

# Meet the people who moved PM

In his speech, the Prime Minister recounted stories of people who made a difference

## Classmates helped Vietnamese student fit in

WHEN Ms Le Ha Thanh Mai arrived here from Vietnam on a scholarship, she was 15 and did not know English. Six years on, she was held up as a success story of integration into Singaporean society by the Prime Minister.

Like many foreign students, she found it hard adjusting to life here at first due to the language and the different way lessons are taught here and in Vietnam.

But things improved after she joined Temasek Junior College, where her classmates helped her fit in.

Mr Lee Hsien Loong cited her as an example of how Singaporeans and foreigners should work at integration.

He said: "By the time she went to Singapore Management University (SMU), she was so localised that if you didn't know her name, you wouldn't know she came from somewhere else."

She was even elected as the international students' secretary of the SMU Students' Association to lead efforts to integrate international students.

He quoted her as saying: "I feel as much a Singaporean as I am a Vietnamese."

"I have come to love the hawk-er food, the Singapore River that I jog along, the fireworks every Na-

tional Day on the magnificent background of Singapore's skyline, the shopping malls... the cinemas where I spend many nights watching movies, the schools I attended and, most importantly, the friendships I have made."

Last night, Ms Mai, whose family is in Ho Chi Minh City, said Singaporeans

can help foreign students to integrate by being more understanding of the difficulties they face being away from home.

Foreign students can also be more thick-skinned and interact with Singaporeans instead of retreating into their comfort zone.

She plans to stay here. "I have a three-year government bond to serve," she said. "And my boyfriend is a Singaporean."

GOH CHIN LIAN



Ms Le Ha Thanh Mai says that she feels as much a Singaporean as she is a Vietnamese.

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