

Singapore National Day Special

Robust ties see potential for further collaboration

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AMBASSADOR OF SINGAPORE



The date Aug. 9, 2019, marks the 54th anniversary of Singapore's independence. On this occasion, I am pleased to convey my 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.

This year is particularly significant for both Singapore and Japan. In Singapore, we are celebrating our bicentennial that marks the 200th anniversary of the founding of modern Singapore. Here in Japan, I am privileged to have witnessed firsthand the momentous and joyous transition from the Heisei Era to the Reiwa Era. I am confident that the friendship between our countries will continue to blossom and flourish in this new era.

Singapore and Japan have enjoyed decades of excellent relations. Japan was one of the first countries to recognize Singapore's independence. Our economic development and progress since would not have been possible without Japan's support, particularly in terms of trade, investment and technology.

Relations between Singapore and Japan are underpinned by shared strategic interests, frequent high-level exchanges, strong economic links and close people-to-people ties. Singapore is honored to have been invited to the Group of 20 meetings hosted by Japan this year, including the Osaka summit. We will continue to support and contribute to Japan's G20 presidency, including its efforts to strengthen the multilateral trading system and develop new digital trade rules through the Osaka Track for Data Governance and its Data Free Flow with Trust initiative.

Our economic ties are robust. We are both members of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and working actively to conclude the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. In 2002, the Japan-Singapore Economic

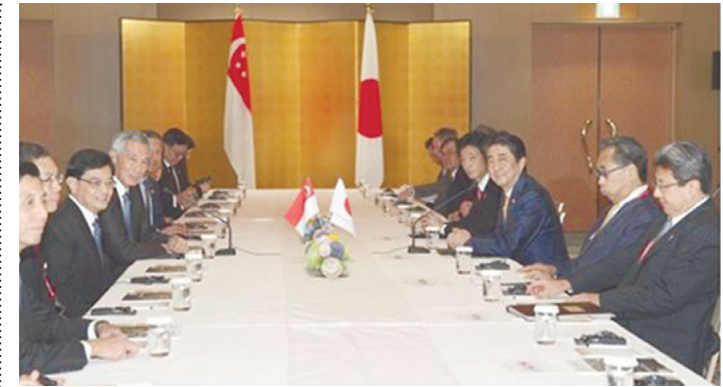


Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Tokyo in May
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Partnership Agreement (JSEPA) entered into force. It was Japan's first free trade agreement and Singapore's first with a major trading partner. JSEPA has paved the way for Japan to become our eighth-largest trading partner and third-largest foreign investor. Today, there are more than 5,000 Japanese businesses registered in Singapore, including retailer Don Quijote's first Asian store outside of Japan. Our newest icon, Jewel

Changi Airport, was built by Obayashi Corp. and one of its highlights is an indoor garden called the Shiseido Forest Valley. Likewise, Singapore is Japan's top Asian and fourth-largest investor. Of note, a consortium that includes Singaporean company Changi Airports International took over the operations of Fukuoka Airport under a 30-year concession as of April. The future for our economic partnership is very promising.

Our people-to-people ties continue to flourish. In 2018, more than 430,000 Singaporeans — or one in nine Singaporeans — visited Japan, while Singapore received more than 820,000 Japanese visitors. This brings two-way travel to more than 1.2 million visitors annually, a figure that has risen steadily and which needs to be supported by enhanced air connectivity between our two countries. Our people-to-people ties are also anchored by the numerous Singapore friendship associations and partnerships established across Japan. This year, we will have an inaugural Singapore Festival in the city of Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, in October! Such exchanges will help deepen mutual understanding and forge



Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (left, center) and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (right, center) at a discussion of the sidelines of the Group of 20 Summit in Osaka in June
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new bonds between our people.

On the regional front, Japan has continued to support the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' development as one of our oldest and most active dialogue partners. ASEAN-Japan relations are deep and multifaceted, with promising new areas of cooperation such as air connectivity, cybersecurity and smart cities. We welcome Japan's proactive role in the region, its engagement of Southeast Asia and its contributions to regional peace, prosperity and stability.

Looking ahead, there remains significant potential for Singapore and Japan to further enhance our cooperation. For example, we can leverage our respective Infrastructure

Asia and Partnership for Quality Infrastructure initiatives to address the vast infrastructure needs across the region. There is certainly scope for more infrastructure collaborations in developing countries. We should similarly capitalize on synergies between Singapore's Smart Nation and Japan's Society 5.0 initiatives, and the ASEAN Smart Cities Network to address digital and technological needs. With abundant possibilities for closer cooperation, I am confident that our two countries can usher in an era of greater 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.