

Singapore national day

Actively reciprocating Japan's friendship

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AMBASSADOR OF SINGAPORE

Japan was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic ties with Singapore following our independence on Aug. 9, 1965. Singapore would not be the country that it is today without the aid and investments of our close friends like Japan during the early years of our nationhood.



When the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck on March 11, Singaporeans were shocked by the widespread destruction and loss of lives. At the same time, the stoic resilience and courage of the Japanese people left a deep impression on us. We also felt that we had a responsibility to help where we could, to reciprocate Japan's long-standing friendship.

At Japan's request, a team of search specialists and tracker dogs were deployed a day after the tragedies in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, some 40 km away from the Fukushima nuclear power facility. Singapore also promptly dispatched emergency humanitarian supplies.

At home, Singaporeans have donated more than \$28 million toward Japan's reconstruction efforts. We are currently working with various ministries, and Iwate prefectural and municipal governments on the construction of a temporary care center in Miyako and a multipurpose hall in Rikuzentakata. We are also discussing projects with Miyagi Prefecture.

Here in Japan, the Singapore community is actively doing its part. Last month, a group of 32 Singaporeans and Japanese went to Miyako on an embassy-organized volunteer relief mission. The community and major Singapore corporations, such as Ascendas, CapitaLand, DBS Bank, GIC (Government of Singapore Investment Corp.), Singapore Airlines, the Singapore Exchange and United Overseas Bank, have raised more than \$38,000 in support of Project Merlion, a Singapore Association in Japan initiative to purchase relief vehicles for Rikuzentakata.

This past year, our ties have grown closer. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong visited Yokohama in November 2010 for the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting. In June 2011, in testament to our excellent bilateral ties, Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong

received the prestigious Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun from His Imperial Majesty Emperor Akihito.

Our two countries continue to share strong mutual interests and a common strategic outlook in various regional and multilateral forums. During Japan's successful chairmanship of APEC last year, we worked closely to promote greater trade liberalization in line with our vision for a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) and the adoption of an APEC Leaders' Growth Strategy. Singapore is also working with Japan on important initiatives such as the ASEAN Connectivity Plan and a new ASEAN-Japan Declaration and Plan of Action.

Bilaterally, we have collaborated to assist other countries. In July, for instance, Singapore and Japan collaborated to provide joint technical assistance to Afghanistan in public governance under the Japan-Singapore Partnership Program for the 21st Century (JSPP21).

I am especially gratified that our economic ties have deepened. The Japan-Singapore New-Age Economic Partnership Agreement (JSEPA), which entered into force in November 2002 and was revised in 2007, has created new opportunities for busi-

nesses and enhanced the attractiveness of both markets. Japanese companies in Singapore have also benefited from the concessions provided by Singapore's free trade agreements with other major economies, including the United States, China and India.

In 2010, total trade between Singapore and Japan increased 23.7 percent from \$37.2 billion in 2009 to \$46 billion. In the same period, Singapore's investment in Japan doubled to about \$1.5 billion. At the same time, Japan is one of the top Asian investors in Singapore, with a cumulative direct investment of \$42 billion. Singapore is Japan's third largest investment destination, after China and India.

The opening of Haneda airport's new international terminal in October 2010, with new daily flights between Tokyo and Singapore, has further enhanced our people-to-people linkages. Last year, 528,800 Japanese visited Singapore, a 7 percent increase year-on-year. For outbound travel, 180,900 Singaporeans visited Japan in 2010, an increase of 24.6 percent from 2009.

I am confident that Singapore's long-standing friendship and multifaceted cooperation with Japan will grow from strength to strength.