

Singapore independence day

Working together for regional integration

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AMBASSADOR OF SINGAPORE

Today marks the 44th year of Singapore's independence. In 1965, we were confronted with immense challenges. With determination, perseverance, and the support and assistance of friendly countries, including Japan, we overcame the initial troubled years. Today in partnership with Japan and other countries in the region, we are doing our part to contribute to regional political and economic integration.



The global economic downturn is one of the most difficult periods we have faced as a young nation. Like many other countries, our economy has been hit hard. Singapore has responded proactively to manage the recession at home. This January, the government announced an unprecedented \$20.5 billion Singapore dollar Resilience Package aimed at retaining jobs and helping businesses tide over this challenging period. At the same time, we are looking beyond the economic gloom. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong recently established an Economic Strategies Committee to develop strategies for Sin-

gapore to build capabilities and maximize opportunities as a global city in a new world environment, so as to achieve sustained and inclusive growth.

Singapore will continue its plans to develop into an exciting place to work, study, live and play. The city is undergoing an extraordinary transformation as two new integrated resorts are expected to be completed next year. Singapore is also proud to be the host of the world's only night Formula One Grand Prix race in September and the host city for the inaugural Youth Olympic Games in August 2010.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1966, Singapore and Japan share many common strategic, political and economic interests. Our ties have deepened considerably and become broad based. 2009 has been particularly eventful for Singapore-Japan relations.

Bilateral ties reached a new historic milestone when President S.R. Nathan and his wife made a state visit to Japan from May 9 to 16 at the invitation of Their Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the first by a Singapore head of state. This was in reciprocation for the first state visit by a Japanese emperor to Singapore in 2006 on the occasion of our 40th anni-

versary of bilateral relations. Together, these two state visits have consolidated and elevated our bilateral relationship to new heights.

Singapore and Japan understand the importance of maintaining an open and inclusive regional architecture, and have cooperated closely in various regional forums and international organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit (EAS), Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the United Nations and the World Trade Organization.

As the current chair of APEC, Singapore looks forward to hosting the APEC Leaders Week from Nov. 8 to 15, and working closely with Japan, which will be the next APEC Chair. At the same time, our two countries are cooperating closely with other like-minded countries to address serious challenges such as climate change and pandemic diseases. We have also capitalized on each other's strengths to invest in and provide technical assistance to third countries under the framework of the Japan-Singapore Partnership Program for the 21st Century (JSPP21).

Economic linkages between Singapore and Japan have strengthened since the signing of the Japan-Singapore Economic Agreement for a New Age Partnership (JSEPA), which entered into force in November 2002 and was subsequently revised in 2007. In 2008, Japan was Singapore's sixth-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade totaling \$560.1 billion.

Our people-to-people ties have strengthened over the years. Japan is a very popular tourist destination, with close to 168,000 Singaporeans visiting Japan in 2008. Singapore, for its part, welcomed more than 570,000 Japanese visitors last year.

In the latter part of this year, we look forward to the establishment of the Japan Creative Center (JCC) in Singapore which seeks to promote greater understanding of Japanese culture through the provision of information, educational services, and various programs to Singaporeans and other nationalities who reside in Singapore, or visit as transit or business travelers.

Singapore is committed to working closely with Japan to strengthen bilateral cooperation, and promote regional peace and prosperity. I am confident that our bilateral relations will continue to grow and reach new heights.