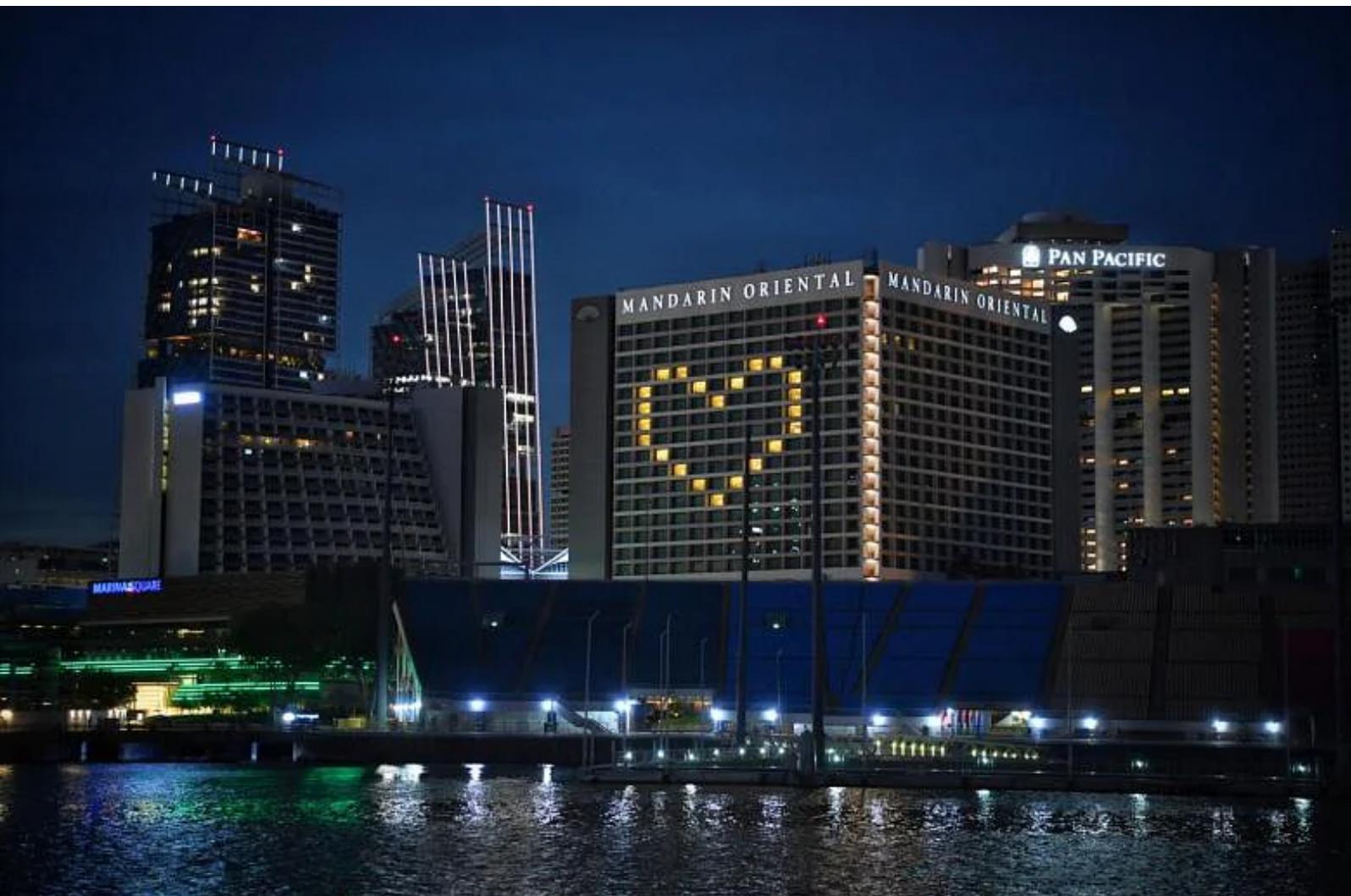


Important for all to know the Covid-19 stories unfolding in the community



Singaporeans have played their part, with many making selfless contributions. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG



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SINGAPORE - The Stories of a Pandemic (Soap) Awards has just announced its final list of winners, bringing the year-long project to a close.

The judging panel which I chair has read hundreds of stories and looked at as many photos and illustrations to select these winners.

In all, we recognised 158 writers, photographers and artists whose work from January last year, taken together, tell the story of what it was like to live through the country's gravest crisis since independence.

I started the project with generous support from The Majority Trust, a philanthropic organisation, because I thought Singaporeans needed to try to make sense of what was happening, and that one way of doing so was to encourage them to record their own experiences and share them with others.

You will find all the defining moments of the pandemic in the collection at sgsoap.sg - the outbreak in foreign worker dormitories, the panic buying in supermarkets, the plight of the homeless, the efforts of the Government to stop the spread of the virus, the struggle to do home-based learning among students from low-income families, how the pandemic exacerbated the rich-poor divide, its effect on those with mental illnesses, the TraceTogether saga, and more.

Re-reading the stories now, the ones that made the most impact for me were not of national issues or policies, but personal accounts from ordinary Singaporeans struggling to cope in a changed world.

Mr Firdaus Abdul Hamid, 40, had lost his job at a marine engineering company and was doing odd jobs, including cleaning. But he could not stop helping ex-convicts and their families whom he had been supporting through Human Hearts, a non-profit organisation he founded.



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So even though his savings were down and he had a family including three young children to feed, he continued to support those in greater need.

"Yes, of course it's difficult for me. But I want to help people who think they can't be helped," he told the Today newspaper.

Madam Komala Devi Ramiah, 49, lost her job last year and could not afford to celebrate Deepavali. But she wasn't thinking of her own deprivation. She was more concerned about the 72 needy families that she had been donating food hampers to during the Indian festival for the last few years.

The mother of two teenage children cut back on her own spending and, with support from relatives and friends, made sure these families had something to look forward to.

"I was more worried about the people who lost their jobs... and could not afford to celebrate Deepavali. I went through that so I can imagine how they were feeling," she said.

I think Madam Ramiah captured exactly the sentiments of those who, despite not having much themselves, are moved to contribute with what little they have.

She suffered from losing her job but it made her even more aware of the suffering of others, and to do something about it.

This heightened sense of community is exactly what is required to beat the virus.

When we look back at the year and look forward to the new post-Covid world, I hope we do not forget this part of the pandemic story.

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Singapore has done exceptionally well to keep infection numbers down, with the Government leading the way, coordinating the work of various agencies and deploying massive resources.

But a critical part of the success story has been how the people respond and behave to keep themselves and others safe.

By and large, Singaporeans have played their part, with many making selfless contributions.

In fact, there are more of these stories out there.

In our search for worthy winners, we came across many other sites with their own collection of everyday heroes, such as on [WAYD](#), [Brqck](#), [Our Better World](#), and individuals doing their own storytelling on Facebook and Instagram, such as Sonny Liew and thewokesalaryman.

They deserve to be read.

In every society, and especially during a crisis, there are people who lead from the front and make things happen, or do exceptional selfless work.

Not everyone can do this.

But, at the minimum, every citizen should take an interest in what is happening around him or her.

This is especially important in a modern urban city state like Singapore where it is so easy to shut yourself off from others and live in your own private world.

I was therefore glad that one of the award winners was a group of journalism students from the Nanyang Technological University's Wee Kim Wee School of Communications and Information.

The school has an annual programme in which students do fieldwork in another country, reporting on a topic there that is of interest to Singaporeans.

Over the years, they have been to Nepal, Iran, Japan and Estonia, among others.

With borders closed last year, they were forced to do their Go-Far (Going Far for Advanced Reporting) project in Singapore and chose to report on how migrant workers were coping here.

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They did an outstanding job with their stories, many of which have been republished in this newspaper.

Through their reporting, these young students discovered another world here that had remained largely invisible to them.

As one of them, Tan Nai Lun, wrote: "Some days I'll head to an assignment telling friends, 'I'm going to Myanmar today'. Or I'd announce with a laugh: 'I'll be in Thailand until 4pm before heading to India for the evening.'

"Who knew tiny Singapore possessed locations so remote that going there could feel like visiting another country."

There is a lot happening in Singapore, all around you, often in your neighbourhood, just outside your door.

You don't have to do the heroic stuff being written about in [sgsoap.sg](#)

But you should get to know the stories unfolding all around you.

They are part of your own story.

• **Han Fook Kwang is also senior fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University.**

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