

Ten years, over 100 trips and millions of miles

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SINGAPORE has had three prime ministers. As the leaders of a small state in a big world, they had to be equally good at governing Singapore internally and managing Singapore's relations externally.

Mr Lee Hsien Loong has been the Prime Minister of Singapore for 10 years. He has been a good steward of Singapore's national interests.

He has adhered to Mr Lee Kuan Yew's founding principles and consolidated Mr Goh Chok Tong's legacy. The last decade has seen Singapore safe in a troubled world. Its standing has even been enhanced.

Malaysia and Indonesia

PRIME Minister Lee's most important foreign policy achievement is in our relations with Malaysia.

He and the Malaysian Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Razak, enjoy a warm and collegial relationship. They have resolved the long-standing dispute over Malaysian railway land. This has unlocked the door to new areas of cooperation, such as a rail link between Singapore and Johor Baru, joint investments by Temasek and Khazanah in Iskandar Malaysia and Singapore, and the construction of a high-speed railway between Singapore and Kuala Lumpur.

Although there are still some unresolved problems between the two countries, the overall relationship is good. Malaysia is Singapore's largest trading partner. Singapore is Malaysia's largest foreign investor. Singapore is also Malaysia's largest source of tourists.

PM Lee also has a good relationship with Indonesia's President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. When Indonesia was hit by the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, Singapore responded immediately. A large contingent of Bahasa-speaking personnel from the Singapore Armed Forces was the first to arrive in Aceh and Meulaboh to help. In 2005, following the terrorist attack on Bali, PM Lee met President Yudhoyono in Bali, to extend Singapore's support for Indonesia's anti-terrorism efforts.

Dr Yudhoyono has been a good president of Indonesia and a good friend of Singapore. The stability that he has brought to Indonesia has allowed the region to prosper. It has also helped to enhance Asean's credibility.

South-east Asia and Asean

IN THE last decade under PM Lee, Singapore has also devoted time and energy to cultivate our neighbours in South-east Asia.

In particular, he has worked hard to keep our relationship with Brunei special. One new platform is the Young Leaders Programme, through which our young leaders engage Brunei's young leaders.

Proposed by PM Lee in 2012, the initiative is led by Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean and Crown Prince Al-Muhtadee Billah.

As Prime Minister, Mr Lee has also raised relations with Vietnam to that of a "strategic partnership". Singapore is a major trading partner of Vietnam and its third largest investor. Under PM Lee's watch we have also established four Vietnam-Singapore industrial parks.

Singapore has also tried to be helpful to Myanmar. When Myanmar was hit by Cyclone Nargis in 2008, Singapore's then-Foreign Minister George Yeo co-chaired the Asean-United Nations International Pledging Conference in Yangon.

Singapore hosted the Asean Summit in November 2007. It was at this summit that the 10 nations signed the Asean Charter, which came into force in 2008. PM Lee has also worked hard to maintain Asean's unity and neutrality in dealing with the great powers.

US, China, India and others

SINGAPORE'S foreign policy aims to maintain good relations with major powers like the United States, China, India and Japan. Singapore also seeks to have good relations with middle powers like South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Turkey.

Singapore is not an ally of the US but it is a strategic partner. The two countries have very substantive relations in business and trade, defence and security, and culture and education. The 10-year-old US-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (FTA) has also been highly successful.

Singapore's relationship with China is warm, substantive and multi-dimensional. Singapore has two iconic projects in China, namely, the Suzhou Industrial Park and the Tianjin Eco-City. The two nations also signed a free trade agreement in 2008. The Singapore Government has established bilateral councils with seven of China's provinces.

Singapore and India signed the landmark Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement in 2005. Economic ties between the two countries are very substantial, with bilateral trade having reached US\$21 billion (S\$26 billion). Close to a million Indian tourists visited Singapore last year. Apart from economics, the two countries also cooperate in culture, education, law and defence.

PM Lee has visited Japan many times. The Japan-Singapore Economic Agreement for a New Age Partnership signed in January 2002 was a milestone in our economic relations.

Europe

PRIME Minister Lee was educated at Cambridge University in England and at Harvard University in the US. He therefore has an affinity with both Europe and America.

Europe is important to Singapore for economic, political and cultural reasons. Economically, the European Union is one of Singapore's top three trading partners. Singapore and the EU have concluded an FTA and a partnership and cooperation agreement which are currently pending ratification by the member states and the European Parliament.

Taken together, the countries of the EU are also Singapore's largest investors. Apart from the EU, Singapore also has very substantive relations with Switzerland and Norway. In fact, Singapore's first FTA was with the European Free Trade Association, consisting of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

Latin America

LATIN America is a continent with tremendous potential. In 2008, PM Lee visited Peru to attend the Apec (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) Economic Leaders Meeting.

He also went to Brazil, where he witnessed the signing of three agreements. One of Singapore's leading companies, Keppel, has a successful shipyard in Brazil. The Prime Minister also visited Chile, where he witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding on education exchange cooperation.

It may be useful to recall that the Trans-Pacific Partnership began life as a quadrilateral FTA, consisting of Brunei, Chile, New Zealand and Singapore. Of the Latin American countries, the members of the Pacific Alliance, consisting of Mexico, Colombia, Peru and Chile, have the most open economies and most interest in linking up with Asia.

The Middle East

SINGAPORE'S ties with the Middle East go back hundreds of years. In June 2005, Singapore took the initiative to reconnect the two regions by convening the first Asia-Middle East Dialogue.

PM Lee made his first visit to the Middle East in 2006. While he was in Saudi Arabia, it was announced that an FTA would be negotiated between the Gulf Cooperation Council and Singapore. The agreement has since been concluded and is in force. Singapore and Oman have established a long-term strategic relationship. Singapore is also a long-standing friend of Egypt.

UN and the world

SINGAPORE has always played an active role in the United Nations and other international organisations, such as the World Trade Organisation, the International Maritime Organisation, the International Civil Aviation Organisation, the World Intellectual Property Organisation, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

At the UN, Singapore chairs the Forum of Small States and the Global Governance Group (3G). Probably for this reason, and also because of Singapore's status as a financial hub and Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam's leadership role in the International Monetary Fund, Singapore has been invited on many occasions to attend the Group of 20 (G-20) summit.

During the past 10 years, PM Lee has worked tirelessly to promote Singapore's national interests abroad. He has travelled millions of miles, in over 100 trips, to reinforce our old friendships, to make new friends and to harness new opportunities. In his foreign trips, he has sought to engage political leaders, intellectuals, business and the media. He has put across the views of Singapore, Asean and Asia, often reminding the audience of the importance of South-east Asia. Like those of his two predecessors, PM Lee has been a voice of reason in our sometimes irrational world.

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