

Singapore national day

Close cooperation continues to blossom

Chin Siat Yoon
AMBASSADOR OF SINGAPORE

Singapore is celebrating 47 years of independence today, Aug. 9.

I remember the early years: it was a very tough time. As a small country with no natural resources, we could only depend on our strategic location and wit to develop Singapore. The withdrawal by Britain of its forces from east of the Suez Canal starting in 1971 added to our multitude of challenges. We are what we are today, a prosperous, bustling and modern, garden city-state not by chance, but by good leadership, determination and hard work. The support of friends like Japan has been crucial. Japan was among the first foreign countries to invest heavily in Singapore. Japan's contributions helped to lay the foundation of our subsequent industrialization and development.

I assumed the post as Singapore's ambassador to Japan in April this year. It is an honor and privilege for me to serve in this



great country. Before this, I had served successively as Singapore's ambassador to Thailand, Germany and China. Since presenting my credentials to His Imperial Majesty Emperor Akihito, I have met many Japanese leaders, officials and businessmen. From my conversations with them, it is clear that Singapore and Japan share many common strategic, political and economic interests. Our bilateral relations are in good shape.

A week after my arrival in Tokyo, I visited Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, and Soma, Fukushima Prefecture, to pay my respects to the victims of the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami, which devastated both cities. In the aftermath of the March 11 disasters, there was a spontaneous outpouring of sympathy among many Singaporeans. We collected more than ¥2.2 billion (35 million Singapore dollars) in donations — one of the largest amounts ever raised by Singaporeans for any foreign country struck by natural disasters. The donations have since been channeled to several reconstruction projects in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures.

Over the past year, our political relations have strengthened through a flurry of high-level exchanges between our two countries. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda met in Honolulu last November on the sidelines of the APEC Summit. Trade minister Yukio Edano and Foreign Minister Koichiro Genba visited Singapore not long after they took up their respective posts last September and October. Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's former prime minister, also visited Tokyo in May this year to attend the Nikkei International Conference on The Future of Asia, and met up with many of his old friends.

In June this year, Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs K. Shanmugam made his introductory visit to Japan where he announced that both sides would conduct the third review of the Japan-Singapore Economic Partnership Agreement (JSEPA) first signed in November 2002. He also reiterated Singapore's strong support for Japan's participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

Our close cooperation also

extends to various regional and multilateral forums such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and East Asia Summit (EAS). We have also capitalized on each other's strengths to provide technical assistance to third countries under the framework of the Japan-Singapore Partnership Program for the 21st Century (JSPP21).

The economic linkages between Singapore and Japan are robust. Singapore is the largest Asian investor in Japan, while Japan remains one of Singapore's top foreign investors. Japan is also a popular tourist destination for many Singaporeans. In recent years, a growing number of Japanese travelers have visited Singapore. I hope that more will come to experience our vibrant, multiethnic lifestyle. Among our various new attractions, the two integrated resorts have been a big draw. To these, we have now just added the Gardens by the Bay.

On this auspicious day, I wish to re-emphasize Singapore's commitment to work closely with Japan to further strengthen our bilateral ties, and promote peace and prosperity in the region.