

Statement by Ambassador Ishikawa Hiroshi at
The Emperor's Birthday Reception 2026

13 February 2026

Your Excellency Dr Tan See Leng, Minister for Manpower and Minister-in-charge of Energy and Science & Technology,
Mr Darryl David, Member of Parliament,
Mr David Hoe, Member of Parliament,
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for joining us this evening at the Emperor's Birthday Reception to celebrate His Majesty the Emperor's 66th birthday.

Looking back over the past year, Japan-Singapore relations have moved forward in meaningful ways. In May, Singapore's People's Action Party led by Prime Minister Lawrence Wong had a landslide victory at the General Election. In October, Japan welcomed its first female Prime Minister, Ms Sanae Takaichi, who secured a mandate of unprecedented scale from the public in last Sunday's election. We look forward to an early meeting between the two leaders to discuss the upgrading of our relationship. In August, Senior Minister Lee Hsien Loong visited Japan to attend the Osaka-Kansai Expo and, in Tokyo, was conferred the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun in recognition of his outstanding contributions to Japan-Singapore relations.

At the Expo, the Singapore Pavilion welcomed more than two million visitors. Among them was Her Imperial Highness Princess Aiko. Curious as to why Princess Aiko chose the Singapore Pavilion, we later learned that it was because, "the Singapore Pavilion was the best prepared and organised." I thought to myself: this is exactly Singapore!

People-to-people exchanges were just as vibrant. May I ask for a show of hands: how many of you visited Japan in the past year? Thank you. Including those who raised their hands, more than seven hundred and twenty thousand Singaporeans visited Japan last year—a new record. I have just one humble request: please venture beyond Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto,

and Niseko. In this regard, I am pleased to share that CNA's "Japan Hour" has recently launched "Cycle around Japan," a series that introduces the charms of regional Japan through bicycle journeys.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year marks a special milestone: the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Singapore and Japan—SJ60. Many commemorative events are forthcoming here in Singapore, including the NHK Symphony Orchestra's SJ60 celebratory concert in April, and the flagship event, "Japan Festival," in November.

On the culinary front, more than ten restaurants are now offering a new take on Lo Hei, the "SJ60 Yu Sheng," featuring Japanese seafood, including Fugu (Pufferfish). From the first of April, Raffles Hotel will serve an "SJ60 Matcha Cocktail," made with Kyoto Uji matcha.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Last April, Ambassador Tommy Koh and I co-edited a book on the story of Japan and Singapore. It appeared on The Straits Times' bestseller list for four consecutive weeks. And the book was also selected as one of the top three titles at the Popular Readers' Choice Awards 2025. This speaks to the strong interest and affection that Singaporeans have for Japan, for which I am deeply grateful.

What, then, truly binds our two nations so closely? I would like to suggest "Three C's" — Common Interests, Collaborative Learning, and Cultivated Trust.

First, Common Interests.

Since independence, Singapore has warmly welcomed Japanese companies as partners in nation-building, and they have positively answered that call. Today, five thousand Japanese companies operate here, employing many Singaporeans and are thriving hand in hand with the local community.

The scope of our common interests continues to expand. In recent years, Japan has been promoting inward foreign direct investment, positioning itself as a leading asset management centre, and nurturing startups. In all these areas, Singapore is an ideal partner. In terms of foreign direct investment into Japan, Singapore ranks by far first among countries in Asia. Japan remains open to further investment. Many local business leaders are also showing keen interest in Japan's stock markets. This is evidenced by the growing participation in the "Japan-Southeast Asia Market Forum" here in Singapore. Singapore's world-class startup ecosystem is another strength. Our two governments have co-hosted pitch events that are already delivering concrete matches between major corporations and startups on both sides.

Second, Collaborative Learning.

There is much Japan can learn from Singapore. Many Japanese visitors are immediately struck by Changi Airport's automated immigration system. Tuas Port and Pasir Panjang Port are also popular destinations for Japanese delegations. Their scale, automation, and efficiency both inspire and challenge Japan to achieve the same capabilities. In social policy, Singapore's 'Skills Future' initiative has been discussed in Japan's Diet as a model worth studying. Furthermore, as Japan increasingly addresses co-existence with foreign nationals, Singapore's extensive experience is valuable. This is why, in January, Minister Kimi Onoda, who oversees this issue, visited Singapore and had a fruitful meeting with today's GOH, Dr Tan See Leng.

Learning flows both ways. Singapore looks to Japan for insights on various areas such as an ageing society, natural disaster management, and nuclear safety, particularly as Singapore considers the introduction of small modular reactors. Culturally, many Singaporeans are drawn to traditional Japanese arts, such as Ikebana (flower arrangement) and Sado (the way of tea), as well as Japanese pop culture, especially anime.

Third, Cultivated Trust.

We live in turbulent times. The unimaginable is becoming reality, and amid such uncertainty, trust matters more than ever. Public opinion surveys consistently show that Japan enjoys strong trust across ASEAN, including here in Singapore. And Singapore, for its part, is undoubtedly a trusted partner for Japan.

Based on this mutual trust, Singapore became Japan's first EPA (Economic Partnership Agreement) partner, and our two countries jointly initiated the CPTPP (Comprehensive Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership).

Trust is also indispensable in frontier technologies. Our two governments have signed memoranda of cooperation in AI, quantum, ICT, clean energy, cyber security and digitalisation, and concrete projects are underway, from submarine cables to AI development and governance. In semiconductors, Rapidus, a Japanese company based in Hokkaido, has formed partnerships with multiple Singaporean companies and institutions. And in space, leading companies from both countries announced a new alliance at the Space Summit in Singapore last week. Multi-laterally, Japan and Singapore are both members of Pax Silica, an initiative launched last December to advance new consensus on economic security among trusted partners.

Trust is equally vital in security cooperation. Last November, Prime Minister Lawrence Wong stated: "Singapore and all Southeast Asian countries support Japan playing a bigger role in our region, including on the security front, because we think that provides for some stability in the region." In this spirit, Japan's Minister of Defense annually participates in the Shangri-La Dialogue and actively engages with regional and international counterparts. At last week's Singapore Airshow, Japanese companies showcased their technologies, and for the first time, our two governments jointly hosted a bilateral workshop on defence technology.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Sixty years ago, Japan and Singapore established diplomatic relations. Since then, we have advanced common interests, engaged in collaborative learning, and fostered cultivated trust. We honour those who built the excellent Japan-Singapore relationship we enjoy today. And we are determined to make this anniversary year a pivotal one in further strengthening our ties for the next generation.

In closing, in view of this special year, I have composed a Chinese poem. I will recite it in Chinese, while the English and Japanese translation will be displayed on the screen.

兰樱交谊六十年
共益双习互信坚
怀想先人流泪汗
誓将世世两花鲜

*English translation, as projected on the screen at the reception:
The Orchid and Sakura welcome their Diamond Jubilee in friendship,
Joined by shared interests and learning, they forged a trust so deep.
Recalling the tears and sweat of those who tilled the soil below,
They vow that both bright blooms endure, in seasons yet to flow.

I thank you for your attention and patience.

Now, following the Singapore National Anthem, I would like to propose a toast to His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Singapore.