

7th Meeting of the Singapore-Australia Joint Ministerial Committee, Canberra, Australia, 10 September 2012



Australian and Singapore Ministers at the 7th Singapore - Australia Joint Ministerial Committee Meeting

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Law Mr K Shanmugam, Minister for Trade and Industry Mr Lim Hng Kiang and Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen were in Canberra, Australia, today to attend the 7th Meeting of the Singapore – Australia Joint Ministerial Committee (SAJMC). The Australian side was represented by Minister for Foreign Affairs Bob Carr, Minister for Trade and Competitiveness Craig Emerson and Minister for Defence Stephen Smith.

The six Ministers had a substantive exchange over an informal “Ministers-only” meeting before proceeding for the SAJMC meeting. Minister Shanmugam briefed Foreign Minister Carr and the other Australian Ministers on PM Lee Hsien Loong’s recent visit to China and on the bilateral consultations the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had with their Chinese counterparts. Minister Shanmugam told the Australian Ministers that PM Lee’s visit to China and the bilateral consultations had helped Singapore and China get a better understanding of each other’s perspective.

Minister Shanmugam briefed the Australian Ministers on these perspectives and that

both China and Singapore had, during PM's visit to China, expressed their desire to see issues in the region, including the South China Sea, resolved peacefully.

At the meetings, the Ministers also noted that bilateral relations were strong on all fronts, including in trade and defence, and agreed to continue working closely together. The Ministers agreed that the SAJMC played an important and useful role in fostering greater understanding and cooperation between Australia and Singapore. The Joint Communiqué of the 7th SAJMC meeting is appended below.

The Singapore Ministers met Leader of the Opposition Tony Abbott after the SAJMC meeting, during which they discussed the bilateral relationship and the latest developments in the region.

**MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY
10 SEPTEMBER 2012**



Joint Communique of the Seventh Singapore Australia Joint Ministerial Committee (SAJMC)

§ **Senator the Hon Bob Carr, Minister for Foreign Affairs**

§ **The Hon Stephen Smith MP, Minister for Defence**

§ **The Hon Dr Craig Emerson MP, Minister for Trade and Competitiveness**

§ **Mr K. Shanmugam, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Law**

§ **Dr Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Defence**

§ **Mr Lim Hng Kiang, Minister for Trade and Industry**

10 September

Canberra

The seventh meeting of the Singapore-Australia Joint Ministerial Committee (SAJMC) provided an opportunity for Ministers to reflect upon the longevity, strength and substance of the Australia-Singapore relationship. Ministers considered ways in which our two countries might increase bilateral collaboration, and to build on shared strategic and economic interests in addressing regional and global challenges. In this regard, the Ministers noted that the Australian and Singapore Prime Ministers had agreed to annual leaders'-level meetings, when they met in Singapore in April 2012.

Trade and Economic Cooperation

Ministers discussed bilateral trade and economic links, and noted that these had helped both countries take advantage of regional and global opportunities. This was reflected in Singapore's investment in Australia, which grew by more than 15 per cent over the last 12 months making Singapore the fourth largest investor in Australia; and in the growing number of Australian firms doing business in and with Singapore.

Ministers noted the positive impact of the Singapore-Australia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) in promoting closer integration between the two economies and called on officials to facilitate trade and investment flows under the SAFTA framework.

Ministers reaffirmed the commitment of both countries to free and open trade. Ministers acknowledged the value of Singapore and Australia working more closely on regional economic and trade issues, and welcomed the close consultation

regionally and internationally, both within and outside formal negotiations and organisations.

On the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) Ministers agreed that officials should continue to work closely in pursuing a high-quality agreement.

Ministers also discussed the proposed launch of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) at the time of the 21st ASEAN Summit and the East Asia Summit in November 2012. They viewed RCEP as another pathway to eliminating trade and investment barriers within Asia and promoting deeper and broader economic integration across the region. The Ministers recognised the significance of RCEP in strengthening regional economic architecture, and committed to making RCEP a modern, high-quality agreement, to promote further economic integration of the participating countries.

Ministers acknowledged the value of Singapore and Australia working more closely on ASEAN connectivity.

Ministers welcomed the successful conclusion of the recent APEC Leaders' meeting on 8-9 September. The APEC list of 54 environmental goods on which tariffs will be limited to no more than 5 per cent demonstrated the ability of APEC members to work together to open up trade despite the global economic downturn.

Ministers affirmed the importance of trade liberalisation for global prosperity and agreed on the need to find new pathways to move WTO negotiations ahead with immediate priority to be given to the negotiations on trade facilitation. Ministers reiterated the need to continue strengthening the multilateral trading system and the role the WTO plays in reducing trade barriers.

Defence and Security Cooperation

Ministers acknowledged that bilateral defence ties have expanded over the years to cover activities including regular strategic and operational dialogue , an extensive bilateral exercise program, personnel exchanges, operational cooperation, facilitation of Singaporean unilateral training in Australia and shared membership of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus. In 2013, Ministers will also hold the inaugural Annual Defence Ministers meeting. This will formalise the close bilateral interactions between both countries at defence minister level.

Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to working together to promote regional stability and advance common interests. Ministers welcomed the strong partnership between the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) in the course of their contributions to multinational stabilisation and

reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Ministers also discussed bilateral training and mutual contributions to maritime security. Singapore Ministers expressed appreciation for Australia's continued support for Singapore's training in Australia and noted the renewal of the Oakey Agreement allowing Singapore Armed Forces to train at the Army Aviation Centre in Oakey, Queensland.

Ministers welcomed existing information exchanges and collaboration on security-related issues. Ministers noted the value in police-to-police cooperation, underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding on Combating Transnational Crime and Developing Police Cooperation. Ministers agreed to recommend that Leaders look to renew this during Prime Minister Lee's visit to Australia in October.

Ministers discussed the importance of enhanced engagement on security issues, given the uncertain global environment and common security challenges. Minister also discussed increasing strategic exchanges and information sharing in areas including transnational crime, terrorism, border security, cyber issues and counter proliferation. Ministers welcomed regional efforts to address irregular migration and trafficking in persons, including through the Bali Process.

Ministers agreed that Australia and Singapore should explore further cooperation, including through meetings, on bilateral, regional and international cyber policy issues. This will include cooperation on capacity building; economic, trade and security issues, and ways of responding to significant cyber threats. Ministers recommended that the Prime Ministers discuss this. The two countries also agreed to cooperate on practical measures - including measures which could be taken forward in the context of the ASEAN Regional Forum - and digital identity management initiatives.

Other bilateral cooperation

Ministers discussed Australia- Singapore cooperation across government services, including energy and environment, science and research, education, health, sports, and social services. This cooperation was reflected in the second Australia-Singapore public sector roundtable which took place on September 3-4, involving 19 heads of Australian and Singapore government agencies. Ministers agreed the public sector roundtable had been productive and was assisting in deepening links between the two public services.

Ministers noted new cooperation in sports and looked forward to the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Sport in the near future.

Regional developments and cooperation

Ministers noted the importance of ASEAN unity and centrality in the evolving regional architecture.

Ministers agreed on the importance of open and inclusive regional architecture, including the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), in encouraging economic integration, contributing to development and promoting stability and security.

The Ministers undertook to work together to strengthen the role of these important institutions in promoting regional stability. Ministers agreed that ASEAN and non-ASEAN members should expand practical cooperation in the EAS priority areas of education, health, disaster management, finance and ASEAN Connectivity. Ministers agreed that Singapore and Australia should work with others to strengthen cooperation between the various regional organisations and to ensure a successful East Asia Summit in November 2012.

On the South China Sea, Ministers reiterated that neither Australia nor Singapore took a position on the merits of the various territorial claims, but had an interest in the maintenance of peace and stability, respect for international law, unimpeded trade and the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.

Australian Ministers welcomed the "Six-Point Principles" statement issued by ASEAN countries, including Singapore, on 20 July 2012, which reiterated ASEAN's commitment to: full implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (2002); the Guidelines for the Implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (2011); early conclusion of a Regional Code of Conduct in the South China Sea; full respect of the universally recognised principles of international law including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS); continued exercise of self-restraint and non-force by all parties; and peaceful resolution of disputes, in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law, including UNCLOS. Australia and Singapore called on governments to resolve differences peacefully and expeditiously in accordance with international law, including UNCLOS, and to exercise restraint and refrain from actions that could increase tensions.

Ministers welcomed the historic transition taking place in Myanmar. Ministers shared the view that a stable and prosperous Myanmar would make an important contribution to the region. Ministers reaffirmed Australia's and Singapore's commitment to continue supporting Myanmar in its reform process.

Ministers underlined the value in Australia and Singapore's engagement on regional and global challenges. With many shared views and interests regionally and globally, Ministers agreed that Australia and Singapore hold regular strategic dialogues involving foreign and defence officials.

Conclusion

Australian and Singapore Ministers looked forward to the forthcoming visit to Australia by Prime Minister Lee.

Singapore Ministers invited their Australian counterparts to Singapore for the 8th SAJMC in 2014.