

# PM goes off beaten track to Kashgar

## Leaders of S'pore, old Silk Road city hope for more people-to-people ties

By **KOR KIAN BENG**  
CHINA BUREAU CHIEF  
IN KASHGAR (Xinjiang)

MS CHRISTIN Tan and her husband visited Kashgar for the first time in 2006. They liked the place so much that they started work at a hotel run by fellow Singaporeans just two months later.

Ms Tan, 46, is a business development manager at the Crown Inn in Tashkurgan, about 300km from Kashgar. There are three Singaporeans based permanently in Kashgar, according to Ms Tan.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's visit, she hopes, will lead

more Singaporeans to visit the ancient Silk Road city.

"The locals, too, are very excited about PM Lee's visit. A local tour agency boss just told me he's hoping more Singaporeans will visit Kashgar and not just Urumqi," she told The Straits Times.

For the past three years, the Singapore Management University (SMU) has been sending its students on cultural exchanges to Kashgar. This was after Ms Tan put the SMU in touch with Kashgar Teachers College.

Last month, SMU students were in Kashgar to teach trainee teachers conversational English.

Yesterday, the two institutions signed a memorandum of understanding to hold the SMU-Kashgar English Festival next year.

"The college said they liked the English classes so much that they want us to formalise it," Professor James Tang, dean of SMU's School of Social Sciences, told The Straits Times at a luncheon that Kashgar party boss Zeng Cun hosted for PM Lee.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister toured Kashgar, where the people are predominantly Uighurs, who are Turkic-speaking Muslims.

He strolled through Old Kashgar, which has traditional mud-house buildings. At a handicraft lane, Mr Lee tried local delicacies, saw craftsmen making lamps and jewellery, and even joined in a little jig with locals playing traditional music on handmade instru-



PM Lee and Mr Mutallip Obul, the commissioner of Kashgar Prefectural Administration of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, dancing at a shop selling handmade musical instruments in Old Kashgar yesterday. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

ments. He also visited Id Kah Mosque, China's largest, where he met the chief imam.

During Mr Lee's meeting with Mr Zeng, they noted the similarities between Singapore and Kashgar, both multiracial and multi-religious societies and keen to strike a balance between economic growth and preserving heritage.

The two leaders also hoped to see more people-to-people exchanges between the two cities.

"So I hope we will be able to deepen and strengthen our ties and make a cross-link between the 'land' Silk Road that you're on and the 'sea' Silk Road that we're on," said Mr Lee. Yesterday evening, he arrived in Shenyang in north-eastern Liaoning province, the last stop of his week-long official visit to China.

[kianbeng@sph.com.sg](mailto:kianbeng@sph.com.sg)