

Singapore independence day

New attractions burnish appeal of the city-state

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AMBASSADOR OF SINGAPORE

Singapore became independent 45 years ago on Aug. 9, 1965. From humble beginnings, Singapore overcame many adversities to transform itself into a modern and bustling city-state.



Later this month, from Aug. 14 to 26, Singapore will host the inaugural Youth Olympic Games (YOG). More than 5,000 young athletes and officials, including a 100-strong Japanese contingent, will compete and inspire us with their talent, determination and spirit of sportsmanship.

International events like the YOG make Singapore the dynamic city that it is today.

Singapore is also one of the world's most open economies. Our strategic location has allowed us to ride on Asia's fast growth.

In the first half of 2010, our manufacturing, services and construction sectors registered double-digit expansion from a year ago. Singapore's gross do-

mestic product (GDP) is forecast to grow by 13 percent to 15 percent this year.

For growth to be sustainable, the Economic Strategies Committee set up last year by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong recommended that Singapore upgrade its productivity, expand into new growth areas and enhance the quality of life for the nearly 5 million Singaporeans and foreigners who live, work, study and raise their families in the country.

In 2011, we look forward to the opening of a new International Cruise Terminal that will strengthen Singapore's position as the cruise hub of Asia; and Gardens by the Bay, which will offer a unique botanical experience in the new downtown Marina district.

These attractions, together with the opening of the iconic Marina Bay Sands and Resorts World Sentosa earlier this year, will burnish Singapore's appeal as one of the world's most livable cities.

As Singapore continues to develop, we have not neglected our bilateral relationships with our close partners like Japan.

This past year has been fruitful for Singapore-Japan rela-

tions. Japan's importance to Singapore was reaffirmed by the visit of Prime Minister Lee in October 2009.

Then Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama visited Singapore a month later for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit. He and Prime Minister Lee also launched the Japan Creative Centre, which showcases Japan's innovative technology and rich cultural heritage.

This exchange of high-level visits follows the historic State Visits by Their Majesties the Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko to Singapore in June 2006, and President and Mrs. S R Nathan to Japan in May 2009.

Singapore is currently working closely with Japan, who will chair the APEC Summit from Nov. 13 to 14 in Yokohama, to promote inclusive, sustainable and balanced growth in the Asia-Pacific region.

Our close cooperation extends to other regional forums such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit (EAS) and Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Singapore and Japan will also be provid-

ing technical assistance to Afghanistan in anticorruption and public governance under the Japan-Singapore Partnership Program for the 21st century.

Our economic ties have deepened since the Japan-Singapore Economic Agreement for a New Age Partnership entered into force in November 2002.

Japan is Singapore's sixth-largest trading partner with 45 billion Singapore dollars' worth of bilateral trade in 2009. Japan is also Singapore's top Asian investor with a cumulative direct investment of S\$48.8 billion as of 2008.

Japan remains a very popular tourist destination, with close to 145,200 Singaporeans visiting in 2009. About half a million Japanese also visited Singapore last year. With the introduction of two daily flights by Singapore Airlines from Haneda International Airport in Tokyo to Singapore from Oct. 31, I am confident that our people-to-people links will become even closer.

On this special occasion, it is my sincere hope that the excellent relationship between Singapore and Japan will continue to strengthen for the mutual benefit of our countries.