

Speech by Yasuhisa Shiozaki
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At 14th Japan-Singapore Symposium
“Cooperation between Japan and Singapore in combating the COVID-19
Pandemic and Economic Recession in the Indo-Pacific”
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His Excellency Mr. Chee Hong Tat, Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Transport,

His Excellency Mr. Washio Eiichiro, State Minister for Foreign Affairs,
Ambassador Tommy Koh, Co-Chairman of Japan-Singapore Symposium,
Ambassador Sasae Kenichiro, Co-Chairman of Japan-Singapore Symposium,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am so honored to be able to speak at the 14th Japan-Singapore Symposium, the first attempt ever to be held online.

The last one year has been an agonising year of cataclysm. Corona has dampened the world, with international politics further divided and destabilised, economies in profound recession, mobility widely dissuaded, borders closed watertight, unemployment gravely surging, and many lives sadly lost.

Nonetheless, there is now a silver lining over the horizon, with new life styles gradually normalising, e-businesses sprouting here and there, digitalisation speedily accelerating, and amongst others, vaccines coming on their way, as yet another demonstration of human progress in science and technology.

For the last several years, the world has undergone major transformation. The spread of the deadly virus has accelerated it. Five fundamental transformations undergoing in Asia and in the world appear relevant to our discussions today.

First, the globalisation is receding. International organisations are weakening. So is global co-operation. In the post-Coronal era, nations ought to address their problems with their own capabilities and insights. They should choose right partners for cooperation.

Second, China is an economic locomotive, but has emerged as a destabilising factor, and an uncomfortable neighbour.

Its rise is never ever peaceful. China is neither capable nor welcome by the world to take over the role of the US.

China seems unwilling to do so, rather keen to take advantage of this pandemic to pursue its own goals, perpetuating its economic growth and military expansion without changing its communist dominating regime.

One of its “unachieved” political goals is grabbing Hong Kong. Another is assaulting in East and South China Seas. Fighting along its border with India is the 3rd. Taiwan should be the 4th.

Thirdly, the global security, let alone Asia’s, has destabilised.

Regional conflicts, including internal fighting, continue in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, but the UN is not functioning well with the world's conflict resolution mechanism losing steam. Myanmar now represents a grave concern in our region.

“US-China New Cold War” looks far less stable than the US-Soviet Cold War. China is yet unaccustomed to superpower confrontation, and has brewed enmity and vengeance against the old colonial powers.

Fourthly, Asian economy, while rapidly growing, has faced structural problems.

WTO has been paralysed. World money has grown beyond the control of international organisations, including the IMF, making it more vulnerable to new crises.

The US-China trade war would not end sooner as long as China maintains unfair restrictions, (a) forcing foreign investors to surrender technology; (b) half-hearted in suppressing the IP infringement; (c) strengthening big Chinese state-owned industries.

Firms have been shifting their production bases and supply chains out from China to other parts of Asia. Corona has accelerated their exodus.

Fifthly, democracy has been flickering during the virus spread.

China has suppressed the Corona Virus severely, but often times by oppressing rights of its citizens. After the virus threat subsides, the world may compare the democratic and authoritative systems from the viewpoint of which of the two can more effectively respond to the crisis and do better for humans.

Which system could react more effectively, swiftly and with less casualties, in ending the crisis and in preventing recurrence? This question is not easy to answer, particularly in Asia, which has a history of authoritarian regimes in some cases.

Under such geostrategic transformation in the Asia Pacific, or Indo-Pacific, Japan-Singapore collaborations in post corona era will enhance genuine value not only for the development of economically viable, politically accountable and security-wise stable Asia, but also for the construction of a region that enhances humanity. Let me raise 5 areas.

First, since early 2000, Singapore and Japan have vigorously sought ASEAN to forge regional economic partnership, joining ARF, and seeking stable regional development. Two should continue to jointly engage in the creation of cohesive co-operation within ASEAN region. At the same time, such endeavor for cohesion is also bringing about joint efforts of two countries contributing globally. A recent good example is a successful establishment of COVAX Facility on vaccine for COVID-19 with the strong leadership of Singapore as one of co-chairs coupled with an intimate cooperative support by Japan.

Secondly, when the two governments initiated an economic partnership agreement in East Asia, both strove to harmonise global-standard rules for trade and investment, first bilaterally, secondly regionally in ASEAN, and thirdly even to cover China. As it was already two decades ago when JSEPA was concluded to promote structural transformation of our economies, wide-ranging reviews for its vigorous updates are already long awaited and utterly overdue.

Thirdly, both Japan and Singapore have an excellent track record of developing advanced science and technology. Cooperation between the two should further enhance technological advancement and advantage. Development of new antibiotics to achieve "One Health", overcoming antimicrobial resistance, is a good example. Detection of SARS-CoV-2 variant viruses by genome sequencing is another. Both countries should prepare for the next pandemic by providing each other with the findings of active epidemiological and clinical studies.

Fourthly, on the industrial side, two countries should also cooperate to lead the development of advanced industries in areas of strategic importance, such as medicine, artificial intelligence, education and finance by utilising advanced cutting-edge science and technological capabilities. E-commerce, e-education, tele-medicine and e-banking, should help industries of both countries to expand wings in this region.

Fifthly, in light of the current crisis of democracy and market economy in Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan should collaborate to revitalise Asian financial markets through exploring a partnership or links between the two stock markets, just as the two governments explored one in our economic partnership agreement negotiations.

Let me conclude this statement by stressing my expectation that this Symposium will offer an opportunity for the public and private sectors of both countries to rediscover the dynamism of cooperation, amid an extraordinary environment forcing us to think and act in isolation.

Thank you very much.