



**SPEECH BY
HIS EXCELLENCY
THE PRESIDENT OF
THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE
AT THE STATE BANQUET
HOSTED BY
THEIR MAJESTIES
THE EMPEROR AND EMPRESS OF JAPAN**

**IMPERIAL PALACE
TOKYO, 11 MAY 2009**

Your Majesties,

On behalf of the people of Singapore, I would like to offer my heartfelt congratulations to Your Majesties on the fiftieth anniversary of Your wedding and the twentieth anniversary this year of Your accession to the throne. Over the last 50 years, Your Majesties have presided over the most remarkable period in Japan's history, a half century of peace and stability, of economic prosperity and of national rejuvenation.

My wife and I are most delighted to be in Japan. We have fond memories of our last meeting during Your Majesties' historic State Visit to Singapore in June 2006. That visit was a milestone in the history of our countries' bilateral relations. We are honoured today to be in this beautiful country as Your Majesties' State Guests.

Your Majesties,

This year marks the 43rd Anniversary of the establishment of our bilateral relations, post Singapore's independence. But the history of our longstanding and multi-faceted relations dates back to the mid-19th century when Yamamoto Otokichi arrived in Singapore in the late 1840s as a merchant, and he remained until his death in 1867 in Singapore. His simple story encapsulates the fascinating history shared between our two countries.

Of course, our relations have transformed significantly since Otokichi's era. We appreciate Japan for being one of the first countries to recognise Singapore's independence in 1966. Our relations have now broadened and deepened considerably, underpinned by our common strategic, political and economic interests.

We share an interest in maintaining an open and inclusive regional architecture and support the continued US presence in the Asia-Pacific. We work closely in many regional and international issues. We are partners in addressing many non-traditional challenges, such as climate change and pandemic diseases. Singapore has been supportive of Japan's efforts to secure a rightful place in world affairs.

Japan and Japanese companies have been pivotal to Singapore's economic development. Japanese companies brought with them to Singapore not just employment opportunities but more importantly, know-how and a work ethic with a strong productivity consciousness that was worth emulating. This had a long-lasting positive impact on Singapore's industrial development.

Today, the synergies we enjoy have developed beyond and are different but stronger, anchored by the Japan-Singapore Economic Agreement for a New Age Partnership. The nature of economic activities by Japanese companies has also become more diversified and higher-end, such as research and development, biomedical sciences, and water technology. Japan is now Singapore's sixth largest trading partner and the largest Asian investor into Singapore. We look forward to this partnership growing even stronger in the days ahead.

Our people-to-people ties have also strengthened over the years. Since the 1950s, more than 1,000 Singaporean students have graduated from Japanese universities. In addition, officers from our Singapore Armed Forces enrol at Japan's National Defence Academy every year. In Singapore, many Singaporeans have learnt to speak "*nihon-go*" (the Japanese language).

Our National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University have also concluded exchange agreements with various Japanese Universities such as Tokyo, Waseda and Keio University. The National University of Singapore also has a long-standing cooperative relationship with Nagasaki University. The two institutions jointly organise the Nagasaki-Singapore Medical Symposium on Infectious Diseases, which has been held nine times since its inception in 1984. The importance of such linkages should not be underestimated. It reflects a continuity of common purpose over time, and takes on new relevance when we have to tackle global infectious diseases together.

Furthermore, Japan remains a very popular destination for Singaporeans, with a record number of more than 160,000 Singaporeans visiting Japan in 2008. Singapore, on its part, received about 600,000 Japanese visitors last year. Singapore's Japanese expatriate community has also been growing, numbering over 23,000 in 2008.

Singapore also enjoys good ties with different prefectures in Japan. This has been spurred by direct air services between Singapore and major Japanese cities beyond Tokyo to places like Osaka, Nagoya and Fukuoka. Increased connectivity will allow more Singaporeans to get

to know other Japanese cities as well. Already, various Singapore-Japan friendship associations, such as those in Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Kagoshima, Hamamatsu and Hakodate and Fukuoka, have sprung up and actively promoting economic, intellectual and social exchanges. I look forward to visiting Kyoto and Hiroshima later this week to further strengthen our friendly relations with Japan at all levels.

Your Majesties,

I would like to express our appreciation for Japan's deep and enduring friendship and support through the last four decades. Singapore is committed to working closely with Japan to strengthen bilateral cooperation and to promote regional peace and stability. I am confident that with Your Majesties' benevolence and strong interest, the relations between Singapore and Japan will continue to grow and reach new heights.

Thank You, Your Majesties.