIBITION

Shared culture of ten ASEAN countries told through stamps

As part of the National Heritage Board (NHB)'s “Celebrate ASEAN!” events which coincides with ASEAN's 40th Anniversary this year, the Singapore Philatelic Museum is organising an exhibition on the shared culture of ASEAN countries titled “ASEAN: What we have in common”, from 15 November 2007 to 4 May 2008. Comprising a selection of the museum's collection of stamps from ten ASEAN member countries, artefacts, interactive exhibits and write-up, the exhibition aims to provide visitors with a better understanding of the heritage and culture of ASEAN countries. The exhibition also coincides with the ASEAN Summit held in Singapore from 18 to 22 November 2007.

ASEAN countries are politically and ethnically diverse. Lying at the crossroads of inter-ocean trade, the countries have been exposed to a steady flow of ideas, skills, and materials from diverse sources since ancient times. Indian, Chinese, Muslim and European influences have helped to shape the culture and tradition of Southeast Asia. Common links are found across the ten nations, such as rice, the main staple food; architecture; religion; literature; art and culture.

Highlights of the exhibition include:

Rice Cultivation

Rice cultivation, an indigenous trait to Southeast Asia, is believed to be grown in East and South Asia some 15,000 years ago when people began to settle on river deltas and grew wild rice. The relationship between rice and people is shown in fertility rites, animistic beliefs, and local myths; inspired songs, paintings, stories and festivals dedicated to rice and rice cultivation, such as the “Rice Ploughing Ceremony” carried by Thais, Cambodians and Burmese, and “Pahiyas Festival” celebrated in the Philippines.

Rice stalks are used to represent the member countries of ASEAN on the logo.

Indian, Hindu and Buddhist Influences

In Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Champa (now Vietnam), Indian religious beliefs and cosmology are reflected in the geometric pattern of ancient buildings and historical relics. The narration of scenes, gods and deities, and mythical creatures from Indian epics, and Buddhism are commonly depicted on bas-reliefs, paintings, and sculptures.

Indian epics, such as the “Mahabarata” and the “Ramayana”, and the Buddhist “Jataka” Tales, form the basis of classical theatre in Southeast Asia. Over the centuries local traditions and beliefs were merged, and gave rise to various versions of “Ramayana” throughout the region, such as “Kakawin Ramayana” of Java in Indonesia, “Ramakavaca” of Bali, “Hikayat Seri Rama” of Malaysia, “Maradia Lawana” of the Philippines, “Ramakien” of Thailand, “Ramker” of Cambodia, “Yama Zatdaw” of Myanmar, and “Pra Lak Pra Lam” of Laos.

Interactive Exhibits

- Flag the ASEAN Countries

Visitors can match the flag with the ASEAN countries.

- The Hats Game

Hats are used by rice farmers in Southeast Asia. Visitors can guess which country each hat is from.

- Match the Stamps

Visitors can match the stamps according to the themes. The themes on the stamps are traditional costumes; musical instruments; traditional games; and houses.

Ms Tresnawati Prihadi, General Manager of Singapore Philatelic Museum said, “Stamps document the history and heritage of a country, they are a window to the world around us. From this exhibition, we hope that many visitors will have a better appreciation of the shared heritage and culture of ASEAN countries.”

ABOUT SINGAPORE PHILATELIC MUSEUM

Singapore Philatelic Museum showcases Singapore’s philatelic heritage and postal artefacts since the Straits Settlements era. Throughout the year, the museum organises changing exhibitions that feature rare collections of world-class philatelists, and contemporary collections that explore heritage and cultures of Singapore and beyond. The museum also hosts a range of educational activities including guided tours, camps, talks and workshops.

The mission of the Singapore Philatelic Museum is to stimulate interest in philately. The museum is a fully-owned subsidiary of National Heritage Board.