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164-year-old Hindu temple restored in \$4.5m project

PM Lee joins thousands of devotees for ceremony at Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple

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The iconic Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple in Little India has been restored to its full glory, after a \$4.5 million restoration.

The 164-year-old temple – one of the oldest in Singapore – was re-sanctified yesterday in a consecration ceremony witnessed by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Holy water from gadams – or sacred vessels – which carry divine powers of Hindu deities, was sprinkled on the nine pinnacles of the temple and the statue of deity Sri Srinivasa Perumal, also known as Lord Vishnu, within the temple's main sanctum.

Some 40,000 Hindu devotees attended the ceremony, held on an auspicious date picked from the Hindu almanac. Although the sanctification started only at 10am, many had begun gathering from as early as 6am.

The ceremony was touted as the most significant event on the Hindu calendar this year.

Mr Lee attended the Hindu conse-

cration ceremony soon after arriving back in Singapore from a work trip in London.

Also present were Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Chan Chun Sing, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu, Minister for Trade and Industry (Industry) S. Iswaran and Senior Minister of State for Education and Communications and Information Janil Puthuchery.

Said Mr Iswaran: "An occasion like this is also an opportunity to reinforce the multiracial, multi-religious nature of Singapore. The Prime Minister's presence here today, having travelled overnight from overseas, is a remarkable validation of the commitment the Government has, that PM Lee also has, to this.

"It is an opportunity to bring together different communities so that we develop this mutual understanding and respect and continue to build on Singapore's multiracial fabric."

Built in 1854, the temple plays a yearly role as one of the start points for the Thaipusam procession. This is the fourth time renovations have been undertaken since it was declared a national monument by the

Preservation of Monuments Board in 1978. The earlier re-development works were in 1979, 1992 and 2005.

The most recent renovation has expanded the space where devotees can worship and eat, with a new multi-purpose facility for "sanctified" meals and religious ceremonies.

Paintings, murals and religious motifs have been repainted, while structures like the *rajagopuram* (tower entrance), pillars and *vimanam* (temple roof) have been reconditioned. Ventilation and lighting were improved, while issues such as weeds and pests were resolved.

The temple remained open to prayers throughout the works, which began in late 2016, but devotees had to contend with the ongoing construction work.

Now, the scaffolding and hoardings have been removed and devotees can see the temple in its near-original form.

The restoration task was not an easy one as the temple's management had to abide by its conservation status. For example, the same colour scheme of the original temple had to be kept, said the Hindu Endowments Board's chief executive officer T. Raja Segar.

The temple also had to invite foreign experts to help in the restoration as certain specific skills were

not available here. A team of 20 highly skilled artisans, known as *shapathis*, were flown in from India for the job, he added.

Special techniques included the use of lime mortar instead of regular cement within the temple's sanctum, and the use of 14 oil and enamel paint colours to recreate the same palette of the original structure.

Said the chief sculptor, Mr Anand M.S. Sivaprakasam, 40, from the state of Tamil Nadu: "The weather in India and Singapore is vastly different too, and it was especially difficult for us to paint during the period of wet and cold weather earlier this year."

The task of carrying out these works falls on the temple's management committee, which changes every two years.

Its chairman K. Vellayappan, 73, said he felt the pressure to get every detail right, in light of the stricter rules for national monuments.

"It is such a relief now that the ceremony is complete," he said.

The consecration ceremony will be followed by another 45 days of cultural programmes at the temple, in a period known as *mandalabishegam*, and thousands of devotees are expected each day, added Dr Vellayappan.

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