

Singapore National Day Special

Continued strong cooperation amid pandemic

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AMBASSADOR OF SINGAPORE



Aug. 9 marks the 55th anniversary of Singapore's independence. On this occasion, I am pleased to convey warm greetings from Singapore for the good health and prosperity of their majesties the

emperor and empress, the Japanese government and people of Japan.

2020 has been a challenging year for the world due to the coronavirus outbreak. The Singaporean government made its best efforts to bring the infection situation under control and kept fatalities low. Singapore is now cautiously resuming social activities and progressively reviving the economy. With a renewed mandate from the recent general election, the government will continue tackling the challenges ahead.

Amid this period of global turbulence, I am heartened that the long-standing and

steadfast relationship between Singapore and Japan has been a source of succor. Both countries reaffirmed commitments to upholding a rules-based international trading system and maintaining supply chain connectivity through the Joint Statement on Facilitating Resilient Economic Activities for Combating the COVID-19 Pandemic in May. Furthermore, Singapore and Japan are working closely to promote vaccine multilateralism in our common fight against the coronavirus.

More broadly, Singapore and Japan have enjoyed decades of excellent relations, underpinned by frequent high-level exchanges, strong economic links and close social ties. President Halimah Yacob met Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during her visit to Japan for the enthronement ceremony of the emperor in October. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and many of our ministers visited Japan in 2019 for Group of 20-related meetings, to which Singapore was honored to have been invited. Even with travel restrictions in place, our ministers have maintained regular contact via videoconferences and telephone calls.

Our economic ties are robust. Japan is Singapore's seventh-largest trading partner and third-largest foreign investor, while Singapore is Japan's top Asian and fourth-largest investor. The Japan-Singapore economic partnership agreement signed in 2002 was Japan's first-ever free trade agreement and Singapore's first with a major trading partner. We are also close partners in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and are working toward signing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership this year.

Notwithstanding the uncertainties of the coronavirus, Singaporean companies remain confident in the Japanese market and have advanced with their expansion plans in Japan. These include Ya Kun Kaya Toast, and Far East Hotel, which set up their presence in Tokyo on July 1. There are also more than 5,000 Japanese businesses registered in Singapore, including retailer Don Quijote's first Asian store outside Japan. Singapore welcomes the Japanese government's recent announcement on commencing reciprocal green lane discussions with Singapore — an important and positive step toward



President Halimah Yacob with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Akasaka State Guest House in October 2019 MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION, SINGAPORE

restoring connectivity and essential travel between our countries.

Our strong people-to-people ties are anchored by our relationships with various Japanese prefectures. Last October, we organized the inaugural Singapore Fair in the city of Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, which contributed to forging new bonds between our people. I am confident that exchanges will rebound as travel restrictions are eased.

On the regional front, Japan is a valued



Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong speaks at the Special ASEAN Plus Three Summit on the coronavirus in April. MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION, SINGAPORE

partner and one of the Association of South-east Asian Nation's long-standing and most active dialogue partners. Our multifaceted cooperation encompasses not only economic interactions, but also new areas such as air connectivity, cybersecurity and smart cities. Amid the coronavirus pandemic, Japan emerged a strong supporter of the establishment of the ASEAN Center for Infectious Diseases. Japan also committed to helping ASEAN build up economic resilience in response to the coronavirus through a joint statement by the Economic Ministers in April.

The future holds significant potential for Singapore and Japan to enhance our part-

nership, given our shared interest in areas such as digital economy, infrastructure cooperation, aging population, innovation and smart cities. Regionally and beyond, Singapore has also been a gateway for many Japanese corporations to ASEAN, and there are good opportunities for Singapore and Japanese companies to collaborate on projects in developing countries. I look forward to an era of enhanced cooperation and deeper friendship in the years to come.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.