



TODAY FILE PHOTO

Singapore Expo eyes UNSW site

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SINGAPORE Expo is eyeing at least three plots of vacant land next to it to develop into hotels, malls and restaurants, as part of its multi-million-dollar rejuvenation plans submitted to the Singapore Tourism Board (STB).

One of the plots was supposed to have been the new 20ha campus for University of New South Wales Asia (UNSW) (picture), before it abruptly pulled out of Singapore last month.

The site now fits in nicely with the expansion plans of Temasek-owned Singex Venues, which manages the 1-million-sq-ft Singapore Expo near Simei.

Singex group general manager Matthew Meredith told TODAY that Singex is willing to spend "tens of millions" to give its business a new shine.

What's possible: Budget hotels to cater to business travellers.

"We've got a huge piece of land here and the fact is, we have a shortage of budget hotels. And if we do have such hotels here, it would improve our proposition to conference organisers to hold their events here," he said.

The expansion plans are in part driven by the competition — integrated resort operator Marina Bay Sands is expected to take up a big chunk of the Mice (Meetings, incentive travel, conventions and exhibitions) business once it is up and running in 2009.

What Mr Meredith wants to do now is to find how to make Singapore Expo tick without having a cash cow such as a casino.

"I've got admiration for the Marina Bay Sands business model principally because it's self-sustaining. We're trying to come up with a model that fits that ... it's finding out what the equivalent of the casino is," he said.

This proposed draw would likely see tie-ups with international organisations, but is "not a tourist at-

traction in its own right, not a Disneyland or an aquarium".

"The whole infrastructure, however, should still be there to support the Mice business, which is our major priority," Mr Meredith said.

The tourism authority is now mulling on the plans, as well as a new contract with Singex to manage the Government-owned Singapore Expo. Its contract ends in February 2009, months before Marina Bay Sands is slated to open its doors.

"We're looking to extend for as long as possible after February 2009. The extension of the contract and the plans to redevelop Expo and its surroundings are linked because the extension period affects the pay-back on our investment," Mr Meredith said.

Aside from its plans to put on a fresh face, Singex has also dropped some shows, such as Big Boyz Toyz.

In their place will be shows that face no direct competition from the region, such as the Assistive Technology event i-CREATE held two months ago.

"We want to focus on those areas where we believe there is long-term growth. The shows we dropped were very similar to what others were doing. Basically, it was putting in a lot of effort for not a lot of gain," Mr Meredith said.

Singex is also looking overseas to woo the Mice dollar — it recently launched a Qatari spin-off to its biennial Singapore-held maritime defence exhibition Imdex Asia, called the Doha International Maritime Defence Exhibition (Dimdex) to be held next March.

Despite the heat Marina Bay Sands will bring to the table in terms of manpower and competition for the same shows, Mr Meredith said he is not perturbed — at least, not any more.

He said: "We're now in a position where — having digested the integrated resort announcement — we (now know better) where the focus of our business is in the longer term."

RJC ATHLETE DIES AFTER SEA GAMES TRIALS

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HE HAD just qualified to represent Singapore in the triathlon at the South-East Asian Games in December.

But moments after crossing the finish line during a time trial yesterday, 17-year-old Thaddeus Cheong collapsed unconscious. The Raffles Junior College student was rushed to Changi General Hospital. Ninety minutes later, he was pronounced dead.

The time trial began at the Tanah

Merah Country Club at 6.45am and saw 12 triathletes swim 1.5km, cycle 40km and then run 10km along Changi Coastal Road.

Thaddeus had been with the national squad for two-and-a-half years. He came in third yesterday with a time of 2hrs 9min, booking, for the first time, his ticket to the games. The qualifying time was 2hrs 12mins.

Last night, Thaddeus' mother Angeline Wee struggled to keep her composure as she told TODAY: "His heart had already stopped beating

when we reached the hospital.

"He collapsed at the end point and there was no medical help. No one knew how to do CPR."

She added: "We're not blaming TAS (Triathlon Association of Singapore) but we hope that they should ensure that no one will ever experience the pain we're going through again."

Mr David Hoong, honorary secretary of TAS, said no CPR was administered because they were unsure what had caused the collapse and wanted to rush Thaddeus to hospital.

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