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Summit delegates take a walk 'On the Nalanda Trail'

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SUMMIT delegates yesterday had a glimpse of the kind of close links that Asean can aim to have with India and China in the future – by looking some 800 years into the past.

At the end of another busy day of meetings, leaders of the East Asia Summit and the European Union took a breather by going on a tour of the Asian Civilisations Museum's "On the Nalanda Trail" exhibition.

The exhibition traces the spread of Buddhism from India to South-east Asia and China through the journeys of Chinese monks heading to India to study at the Nalanda University.

The presentation itself had come about as a result of cooperation between Singapore and India.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong paid tribute to that bond at a reception at the museum. He thanked his Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh for the Indian government's loan of several key artefacts.

This exhibition, he said, "is part of a broader effort by the

Indian government to revive Nalanda University".

"Founded in AD427 in north-eastern India, Nalanda was one of the first great universities in recorded history," said Mr Lee.

"I hope you will enjoy the exhibition, and look forward to continued progress in our combined efforts to rebuild and revive Nalanda."

He also noted that the project to revive Nalanda was

AT THE SUMMIT

first mooted by former Indian president A.P.J. Abdul Kalam during a state visit to Singapore in January last year, and again by Prime Minister Singh at last year's East Asia Summit.

It was once again discussed at the summit yesterday, before delegates toured the exhibition.

Among the Indian government's most valuable contributions to the exhibit were some bone relics from the only archaeological find that can be linked directly to Buddha.

Another piece that drew special attention was an inscribed plaque recording a donation made by a ruler of the Shailendra dynasty in Sumatra to a monastery in Nalanda – proof of close links that existed between the regions nearly a millennium ago.

To ensure security for the leaders, the entire area encompassing Empress Place and Old Parliament Lane was closed to the public in the evening. Two Coast Guard boats were also positioned on the Singapore River adjacent to the museum.

After the tour, President SR Nathan and Mrs Nathan hosted a dinner for Asean leaders and several dialogue partners at the Istana.

The President gave a brief address before dinner and congratulated Asean for signing the Charter that will transform it from a loose grouping into a rules-based organisation.

Inviting the dignitaries to raise their glasses, he declared: "It is now my pleasure to invite all present to join me in a toast to the close friendship between our governments and our peoples. Hear, hear."



PHOTO: MFA

MUSEUM TOUR: PM Lee with Dr Singh (left) and Thai Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont and his wife at the Asian Civilisations Museum yesterday. Mr Lee thanked Dr Singh for the Indian government's loan of several key artefacts for the exhibition.