

# Singapore National Day Special

## Long-standing friendship continues to grow

PETER TAN  
AMBASSADOR OF SINGAPORE



Aug. 9 marks the 56th anniversary of Singapore's independence. On this occasion, allow me to convey warmest greetings from Singapore for the good health and prosperity of their majesties the emperor and empress, the Japanese government and the people of Japan.

2021 brought both progress and challenges in the fight against COVID-19. The international rollout of vaccines marked an important step toward a return to some form of normalcy. Singapore is on track to achieving our target of fully vaccinating two-thirds of the population by our National Day. We have also laid out a road map for living with COVID-19, and are working toward resuming social activities and progressively achieving economic recovery. At the same

time, the emergence of new, more virulent variants has resulted in a resurgence of infections in various parts of the world.

Amid this global uncertainty, I am heartened that the long-standing and steadfast friendship between Singapore and Japan continues to strengthen. As we mark the 55th anniversary of diplomatic relations this year, our countries have worked closely together to support vaccine multilateralism initiatives such as COVAX, and are discussing how to support the post-COVID-19 recoveries of our economies, including through the recognition of health certificates.

More broadly, Singapore and Japan have enjoyed decades of excellent relations. Even with travel restrictions in place, our leaders have maintained regular contact. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong spoke to Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga on the phone in October 2020 and May 2021. Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi made his introductory visit to Singapore in August 2020, the first ministerial-level visit from Japan to Singapore since the COVID-19 outbreak began, while administrative reform min-

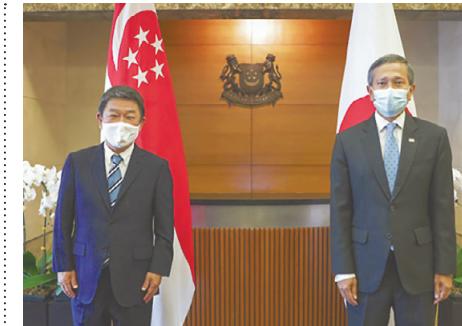
ister Taro Kono visited in December 2020. Most recently, Speaker of Parliament and President of the Singapore National Olympic Council Tan Chuan-Jin, and Minister for Culture, Community and Youth and Second Minister for Law Edwin Tong visited Japan for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games.

Our economic ties are robust. Japan is Singapore's sixth-largest trading partner and third-largest foreign investor, while Singapore is Japan's top Asian and fourth-largest investor. The 2002 Japan-Singapore economic partnership agreement was Japan's first-ever free trade agreement and Singapore's first with a major trading partner. In March this year, Singapore's Infrastructure Asia and Japan's Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Ministry signed a memorandum of understanding to promote cooperation between our companies on regional infrastructure projects. In July, Singapore's Ministry of Communications and Information signed a memorandum of cooperation with Japan's Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry on the digital economy. We are also close partners in

the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

There are more than 5,000 Japanese businesses registered in Singapore, and their continued investments demonstrate their confidence in our value proposition. For instance, bicycle parts-maker Shimano Inc. is investing ¥20 billion in a new plant in Singapore. Singapore companies, too, remain confident in the Japanese market and have pressed on with their expansion plans here. These include the listing of OmniPlus System Ltd. on the Tokyo Stock Exchange, the first Singaporean company to do so, and the opening of The Ascott Ltd.'s new development in Tenjin, Fukuoka.

Our close people-to-people ties are exemplified by the warm hospitality shown by the host towns to Singapore's Olympians. Our table-tennis team had the pleasure of conducting its pre-Games training in Shima, Shizuoka Prefecture, while Singapore's Olympians and Paralympians will conduct virtual interactions with the people of Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, after the Paralympic Games. While the resumption of



Left: Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan poses with visiting Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi on Aug. 13, 2020, in Singapore. Right: The Supertree Grove at Singapore's nature park Gardens by the Bay MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, SINGAPORE



tourism is still some way away, I am confident that such exchanges will rebound once travel restrictions are eased.

On the regional front, Japan continues to be one of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' long-standing, valued and most active dialogue partners. Amid COVID-19, Japan emerged as a strong supporter of the establishment of the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases. Japan also approved and ratified the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership in June. We welcome Japan's proactive role in the region, including its engagement of Southeast Asia and contributions to regional peace,

prosperity and stability. I believe that the future holds significant potential for Singapore and Japan to enhance cooperation in shared interests like innovation, the digital economy and mitigating climate change. As we look toward the "new normal" of living with COVID-19, the strong bilateral relationship will provide an excellent base for collaboration between our two countries in tackling common challenges.

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