

Singapore national day

Celebrating 50 years of independence and progress

Chin Siat Yoon
AMBASSADOR OF SINGAPORE

Aug. 9 this year marks the 50th anniversary of Singapore's independence. Turning a half-century old is a major milestone for our young nation. Singapore's progress to date would not have been possible without the



goodwill and assistance of many friendly countries, including Japan. Japan has contributed significantly to Singapore's nation building since our independence in 1965. Japan, in particular, was one of the first countries to invest heavily in Singapore. Japanese companies brought not only badly needed jobs, but also technology and standards of excellence in planning, efficiency and quality. This helped lay the foundation for

Singapore's subsequent industrialization and development. Singapore's founding father and first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, who passed away earlier this year, was a key proponent for maintaining good bilateral relations with Japan, and made regular annual visits even in his twilight years. Former Prime Minister Lee was instrumental in building Singapore into the country we are today. Singapore deeply appreciates Prime Minister Shinzo

Abe taking the time from his busy schedule to attend former Prime Minister Lee's state funeral in Singapore. We are also touched by the kind messages of condolence from our many other Japanese friends on his passing.

I am happy to report that bilateral relations between Singapore and Japan continue to grow from strength to strength. Total bilateral trade between our countries in 2014 was 46.7 billion Singapore dollars. At the

end of 2014, there were more than 4,000 Japanese companies registered in Singapore. Economic ties are aided in no small way by the Japan-Singapore Economic Partnership Agreement (JSEPA), of which a third review, backed by our leaders, is ongoing. We look forward to its early conclusion. People-to-people ties are also robust. Singaporeans' interest in Japan and their fascination for all things Japanese are strong. Tourism is booming, with

228,000 Singaporeans visiting Japan in 2014, a 20.4 percent increase from the year before. This year also saw the completion of Singapore's fourth and largest reconstruction project in Japan's earthquake and tsunami-devastated Tohoku region — a community hall in Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture. Singapore's Foreign Minister K. Shanmugam presided over the opening ceremony of the community hall in March. Singapore hopes that our modest contribution will, in some small way, help in the overall recovery of the region.

We are delighted to be able to mark our jubilee year by achieving our first-ever entry on the UNESCO World Heritage site list. The Singapore Botanic Gardens was recognized as being a UNESCO World Heritage site at the 39th session of the World Heritage Committee on July 4. With more than 150 years of history, the 74-hectare gardens hold a unique and significant place in the history of Singapore and the region. The gardens are the first and only tropical botanic garden on the UNESCO's World Heritage list. It is the first in Asia and the third botanic gardens in the world to be included, following Orto botanico di Padova in Italy and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in the United Kingdom.

Singapore and Japan will

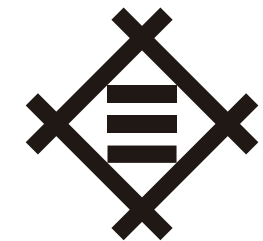
celebrate our 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations next year. This important occasion should be marked with celebrations befitting the strong bonds between Singapore and

Japan. I am confident that our two countries can continue to achieve more together as we look forward to many more years of friendship and cooperation to come.



Left: People enjoy a performance in the Singapore Botanical Gardens. Above: The Singapore Merlion overlooks the iconic Marina Bay Sands. COURTESY OF SINGAPORE BOTANICAL GARDENS, SINGAPORE TOURISM BOARD

**Congratulations
to the People of
the Republic of Singapore
on the 50th Anniversary
of Their Independence**



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