Singapore, China ink MOU for fourth university

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SINGAPORE has taken a major step towards establishing a unique three-way partnership with the US and China as part of plans to build a fourth publicly funded university here.

The first piece of the jigsaw was put in place last night when Singapore and China signed an agreement under which the new university will work hand-in-hand with a top Chinese varsity.

During a short ceremony at St Regis Hotel, Singapore's Education Minister Ng Eng Hen and his Chinese counterpart Zhou Ji signed a revised memorandum of understanding — 10 years after the first MOU was signed — that will expand the education co-operation partnership between the two countries.

The agreement was witnessed by China's state councillor Liu Yandong. The two Chinese leaders are accompanied by a delegation for a four-day working visit to Singapore, which ends on Sunday.

Singapore will open its much-awaited, yet-to-be-named, publicly funded varsity in 2011 and will admit 500 students in the first intake. Classes will be held on a temporary campus first while a permanent home at Changi is being built by 2013.

With China already locked in as a key partner, what is pending is confirmation that the US will officially come on board to help run the new institution.

Speaking to reporters after the MOU was signed yesterday, Dr Ng said the government is evaluating proposals from several leading US universities and will decide within two months.

The US and China were chosen as partners because Singapore wants its new university to "have the best possible start" and be well-positioned for the future, said Dr Ng.

"We see China rising in science and technological capability prowess, and the US will continue to be a dominant player in these fields," he said. "This, to us, was the best possible linkage, and why we want a Singapore-China-US partnership."

Besides strengthening the university sector, the MOU will strengthen the working relationship between Singapore and China in areas such as school twinning programmes, scholar, teacher, and student exchanges and professional sharing conferences and seminars.

A joint working group, to be co-chaired by senior officials from the Singapore and Chinese education ministries, will be set up to review and monitor the progress of the collaboration under the MOU.

In what was a packed schedule yesterday, Mdm Liu and Mr Zhou called on Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean, and visited Yale's Institution, the National University of Singapore and the Confucius Institute at Nanyang Technological University.