

REMARKS BY
DR TONY TAN KENG YAM
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE
AT THE STATE BANQUET HOSTED BY
HIS MAJESTY EMPEROR AKIHITO
JAPAN

30 NOVEMBER 2016

Your Majesties, Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko

Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honoured to be making a State Visit to Japan during this momentous year for the bilateral relations between Singapore and Japan. 2016 marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries, or SJ50 in short. On behalf of my wife and the Singapore delegation, I would like to thank Your Majesties for the warm welcome and gracious hospitality that have been accorded to us.

I would also like to extend my good wishes to Prince Akishino, whom I understand is celebrating his 51st birthday today. Happy Birthday.

Singapore and Japan enjoy a close and enduring friendship. Just five years after our independence in 1965, Your Majesties visited Singapore in your capacities as then-Crown Prince and Princess. You would be happy to know that the two King Sago palms you planted in Singapore's Japanese Garden during that visit have grown beautifully.

Much like the palm trees, Singapore-Japan relations have blossomed and strengthened over the past 50 years. There have been frequent exchanges between the leaders of both countries since the time of Singapore's first Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew, which have built up a high level of familiarity and trust between our governments. Singapore and Japan share many

common interests and work closely together in regional and multilateral fora to address issues of mutual interest and to tackle shared challenges. Beyond our bilateral partnership, Singapore and Japan are working together to provide technical assistance to third countries through the Japan-Singapore Partnership Programme for the 21st Century.

Our robust economic cooperation is another key pillar of our close friendship, underpinned by the Japan-Singapore Economic Partnership Agreement (JSEPA) which came into force in 2002. The JSEPA was Japan's first bilateral Free Trade Agreement and Singapore's first with a major trading partner. Japanese companies have a longstanding and established presence in Singapore. Just a few weeks ago, I attended the Orchard Road "Christmas Light-Up", an annual event in which one of Singapore's busiest shopping streets was transformed into a dazzling display of lights and decorations. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that this event has been sponsored by Hitachi over the past 26 years! This is testament to the strong relationship Singapore has with Hitachi, as well as the rest of about 5,000 Japanese companies registered in Singapore. It is no surprise that Japan is Singapore's second largest foreign investor while Singapore is Japan's largest Asian investor.

Beyond our close political and economic ties, it is heartening to note that people-to-people ties between our two countries are robust and growing. Two-way tourism numbers reached over a million last year. There has been a wealth of cultural events commemorating SJ50 both in Singapore and Japan, which go towards deepening the understanding and appreciation of each other's traditions and history. The bond between our peoples was most evident in the aftermath of the Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami in 2011. In a show of support and solidarity for Japan, Singaporeans contributed over S\$35.7 million, or about 2.9 billion yen, in one of the largest ground-up

fundraising campaigns in Singapore to help those affected. I will be visiting Miyagi Prefecture in a few days' time, where the funds raised in 2011 have partly gone towards the reconstruction and revitalisation of the region, including the reconstruction of the Toyama Nursery School which I would be visiting. We hope that these projects contribute to the region's capacity to respond to future incidents. Last week's earthquake, which thankfully did minimal damage, was a stark reminder of the importance of being prepared.

As Singapore and Japan celebrate 50 years of friendship, I am pleased to see opportunities for even closer collaboration between our peoples. During my visit, I will witness with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the exchange and signing of several agreements, including educational exchanges and research cooperation between Singapore and Japanese universities. These agreements will bring together our best and brightest to learn from each other, building lasting friendships between our younger generations.

Your Majesties

Ladies and Gentlemen

On the important occasion of the 50th anniversary of the bilateral relations between Singapore and Japan, we can reflect with great pride and satisfaction over what our two countries have accomplished together over the past half century. I am confident that we can continue to achieve more together as we look forward to many more years of friendship and cooperation.

I now invite you to join me in a toast:

- To Their Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko
- To the people of Japan
- And the continuing friendship between Singapore and Japan.

Kanpai!

Arigato Gozaimasu!