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SINGAPORE



MINISTER VIVIAN
BALAKRISHNAN
ADDRESSES
The Seventh Indian Ocean
Conference, Perth

INTERVIEW
H.E. Kakhramon Shakirov,
Ambassador of the Republic of
Uzbekistan



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February - A Month of Festivities



In the month of February, Singapore was cloaked in the joyous hues of the Chinese New Year, with the landmark Marina Bay Sands unveiling The Legend of the Dragon Gate, a spectacle brought to life by 1,500 synchronized drones, a vision that graces the cover of our current edition. Amidst these celebrations, the Chingay Parade was also held on the 23rd and 24th of February 2024. This year's festivities were enriched by the exchange of artistic talents both local and international of which we bring you a report.

The High Commission of Malaysia brought the delights of the Malaysian Breakfast to Singapore by organising a grand Chinese New Year Celebration at Rumah Malaysia, the High Commissioner's residence. The month also featured the Indian Ocean Conference in Perth, where Foreign Minister Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan addressed the pressing environmental and strategic concerns facing the Indian Ocean region, while advocating for resilient maritime practices. We bring you Highlights of the Minister's Speech on Page 5.

This issue also brings you reports on Page 6 and 7 on the various events organised by the diplomatic missions, such as St Brigid's Day 2024 by the Embassy of Ireland, Catwalk 2024 by the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, and others as well.

We spoke with His Excellency Kakhramon Shakirov Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Singapore who has just completed his term here, during which bilateral ties between Singapore and Uzbekistan touched great heights. At IN Diplomacy we would like to thank him for his cooperation as a dean and wish him success in his future postings.

For those keen on staying abreast with the diplomatic endeavours in Singapore, we invite you to explore daily updates at www.indiplomacy.com a gateway to Singapore's diplomatic narratives.

Happy reading!
Nomita Dhar

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Presentation of Credentials

The following diplomats presented their letters of credentials to President

Tharman Shanmugaratnam on 27th February 2024 at the Istana



The Ambassador of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
His Excellency Delgahadeniya Dissanayake
Mudiyanselage Senarath Bandara Dissanayake



The Ambassador of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste
His Excellency Alexandre Vital da Cruz



The Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia
His Excellency Jernej Müller

Brief introductory bios available online at indiplomacy.com

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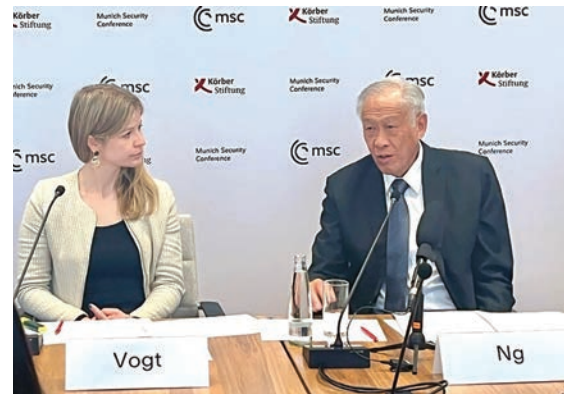
FACETIME in February 2024



The Singapore Airshow, Asia's premier aerospace and defence exhibition was held in Singapore from 20 - 25 February. The display dazzled nearly 30,000 attendees with stunning aerial displays and pilot meet-and-greets. The attendance at the four trade days of the show approached 60,000, nearly quadrupling the figure from 2022, when international visitors were subjected to daily rapid COVID-19 testing, and surpassing the 54,000 attendees recorded in 2018.



At the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on 21-22 February 2024, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for Education and Foreign Affairs, Dr. Mohamad Maliki Osman represented Singapore. This significant gathering brought together foreign ministers from the world's largest economies to deliberate on pressing global issues, emphasizing the critical need for enhanced international cooperation and adherence to the principles of international law amid escalating global tensions.



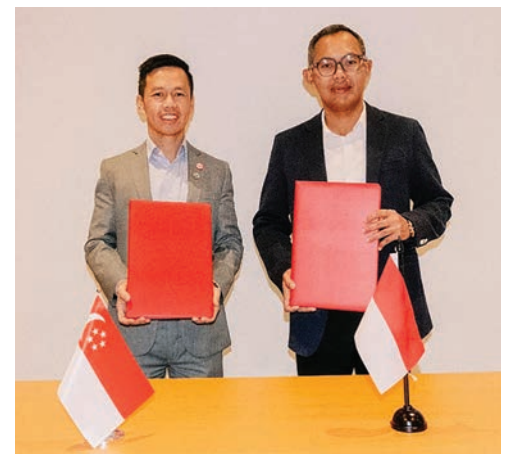
The Munich Security Conference (MSC) 2024 was held from February 16 - 18 February 2024. Singapore was represented by Defence Minister, Dr. Ng Eng Hen. He spoke at the Munich Young Leaders' Roundtable and highlighted the retreat of globalization and the rise of political polarization as pivotal challenges. Addressing top young leaders, he outlined the stark disparities in wealth and the skepticism towards global cooperation, contrasting protectionist trends with calls for an outward-looking stance by leaders like U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris. Dr. Ng emphasized the historical shifts shaping today's divided landscape and urged emerging leaders to navigate these complexities with foresight.



The second Changi Aviation Summit convened on 19 February 2024 at Marina Bay Sands, Singapore, uniting over 400 leaders from 70 countries to shape aviation's future post-pandemic, focusing on recovery, growth, and sustainability. The Summit was organized by Singapore's Ministry of Transport (MOT), Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS), Changi Airport Group, Experia Events, and International Air Transport Association (IATA). Opening addresses were given by Singapore's Minister for Transport and Second Minister for Finance, Mr. Chee Hong Tat. The summit facilitated MOU signings to enhance aviation safety and human capital development in the Asia-Pacific.



The inaugural Singapore-France Judicial Roundtable on January 31, 2024, co-chaired by Chief Justices of Singapore and France, The Honourable Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon of Singapore and The Honourable First President Christophe Soulard of the Court of Cassation of France, marked a significant step in judicial collaboration, focusing on technology's role in justice systems. This event, stemming from a 2023 MoU, highlighted the opportunities and challenges presented by technological advancements, especially artificial intelligence, in legal procedures.



On 30th January 2024, Singapore and Indonesia signed a Letter of Intent for collaboration on carbon capture and storage. The letter was signed by Keith Tan, Deputy Secretary (Industry) of the Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, and Jodi Mahardi, Indonesia's Deputy Coordinating Minister for Maritime Sovereignty and Energy. This marks a pivotal move towards combating climate change. This agreement, set against the backdrop of Indonesia's new CCS regulation, aims to mitigate carbon emissions and foster sustainable development. This Letter of Intent marks both nations as pioneers in Southeast Asia for environmental stewardship, with plans to establish a formal framework for cross-border CO2 management.

COVER STORY

Chingay 2024 Blooms in Celebration of the Year of the Dragon

This year's theme 'Blossom' aptly captured the beautiful and colourful spirit of Chingay



Photos by Michael Ozaki



Chingay 2024 enthralled the spectators with its spectacular parades on the nights of the 23rd and 24th of February in celebration of the Chinese New Year being the Year of the Dragon. Representing the diversity in Singapore, the event showcased a magnificent spectacle of lights, music, and dance, reflecting the cultural tapestry of Singapore and the participating countries.

The parade's first night, on Friday, 23rd January, was graced by the presence of Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam and First Lady Mdm Jane Ittogi. On the following night, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat were in attendance, further highlighting the significance of this event.

The word Chingay is synonymous with the Mandarin word *zhuangyi* which means the art of costume and masquerade in the Hokkien dialect. The parade began in 1973 as a street parade to mark the Chinese New Year. Since its inception, it has evolved into an annual iconic event that showcases Singapore's rich and unique multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan cultures. The parade was first mooted by Singapore's founding Prime Minister, the late Mr. Lee Kuan Yew.

Today, Chingay is celebrated as one of Asia's largest street performance and float parades, characterized by vibrant performers in elaborate costumes from diverse ethnicities, cultures, and backgrounds. It features a dazzling display of floats, huge intricate props,

and structures, along with cultural performances from all around the world, cementing its reputation as a colourful epitome of Singapore's multicultural society.

Minister Vivian Balakrishnan Addresses Seventh Indian Ocean Conference, Perth

Singapore's Foreign Minister delivered insights on the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean and emphasized the urgency of sustainability measures during the conference



Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan, while addressing the prestigious audience, articulated the theme of this year's conference, "Towards a Stable and Sustainable Indian Ocean," underscoring its timeliness and relevance. He delved into two primary aspects of the theme: the strategic significance of the Indian Ocean and the critical issue of sustainability.

Highlighting the strategic importance, Dr. Balakrishnan explored the Indian Ocean's historical and geographical significance, particularly its relationship with the Himalayas. Despite the Himalayas and dense jungles of Myanmar serving as formidable natural barriers between South Asia and East Asia, the Indian Ocean has historically bridged cultural, linguistic, and economic exchanges, including trade and colonization. He pointed out that the Indian Ocean's significance is further magnified by its connectivity to 26 littoral states and its role in supporting landlocked countries, exemplified by Nepal's trading relationship with India and China.

The discussion on strategic significance also touched upon the concept of "choke

points" in maritime navigation, with a focus on the Straits of Malacca and the Sunda Strait, emphasizing their pivotal role in global trade routes and the inherent risks posed by geopolitical tensions in regions like the Red Sea.

On sustainability, Dr. Balakrishnan raised alarms over the record high sea surface temperatures in the Indian Ocean, signifying a clear and present danger of climate change, as evidenced by coral bleaching in the Maldives.

He outlined Singapore's efforts on the international stage to combat environmental challenges, including its participation in the Paris Agreement and the co-sponsorship of a resolution seeking an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on climate obligations. He also celebrated the conclusion of the BBNJ treaty, aimed at the sustainable use of marine biodiversity, highlighting Singapore's leadership in the negotiations.

Moreover, Dr. Balakrishnan emphasized Singapore's initiatives towards green shipping corridors and its contribution to the Silk



Alliance initiative. These efforts are aimed at fostering decarbonization, digitalization, and sustainable growth in the maritime industry, underscoring the need for collective solutions that ensure inclusivity and sustainability in the Indian Ocean region.



Embassy of Ireland Celebrates St Brigid's Day 2024

The Embassy of Ireland, commemorated St Brigid's Day on Thursday, 1st February 2024. The event was held at the Residence of the Ambassador of Ireland, H.E. Sarah McGrath, amidst a warm and welcoming atmosphere for all who attended. Ambassador McGrath extended a cordial invitation to guests for an evening of networking, drinks, and canapés, providing an opportunity to celebrate the cultural significance of St Brigid's Day. This event was not only a festive occasion but also served to raise awareness and honour the achievements of remarkable women. To enhance the recognition of extraordinary women, attendees were encouraged to bring along an early career female colleague or friend as their guest for the evening. This gesture aimed to spotlight and support the endeavours of women in various fields.

Saudi Arabia Global Initiative - Catwalk 2024

In Singapore Catwalk 2024 took place on 10th February 2024 at the picturesque Marina Barrage Water Playground. The event was organized by the Royal Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, under the leadership of His Excellency Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Madhi. The walk was organized to mark a significant step in raising awareness for Big Cat conservation. It helped put the spotlight on the challenges faced in the conservation efforts of the seven Big Cats and their impact on our collective wellbeing. The event gained special significance this year as it coincided with the historic declaration by the United Nations, establishing 10th February as the first-ever International Day of the Arabian Leopard. The ambassador in his speech, extended an invitation to all attendees and the broader community to continue supporting such initiatives and work together towards a sustainable future for Big Cats.



Malaysia HC Celebrates CNY with Malaysian Breakfast for All



THE High Commission of Malaysia under the leadership of His Excellency Azfar Bin Mohamad Mustafar brought the delights of the Malaysian Breakfast to Singapore by organising a grand Chinese New Year Celebration at the High Commissioner's residence "Rumah Malaysia," showcasing Malaysia's iconic breakfast dishes and traditions on Saturday, 17th February 2024. The event, coinciding with the Chinese New Year celebration, aimed to promote Malaysian culture and cuisine.

NTU's Indonesian Students Stage Kaharsa for ICN 2024



Indonesian students from Nanyang Technological University showcased their creativity through a play "Kaharsa: A Musical" written, directed, and showcased by the students. This was the first time Indonesian Cultural Night (ICN) 2024 was successfully held in person since Covid. The show was screened over the weekend at the Drama Centre Theatre, National Library Building. Since its inception in 2007, ICN has served as a vital platform for Indonesian students at Nanyang Technological University, offering a space to explore, develop, and showcase their talents. After a hiatus due to the pandemic, ICN made a remarkable return with its 13th production, "Kaharsa: A Musical." The term "Kaharsa" originates from Sanskrit, meaning joy and happiness.

Forging Friendships Between People and Nations

*Interview with Ambassador Kakhramon Shakirov, the Ambassador of Uzbekistan
and the former Dean of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps in Singapore.
He leaves behind a strengthened legacy of improved Uzbek-Singapore ties and relations*



Diplomats bid goodbye to Ambassador Kakhramon at a farewell reception organised by the Diplomatic and Consular Corps and the current Dean and Ambassador of Mexico H.E. Agustin Garcia Loaeza (third from right)



Congratulations on your successful term in Singapore. Since you arrived in July 2018 how has your tenure been?

KS: I will always remember Singapore as my first posting as an ambassador. The last six years have been both a challenge and a huge opportunity. Also, I never expected to be appointed to be the Dean for that short period in the past (1st May 2022 to 31st March 2023) representing the esteemed diplomatic corps in beautiful Singapore.

Please update us on the highlights and progress of Uzbekistan - Singapore ties during this time?

KS: Our President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, set 2023 as the “breakthrough year” for reforms and global engagement. And just a little over a year ago we were happy that Singapore was part of this engagement when he visited the island to share what Uzbekistan has achieved and study what Singapore has successfully accomplished so we can learn and work together to our mutual benefit. It still is one of my proudest moments here to be a part of this important visit. It was a wonderful way to cap our 25 years of diplomatic relations then.

The visit of Her Excellency Madam Halimah Yacob, the then President of Singapore, in May 2023, further cemented our bilateral relations during her visit. This significant engagement highlighted the depth of our countries' cooperation and shared interests.

Internationally, Singapore and Uzbekistan have always been together in supporting many initiatives within global institutions; we share the values of international rule of law, we cooperate in critical issues such as combating international terrorism and extremism and supported each other in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

This closeness in ties is also reflected in the number of frequent exchanges in terms of visits by government and business delegates on a regular basis to discuss ways to

collaborate in the political, trade, economic, investment, financial, scientific, technical, cultural, educational and humanitarian spheres.

How about progress in the areas of investment, trade, culture and people-to-people exchanges?

KS: Uzbekistan's investment outlook has attracted many Singaporean companies, which have invested nearly half a billion US dollars in such sectors as education, food, agriculture, and the chemicals and textile industries.

There are also rising figures in the numbers of Uzbek companies using Singapore as a base to explore Southeast Asia market. This has given me a great sense of satisfaction about progress on the economic side..

Thanks also to the comprehensive socio-economic reforms taking place in Uzbekistan, especially over the last six years, we are also witnessing the opening up of new directions for collaboration within government and business circles—particularly between small and medium-size enterprises of Uzbekistan and Singapore.

Where people, social and cultural ties are concerned we are happy to see the enthusiastic response we received at travel fairs such as those organised by NATAS, we have seen rising interest by Singaporeans visiting Uzbekistan. Recently we established the Uzbek-Singapore Center for Tourism Development, to help promote Uzbekistan's tourism brand in Singapore and other Southeast Asian countries. Furthermore, Singaporeans will be able to visit Uzbekistan for 30 days without a visa as part of the country's measures to make it more convenient to visit it.

What are your favourite places in Singapore and what will you miss about our island?

KS: I love walking and enjoying nature and the parks here are really nice. But Uzbeks are like Singaporeans in our love for food. And we are open to try new cuisines. So when I came here I noticed you can have Asian, Chinese, and European cuisines etc. but I look for the country's own unique dishes. In Singapore, for me, my favourite place to go is for the chicken rice!

If you were given an opportunity to replicate something about Singapore in Uzbekistan what will that be?

KS: I am particularly impressed by the smart city projects as well as smart city transportation systems that have been effectively introduced in Singapore. This is the synergy of modern infrastructure and old history with new and green tech. I think Uzbekistan can benefit from the transfer of such technology from Singapore. Uzbekistan has already initiated changes in cities like Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara, and we are working on the modernization of airports, railways, and other transportation modes.

What is your message to Singaporeans and friends of IN Diplomacy?

KS: I leave Singapore with the confidence that the positive trends of bilateral cooperation amongst government and businesses especially those that was sparked by the visit of President Shavkat and resulted in the many MoUs that were signed during his visit will continue to increase in the years to come.

To my friends in the diplomatic corps and especially to you Ms Nomita and your excellent staff my humble thanks to all the assistance extended to me as the former Dean and to the Uzbekistan Embassy in Singapore.

Sixth Philippines-Singapore Consultations on Action Plan Held



(Above from left): Ambassador Medardo G. Macaraig and Asst. Sec Aileen Mendiola-Rau; Singapore Ambassador to the Philippines Constance See and Dep Sec Foo Chi Hsia

Deputy Secretary Foo Chi Hsia of Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Assistant Secretary Aileen Mendiola-Rau of the Philippines' Department of Foreign Affairs co-chaired the Sixth Informal Consultations on the Philippines-Singapore Action Plan (IC-PSAP) in Manila on 20th February 2024.



This year marks the 55th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Singapore and the Philippines. The Co-Chairs reaffirmed the excellent state of bilateral relations, underpinned by regular high-level engagements, robust economic partnerships and strong people-to-people connections. They expressed satisfaction

at the substantial progress achieved in strengthening cooperation, especially in the areas of trade and investment, defence and security, culture and people-to-people ties. The Co-Chairs identified ways for both countries to strengthen collaboration in emerging areas such as the green economy, smart and sustainable infrastructure, and innovation.

Philippines Ambassador to Singapore H.E. Medardo G. Macaraig who also attended the meeting expressed optimism for the future of Philippines-Singapore relations following the successful talks. established in 1998, serves as a mechanism for strengthened bilateral cooperation between the Philippines and Singapore. This sixth meeting was the first in-person consultation held after the pandemic, with the next IC-PSAP set to be hosted by Singapore.

Trade Minister Gan Kim Yong attends 13th WTO Ministerial Conference, Abu Dhabi

Singapore's Minister for Trade and Industry Mr Gan Kim Yong visited Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, from 25th to 27th February 2024 to attend the 13th World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference (MC13) where he joined Trade Ministers and senior officials from the 164 Member States.

Singapore is a strong supporter of the open, rules-based multilateral trading system, with the WTO at its core. The WTO has enabled trade to flow freely and predictably and is an indispensable guarantor of common growth.

Following the conclusion of the Joint Statement Initiative (JSI) on Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) last year, Ministers will also discuss the incorporation of the JSI IFD into the WTO's legal framework at MC13. The JSI IFD will facilitate foreign direct investment and set international benchmarks on investment facilitation.



Minister Gan Kim Yong (3rd from right) had a series of meetings with the Director-General of WTO, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (4th from right) as well as his ASEAN counterparts, US Trade Representative and China's Minister of Commerce among others

Visit by US Asst Sec of State Krittenbrink: 6th US-Singapore SPD

The US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Mr Daniel Krittenbrink, was in Singapore to co-chair the 6th US-Singapore Strategic Partnership Dialogue (SPD) with the Republic's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Permanent Secretary, Mr Albert Chua, on 27th February 2024. This year marks the 20th Anniversary of the US-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (FTA) – the first FTA the US signed with a country in Asia.

Mr Chua also took the opportunity to show Mr Krittenbrink artefacts from the inception of the FTA. These include the golf clubs from the midnight golf game between then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and then-President Bill Clinton in November 2000 when both sides agreed to launch the FTA, as well as the Press Statement announcing this.

Singapore MFA said, "Besides our strong economic partnership, the co-chairs reaffirmed our longstanding and robust cooperation in the defence, security, and people-to-people spheres. They reviewed ongoing areas of cooperation and explored greater collaboration in emerging areas such as in critical and emerging technologies, energy, climate change and regional capacity-building."

A Joint Statement was also issued by both governments on the occasion of the 6th Dialogue that touched on the strong defence and security partnership shared by both countries and progress achieved by various programmes such as the U.S.-Singapore Partnership for Growth and Innovation (PGI), launched



by Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and Minister for Trade and Industry Gan Kim Yong in October 2021 as well as the close cooperation between Singapore and the United States on the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF).