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SINGAPORE



President Tharman's Inaugural Diplomatic Dinner Reception



INSIDE:
9th Singapore-Australia
Annual Leaders' Meeting
and ASEAN-Australia
Special Summit

**INVESTMENT DESTINATION
FOCUS: Armenia**
INTERVIEW: H.E. Mr. Serob Bejanyan
Ambassador of Armenia to Singapore



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March : A Month of Global Dialogues and Cultural Infusion



In March 2024, Singapore emerged as a vibrant hub of international diplomacy and cultural festivities, marking a period rich in global engagements and communal harmony. The month was notably highlighted by Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan's diplomatic tour across Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, and Israel, where discussions on humanitarian support and peace initiatives underscored Singapore's commitment to global stability and humanitarian aid. These efforts, aimed at fostering dialogue and understanding amidst regional complexities, reflect Singapore's proactive stance in international diplomacy.

Concurrently, the visit of Hungary's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Péter Szijjártó, and Senior Minister Teo Chee Hean's engagements in China, amplified Singapore's economic and strategic ties with key global players. These visits facilitated discussions on trade, investment, and bilateral cooperation, showcasing Singapore as a pivotal partner in global economic dynamics.

Cultural and environmental initiatives also adorned the month, with the Singapore-Australia Annual Leaders' Meeting in Melbourne launching green and digital collaborations, reinforcing a shared commitment to sustainability. Additionally, the enchanting Sakura floral display at Gardens by the Bay and the Indonesia in SG showcase at Ngee Ann City brought cultural diversity to the fore, celebrating the rich tapestry of traditions that enrich Singapore's social fabric.

March 2024 highlighted Singapore's central role in diplomacy and culture, and also featured Dr. S. Jaishankar's visit and Indonesia's post-election developments. For full coverage on these events, see our detailed reports on pages 6 and 11.

For those keen on staying abreast with the diplomatic endeavors 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 14th March 2024 at the Istana



The Ambassador to Singapore from the Kingdom of Thailand
Her Excellency Ureerat Chareontoh

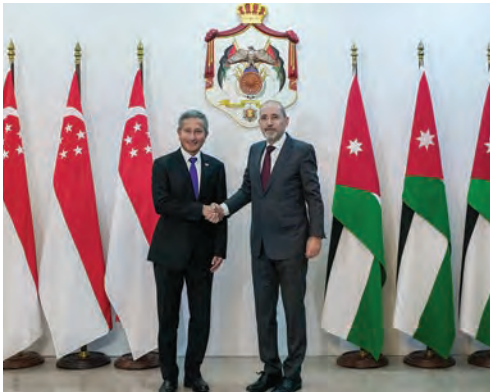


The High Commissioner to Singapore from the Republic of Cyprus
His Excellency Nicholas Panayiotou

Brief introductory bios available online at indiplomacy.com

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FACETIME in March 2024



During a pivotal two-day working visit to Amman, Jordan, from 16 to 17 March 2024, Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan, engaged in profound discussions with his counterpart, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Ayman Safadi. This meeting underscored the robust bilateral ties between Singapore and Jordan, with a spotlight on their collaborative humanitarian assistance initiatives in Gaza. The ministers deliberated on enhancing aid channels to Gaza, amidst calls for a humanitarian ceasefire, and reminisced about the fruitful outcomes of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Al Hussein Bin Abdullah II's visit to Singapore earlier in January 2024.



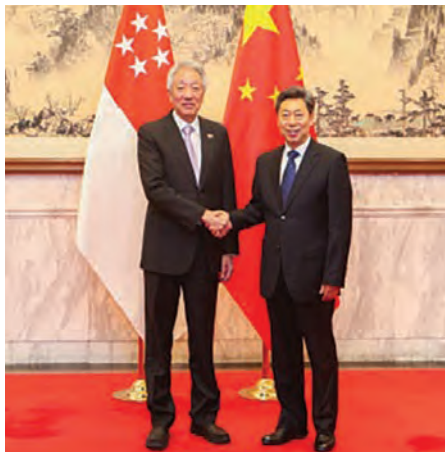
On 18 March 2024, Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan, Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs, embarked on a vital working visit to the Palestinian Territories. Meeting with prominent Palestinian leaders, including the PA Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, Minister Balakrishnan voiced Singapore's concern over Gaza's humanitarian crisis and advocated for an immediate ceasefire. He underscored Singapore's support for a two-state solution as a pathway to peace and detailed the nation's humanitarian contributions to Gaza.



From 19 to 20 March 2024, Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan's visit to Israel was marked by key meetings with Israeli leadership, including President Isaac Herzog and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Minister Balakrishnan condemned the attacks on 7 October 2023 and called for the protection of civilian lives in Gaza, urging for an immediate ceasefire to allow humanitarian aid. He reaffirmed Singapore's support for a two-state solution and engaged with a broad spectrum of Knesset members to discuss peace, humanitarian efforts, and regional stability. This visit underscored Singapore's commitment to fostering dialogue and understanding amidst the complex geopolitical landscape of the region.



During a constructive visit from 19 to 20 March 2024, Hungary's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Mr. Péter Szijjártó, commenced his Singapore journey with a working dinner hosted by the Singapore Manufacturing Federation (SMF). Discussions focused on bolstering bilateral trade and investment, highlighting the strong economic ties and the significance of Singapore as a key partner for Hungary in Southeast Asia. The engagements emphasized the mutual interest in further strengthening the robust relationship between the two nations.



Senior Minister Teo Chee Hean's visit to China from 17 to 22 March 2024 facilitated high-level discussions aimed at fortifying Singapore-China ties. Covering strategic regions such as Sichuan, Zhejiang, and Beijing, Senior Minister Teo engaged with local officials and Singaporean businesses to deepen cooperation and understand economic developments. Key meetings celebrated bilateral milestones and discussed future collaborations in connectivity, security, and social governance, reflecting the dynamic and evolving partnership between Singapore and China.



The Minister of the International Department of the Communist Party of China, Mr. Liu Jianchao, called on Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Mr. Lawrence Wong on 26th March 2024. They reaffirmed the warm and longstanding bilateral relations and cooperation and looked forward to the successful convening of the 20th Joint Council for Bilateral Cooperation (JCBC) meeting in Singapore later this year. They also discussed the importance of an open, rules-based multilateral trading system and ASEAN-China relations for the region.

Memorable First Inaugural Diplomatic Dinner Reception

President Tharman Shanmugaratnam's debut at the annual traditional programme to acknowledge and thank the ambassadors for fostering friendly relations with Singapore was warmly received



The President's Annual Diplomatic Dinner Reception (also known as PADR) hosted by the President of the Republic of Singapore, H.E. Tharman Shanmugaratnam and the First Lady Jane Ittogi Shanmugaratnam at Istana Palace was held on the evening of 20th March 2024. The first PADR was held in 1965 and was organised to thank ambassadors for fostering friendly relations with Singapore.

A major highlight in the year's diplomatic calendar, was the welcome of Singapore's President and First Lady to the heads of the diplomatic and consular missions and



representatives of international organisations to Singapore along with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and cabinet ministers, parliamentarians and senior officials of Singapore also attended the PADR.

PM Lee commented in his social media post that he was delighted to have met many friends of Singapore and that this first PADR hosted by President Tharman Shanmugaratnam affirmed Singapore's good bilateral relations with many countries.

He wrote: "Our diplomats play an important role in fostering strong ties, building mutual understanding, and deepening win-win cooperation. These are always important to a small nation, but especially in uncertain and turbulent times."



"The first President Annual Diplomatic Reception by President Tharman was a momentous, memorable and enjoyable occasion"

- H.E. Azfar Bin Mohamad Mustafar, High Commissioner of Malaysia to Singapore



9th Singapore-Australia Annual Leaders' Meeting: Go Green and Digital

Both leaders build on Singapore-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with launch of A\$20 million grant for collaborative efforts in green sectors and MoU on Green and Digital Shipping Corridor



Prime Ministers Lee Hsien Loong and Anthony Albanese reaffirmed the excellent state of bilateral relations and noted the good progress in bilateral cooperation of the Singapore-Australia CSP

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese held the 9th Singapore-Australia Annual Leaders' Meeting in Melbourne on 5th March 2024. Following the Meeting the Prime Ministers held a Joint Press Conference where they highlighted the progress made on the Singapore-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP). The CSP was established in 2015 and that covers broadly both countries' relationship in Economics and Trade, Defence and Foreign Affairs, Science and Innovation, People-to-People, Digital Economy and Green Economy.

The leaders issued a Joint Statement that outlined the key outcomes that were agreed on at the 9th Meeting:

- They noted the good progress in implementing the Singapore-Australia Green Economy Agreement (SAGEA) since it was signed in October 2022, including the announcement of initial recipients of the A\$20 million **Go-Green Co-Innovation Programme Grant** which supports Singapore and Australian enterprises in collaborative efforts to innovate products and services in green sectors.

- They welcomed the signing of the MoU formalising the **Green and Digital Shipping Corridor (GDSC)**, which will spearhead the shared goal and collaboration to accelerate maritime decarbonisation and digitalisation. They encouraged the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) and Australia's Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts to continue engagement with Australian state and territory governments to develop work plans to implement the MOU.

- The Leaders welcomed the **Ten Principles to Guide the Development of Cross Border Electricity Trade** that were jointly developed by Australia and Singapore to facilitate cross border trade in electricity. This would form the basis for the subsequent development of standards and norms in deepening regional energy connectivity.

- The Leaders welcomed Australia's commitment to enhance business connections, trade and investment into Southeast Asia, including through initiatives implementing **Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040**. The Leaders tasked officials to further enhance and facilitate investment opportunities in Australia and Singapore, as well as expand synergies and cooperation in the region.

- As the CSP marks its 10th anniversary in 2025, the Leaders agreed that cooperation under the next phase of the CSP should be ambitious, future-oriented and pathfinding, and should comprise concrete initiatives in areas such as supply chain resilience, food security, climate change and green economy, energy security and clean technology, defence, health, education, trade and investment, connectivity, creative industries, digital economy, cyber and critical technologies, homeland safety and security, as well as science and innovation.



ASEAN-Australia Special Summit

During his visit to Australia Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong also attended the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit that was held from the 4th to 6th March 2024. The Summit commemorated the Golden Jubilee of ASEAN-Australia Dialogue Relations. Australia is ASEAN's oldest Dialogue Partner. During the Summit, Australian PM Anthony Albanese and ASEAN Leaders announced a US\$500 million package of new and expanded initiatives to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of ASEAN-Australia Dialogue Relations. For the Outcomes Summary List visit www.indiplomacy.com



A traditional welcome ceremony by the Wurundjeri Tribe, an aboriginal group who were the traditional owners of the Yarra River Valley for ASEAN - Australia Special Summit delegates

For the full list of key outcomes visit www.indiplomacy.com

Dr. S. Jaishankar's Diplomatic Visit to Singapore

In March 2024, Dr. S. Jaishankar, the External Affairs Minister of India, conducted a visit to Singapore from the 23rd to the 25th. This trip was aimed at reinforcing the longstanding relationship between India and Singapore, focusing on enhancing bilateral ties and exploring avenues for future cooperation.

External Affairs Minister of the Republic of India, Dr. S. Jaishankar, embarked on a significant visit to Singapore from March 23 to 25, 2024, to reinforce the bilateral relations between India and Singapore. Each meeting with Singaporean officials underscored the multifaceted partnership between the two countries.

In his meeting with Singapore's Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Hsien Loong, they discussed the broad spectrum of India-Singapore relations, including trade, investment, and defense. They emphasized the importance of strengthening economic ties and explored new initiatives to enhance collaboration in technology and innovation.

Dr. Jaishankar also met with Mr. Lawrence Wong, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance. Their discussion focused on economic collaboration and investment opportunities, highlighting the potential for growth in bilateral trade and investment.

Another key meeting was with Mr. Teo Chee Hean, Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security. Their conversation delved into security cooperation and regional stability, addressing shared concerns over maintaining peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region.

His engagement with Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for Foreign Affairs, was pivotal in discussing bilateral and multilateral diplomatic initiatives. They reviewed ongoing cooperation in international forums and sought ways to intensify collaboration on global issues.



The meeting with Mr. Gan Kim Yong, Minister for Trade and Industry, focused on enhancing trade relations and economic cooperation. The dialogue centered on identifying new opportunities for collaboration in sectors such as technology, e-commerce, and renewable energy.

At the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) - National University of Singapore (NUS), Distinguished Lecture event titled #WhyBharatMatters, External Affairs Minister of India, Dr. S. Jaishankar, shared his insights on India's pivotal role in global diplomacy and economy. He emphasized India's contributions in shaping a balanced world order and its strategic partnerships that underscore its growing influence. Highlighting the nation's historical and cultural legacy, Dr. Jaishankar illustrated why understanding India's trajectory is crucial in the contemporary global landscape. His lecture reinforced the significance of India's position and responsibilities on the world stage.



"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world,"
- Dr. S. Jaishankar

Dr. S. Jaishankar's interaction with the Global Schools Foundation (GSF) underscored the transformative power of education in uniting countries. Addressing the future leaders at the GIIS SMART Campus, Dr. Jaishankar emphasized the importance of understanding and innovation in fostering international harmony. His message to the students highlighted the potential of education in bridging cultural divides and strengthening bilateral ties.

Dr. Jaishankar while echoing Nelson Mandela's words, stressed on the role of educational institutions like GSF in preparing individuals not just for the workforce, but for a globally interconnected community.



Bridging Cultures and Opportunities with Armenia's Ambassador to Singapore

IN Diplomacy engaged with the Ambassador of Armenia to Singapore, H.E. Mr. Serob Bejanyan, to discuss the evolving landscape of Armenia's diplomatic ties and economic relations with Singapore. Highlighting the journey since diplomatic relations were established in 1992, Ambassador Bejanyan shares insights into the challenges and opportunities ahead, emphasizing the potential for mutual growth and collaboration between the two nations.



When were diplomatic relations between Singapore and Armenia established?

Diplomatic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Singapore were established on July 1st, 1992.

Given that the embassy is currently based in Jakarta, how do you effectively engage with Singapore and foster bilateral relations?

Yes, indeed, the embassy is located in Jakarta and covers not only Indonesia, but also Singapore and Malaysia. And, of course, this somehow creates difficulties. However, the embassy endeavors to engage with relevant Singaporean authorities in both the public and private sectors to enhance political and economic relations between the two countries for the benefit of our people.

Unfortunately, the absence of an accredited Singapore embassy in Armenia is another obstacle to the effectiveness of bilateral relations.

Can you provide an overview of the investment and trade ties between Armenia and Singapore?

Armenia and Singapore have been working to strengthen their economic ties, albeit with relatively modest trade and investment volumes. The trade relationship between the two countries certainly has a room for growth.

Armenia offers potential investment opportunities in areas such as information technology, renewable energy, agriculture, and tourism. The Singaporean government and businesses may find Armenia attractive due to its skilled workforce, competitive costs, and strategic location as a gateway to regional markets.

Singapore can serve as a valuable partner for Armenia in accessing markets in Asia, while

Armenia provides Singapore with opportunities to tap into the Eurasian Economic Union and the broader Caucasus region.

Surely, there is real potential for deeper cooperation and mutual benefits in the future. In recent years, aluminum products, ores and mines, watches, natural juices, and wine have been exported from Armenia to Singapore. Inversely, pharmaceutical products, electrical, optical, photographic equipment, and machinery are imported from Singapore to Armenia.

What advice do you have for Singaporeans looking to visit Armenia for both business and pleasure?

Overall, visiting Armenia for both business and pleasure can be a rewarding experience, offering a blend of cultural enrichment, business opportunities, and natural beauty. By planning ahead and embracing the local culture, you can make the most of your trip to our fascinating country.

For business purposes, we recommend looking through diverse collection of publications covering Armenia's economic sectors. Once business interests in Armenia are specified, Enterprise Armenia, the national investment promotion agency of Armenia, is ready to assist business partners by providing a comprehensive range of services throughout the entire investment process, completely free of charges or fees, including providing information on Armenia's business climate, investment opportunities, and relevant legislation, arranging relevant meetings with actors from the public and private sectors.

I would also like to note that since March 2018, Singaporean citizens are exempt from the need to obtain a visa to visit Armenia. This facilitates visiting and exploring the rich history and culture of Armenia.

How has the Armenian economy been performing recently?



For years, Armenia has been registering constant economic growth of 6-7 percent annually. The year 2020, however, was a year of a global crisis, and Armenia's economy has faced various challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in the Armenian-populated Nagorno-Karabakh.

These factors have had a significant impact on economic performance. But Armenia's economy decrease was not so dramatic, and in 2021 we recovered the growth rate to 5.7%. This growth trend is constant, and even stronger in 2022 with 12.6% growth. Currently, the main contributors to the GDP are agriculture, industry and construction, as well as service - with booming tourism and IT sectors.

International organizations such as the OECD and The Heritage Foundation consistently rate Armenia highly for its economic freedom.

Armenia also has a strong and stable financial and fiscal system, which is confirmed by the country's positions in international indices.

What is Armenia's investment policy and what incentives are offered to foreign investors?

Thanks to the liberal policies adopted by the government, Armenia's FDI legislation is one of the most flexible and business-oriented ones among emerging markets, so:

- Foreign nationals doing business in Armenia have the right to a 100% ownership of the resident legal entities in Armenia;
- The legislation safeguards investors against discriminatory policies. Investors, regardless of their citizenship receive equal treatment, unless a more favorable regime is provided by a respective treaty;
- Investors have virtually unrestricted access to any sector and location throughout the country;
- Companies owned by foreign nationals have the right to purchase land. Foreign citizens can have long-term lease contracts.

Full interview visit www.indiplomacy.com

FEATURED INVESTMENT DESTINATION

Armenia A Promising Destination for Global Investors

Text and Photos by Embassy of the Republic of Armenia

Armenia, nestled in the South Caucasus region, has long been celebrated for its rich cultural heritage, ancient history, and breathtaking landscapes. However, in recent years, this nation has been making headlines for a different reason – its remarkable economic growth, increasing attractiveness for investors and emerging regional hub for tech and innovations



In the heart of Armenia’s capital Yerevan lies its most important civic space - Republic Square

With a blend of ancient traditions and modern aspirations, today Armenia is positioning itself as a rising destination in the global investment landscape.

For years, Armenia has demonstrated consistent GDP growth rates, typically hovering between 6-7%. Despite the challenges posed by the global health crisis in 2020, Armenia managed to weather the storm relatively well, with a slight economic decrease. However, the resilience of its economy was truly showcased in 2022 when it bounced back with a staggering 12.6% GDP growth rate, being rated as a 4th fastest-growing economy in the world according to the IMF. Building on this momentum, projections for 2023 suggest a continued GDP growth trajectory, with estimates reaching around 9%.

Simultaneously, the country has made significant strides in improving its macroeconomic solidity and business environment in recent years. Diversification of the economy and trade destinations, green transition, as well as, strengthening of the private sector have been key priorities. Structural reforms aimed at promoting fiscal sustainability and fostering a favorable investment climate have been implemented, resulting in increased investor confidence and a conducive business environment.

8 www.sunmediaonline.com

Liberal Investment Environment

Armenia currently maintains one of the most liberal investment environments among emerging market countries. The government’s commitment to an “open door” policy ensures that there are virtually no restrictions on investment activities, with foreign investors enjoying equal treatment as the locals under the national legislation. Foreign investments in Armenia are fully protected, investors have a number of

accordance with general legislation (like local companies), which ensures non-discriminatory treatment towards them.

Foreign investors are also given the most favourable treatment, as well as a number of privileges. This openness and transparency are coupled with low business costs, efficient and business-friendly tax environment and last but not the least availability of skilled and educated human capital. Moreover, the government is committed to further improving the business climate through a range of tax incentives and comprehensive state support programs.

For example, the Armenian Government provides up to a 20% return on capital investments for securing the infrastructure needs of the project, reimburses up to 70% of the monthly wages for newly hired highly qualified foreign specialists, offers up to a 35% reimbursement of capital investments for producing economically complex products, and implements other support programs, showcasing Armenia’s proactive stance in creating an environment conducive to investment and economic growth.

Most of the state support programs are directed towards the increase of economic productivity, introduction of innovations, further diversification of industries and sophistication of production value chains. Driver of the economic growth of Armenia is the tech sector, which has emerged as

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International Ratings

guarantees and advantages. According to the RA Law “On Foreign Investments”, foreign investors in Armenia are given a national regime, that is, they operate in

“Armenian Government provides up to a 20% return on capital investments for securing the infrastructure needs of the project, reimburses up to 70% of the monthly wages for newly hired highly qualified foreign specialists, offers up to a 35% reimbursement of capital investments for producing economically complex products, and implements other support programmes”



(From left): Yerevan’s North Avenue its premier pedestrian mall; Armenia’s breathtaking mountainous landscapes

one of Armenia’s fastest-growing industries, boasting a consistent annual growth rate of 20% and comprising around 5% of the local GDP. Not surprisingly, reputable independent organizations name Armenia a technological hub of the region. This is due to the presence of a large number of globally recognised tech giants, vibrant tech ecosystem, innovative educational initiatives, and active technology transfer. Furthermore, Armenia has become a birthplace for several tech unicorns, underscoring its prowess in the global tech landscape.

Strategic Advantages

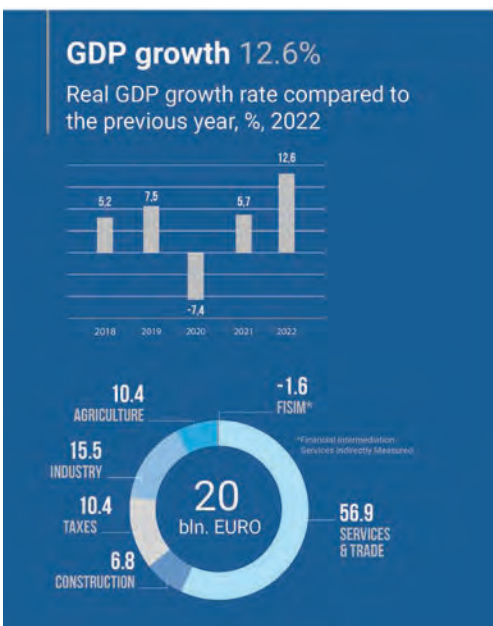
Beyond its favourable business environment, Armenia boasts several strategic advantages, including its role as a gateway to major markets. As a member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Armenia has access to a vast consumer

market comprising 184 million people. The Union has free trade agreements with Singapore, Vietnam, Serbia and Iran. Armenia also maintains free trade agreements with CIS countries and Georgia. Furthermore, GSP regimes with key trading partners such as the United States, Japan, Canada, Switzerland, and Norway provide preferential access for Armenian products, enhancing its competitiveness on the global stage. Hence, Armenian producers benefit from unique access to a consumer market of over 1 billion people with 0% or reduced customs duties.

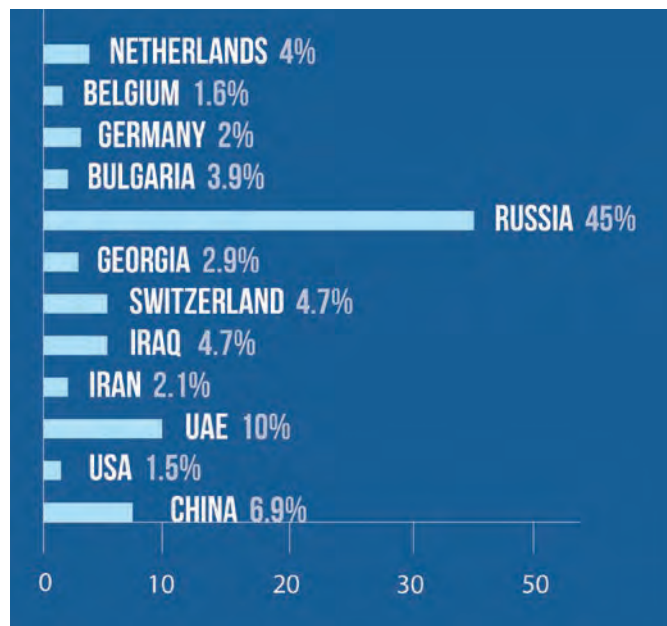
Nowadays Armenia has emerged as a hub of opportunities in the global investment landscape, with its remarkable economic growth and investor-friendly environment. The country’s promising sectors, including agriculture and food industry,

pharmaceuticals, textiles and apparel, winemaking, tourism, and most importantly the information and communication technologies, offer diverse opportunities for investors seeking to capitalize on Armenia’s strengths.

To support investors in that particular endeavour the Armenian Government has established Enterprise Armenia - the National Investment Promotion Agency (<https://enterprisearmenia.am>). Enterprise Armenia stands ready to provide comprehensive and free-of-charge services to any businessperson interested in pursuing opportunities within Armenia. From facilitating investment opportunities to assisting with business registration and providing market insights, the agency is committed to supporting investors throughout their entire journey.



Armenia’s GDP Structure



Diversified Major Export Destinations

DCC Bids Farewell to Chile, Colombia and Pakistan Heads of Mission

The Diplomatic and Consular Corps in Singapore recognised and paid tribute to the heads of mission leaving the Island Republic at a moving farewell dinner



The members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps (DCC) held a farewell dinner function to pay tribute to the friendship and bid goodbye to the heads of mission of Chile, Colombia and Pakistan.

The Dean and Ambassador of Mexico, García-López Loaeza in his welcome address registered the corps' thanks and recognition of the work of H.E. Ignacio Concha from Chile, H.E. Manuel Hernando Solano Sossa from Colombia and H.E. Rukhsana Afzaal from Pakistan.

Dean Loaeza said that their work has shown great leadership in the wise conduct of diplomatic work, which has resulted in important economic, social and political accomplishments for their country resulting in achievements that have undoubtedly helped to consolidate its bilateral relations with this City State.

For High Commissioner Afzaal there was also another special farewell lunch that was hosted by Ms Michelle Liem, Singapore's Non-Resident Ambassador for Luxembourg



(From left): H.E. Manuel Hernando Solano Sossa; H.E. Rukhsana Afzaal; Mdm Blanca Eugenia Andrade spouse of H.E. Ignacio Concha

with the Women Ambassadors Group in Singapore on 18th March 2024.

The High Commissioner was also interviewed by *IN Diplomacy* magazine's Editor-in-Chief, Ms Nomita Dhar, on International Women's Day. She was asked to share Pakistan's progress in the area of women empowerment and her take on the state of bilateral relations with Singapore. "There's been a transformative change in Pakistani society. I joined the foreign service in 1994 coming from a very conservative part of Pakistan where many girls at that time didn't

go to university. Me and my two sisters were the first women to go to uni and I did my masters in political science during a time when this was very unusual for women to undertake tertiary education in my village. I then decided to sit in for the competitive civil service examination and I didn't stop there. I passed and chose the diplomatic service which was a very rebellious step as going, studying, working and living abroad for a single woman was also not a common thing - almost unthinkable.

In the past 30 years though I have seen a significant change take place in Pakistan. Today there are more Pakistani women studying in universities than men. Women are also doing very well in the entry exams of engineering universities and medical colleges. Now there are so many women in careers like the police force, in the administration of cities and even as fighter pilots! Remember Pakistan was the first Muslim country to have a woman prime minister; a woman parliamentary speaker, woman governor, foreign minister and also first Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister."



Another farewell lunch was organised for High Commissioner Rukhsana Afzaal with the Women Ambassador's Group



Ambassador Rukhsana interview by Ms Nomita Dhar

Sakura Day & Night Experience Complemented with Cultural Programmes and Anime Garden

The ninth edition of Gardens by the Bay's iconic Sakura floral display marks the first time that visitors can enjoy a day-to-night experience since the debut show in 2016. Inspired by the city of Kyoto, the iconic Kinkakuji Temple takes centre stage, in which visitors can step into and imagine they are within the actual temple – a UNESCO World Heritage site. At night, the floral display is transformed into a landscape inspired by "Yozakura" (night sakura) in Japan. At the Gardens, the trees are specially lit and there are light projections that only appear when the sky darkens.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for National Development and Finance Ms Indranee Rajah opened the Sakura floral display on 22nd March 2024 with the traditional breaking of a sake barrel. Joining her were the Ambassador of Japan to Singapore H.E. Hiroshi Ishikawa, Gardens by the Bay Chairman Mr Niam Chiang Meng, and Gardens by the Bay CEO Mr Felix Loh. Mr Felix Loh said, "The affection that Singaporeans have for Japanese culture has made our Sakura floral display, now in its ninth year, a beloved event. This year's edition is especially exciting as we introduce 'yozakura', or night sakura, for the first time, offering visitors the chance to also experience cherry blossoms in a different way after dark. Together with the Japanese cultural fringe programmes and the much-anticipated return of Anime Garden, this year's Sakura season at Gardens by the Bay promises to be an exciting and unforgettable one." The display is on from **22nd March to 21st April 2024**.



For the full programme of events and activities visit www.indiplomacy.com



The Indonesia-Singapore Business Forum 2024

The Indonesia-Singapore Business Forum 2024, held on **March 27** at the Hilton Singapore Orchard, was a significant event that followed closely after Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election, aiming to strengthen economic ties between Indonesia and Singapore. Jointly organized by the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, IIPC-Singapore, and Enterprise Singapore, the forum attracted 400 key figures, including business leaders and government officials. The event featured discussions led by economic ministers Airlangga Hartarto of Indonesia and Gan Kim Yong of Singapore, focusing on deepening bilateral investments and exploring new business opportunities. Panels provided insights into Indonesia's economic outlook and investment climate under its new leadership, offering valuable information for investors and entrepreneurs interested in the Indonesian market.

Diversity in Action: Women Driving Change

H.E. Ms. Charlotte Lobe, High Commissioner to the Republic of South Africa for Singapore, will deliver the keynote address at the "Diversity in Action: Women Driving Change" event, hosted by the South African Chamber of Commerce. The business forum panel discussion and networking session is scheduled for the **18th of April 2024** at IMDA Pixel. Her Excellency Ms. Charlotte Lobe's presence at the event is especially significant as the Chamber facilitates a gathering for trade delegates and members spearheading the trade mission "Fixing Each Other's Crown" from South Africa. With her extensive experience and profound insights, Her Excellency's address is expected to inspire and enlighten all attendees, further enriching the discussions on diversity and women's leadership.



*Keynote Speaker:
H.E. Ms. Charlotte Lobe, High Commissioner Republic of South Africa, Singapore*



Travel Malaysia 2024 35th Edition!

It is billed as the 35th edition of the "most established Malaysia Travel Exhibition in Singapore". Jointly organised by the Malaysia Truly Asia - the Malaysian Tourism and the country's Express & Excursion Bus Association - it will be held at Singapore Expo from the **3rd to 5th of May 2024**. For the latest updates on the fair visit: www.travelmalaysiafair.com

TOURISM

Maldives: A Realm of Infinite Possibilities

The Maldives, a jewel in the vastness of the Indian Ocean, is more than just a destination; it's a palette of experiences painted on a canvas of turquoise waters and pristine beaches. Here, every island is a doorway to adventure and tranquility, promising an escape that caters to the heart's every desire, from the pulsating rhythms of music to serene moments of solitude.

The Maldives, set in the vast Indian Ocean, transcends mere geography to offer a spectrum of experiences. With its turquoise waters and pristine beaches, each island is a gateway to both adventure and tranquility, catering to desires that range from the vibrant rhythms of music to serene moments of reflection.

In this tropical paradise, the Hard Rock Hotel Maldives stands out as a beacon of energy, inviting guests to live out their rockstar fantasies against a backdrop of sun-kissed beaches. For those seeking a quieter retreat, SAii Lagoon Maldives offers a serene haven, where luxurious villas and tranquil waters promise relaxation and privacy.

The Marina at Crossroads Maldives adds a vibrant layer to the Maldivian experience, with a mix of gourmet dining, shopping, and entertainment. It's a place for those who thrive in lively settings, offering a dynamic atmosphere that contrasts with the island's natural calm.

The Maldives is a treasure trove of wonders, from vibrant coral reefs to culinary delights and beachfront weddings. Whether it's diving into adventures beneath the waves, relaxing in world-class spas, or enjoying family activities, the islands offer a backdrop that makes every moment memorable.

Ultimately, the Maldives is a promise of a personalised paradise, blending the thrill of discovery with the tranquility of secluded retreats. It's a destination where every visit is tailored to fulfill dreams, making the Maldives not just a place to visit, but a collection of experiences to cherish.



"The Maldives: where every grain of sand tells a story of enchantment, and every wave sings a melody of tranquility, inviting you to write your own chapter in its endless sky."