



Fact Sheet

Overview of Singapore

Research Office
Legislative Council Secretariat

FSC18/15-16

Geography

Land area

- Singapore, officially the Republic of Singapore, lies at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, and is separated from Malaysia by the Johor Strait and from Indonesia by the Singapore Strait. It is an island state with a total land area of 718 sq km, comprising the main island of Singapore and 63 surrounding islets.



Source: CIA World Factbook.

Demographics

Population

- Singapore had a total population of some 5.5 million at end-June 2015, comprising 3.9 million Singaporean residents and 1.6 million non-residents. The ethnic composition of the 3.9 million resident population was as follows: 74.3% Chinese, 13.3% Malays, 9.1% Indians and 3.3% others.

History

Early history

- In 1819, Thomas Stamford Raffles arrived at Singapore as an agent of the British East India Company. He obtained permission from local rulers to establish a trading post in Singapore as a base for British trade on the route between India and China. In 1824, Singapore became a British colony when local rulers agreed to cede the island to the British East India Company "in perpetuity".
- During World War II, Singapore was occupied by Japan in February 1942. Singapore remained under the control of the Japanese troops until September 1945, when the British returned to the island after the surrender of Japan to the Allied Powers.

History (cont'd)	
Self-government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 1955, Singapore became partially self-governing, with a new Legislative Assembly returning 25 elected Members out of a total membership of 32. In 1958, the United Kingdom Parliament passed the <i>State of Singapore Act</i> to change the Singapore's status from a colony to a state. Moreover, a new constitution was enacted to create the position of Prime Minister and increase the number of seats in the Legislative Assembly to 51 with Members entirely chosen by popular election. • Singapore achieved complete internal self-government in 1959. In May of that year, Singapore held its first general election to return 51 Members to the first fully elected legislature. The People's Action Party ("PAP") won 43 seats and its leader, Lee Kuan Yew (李光耀), became the first Prime Minister of Singapore.
Birth of an independent republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 1962, a national referendum overwhelmingly approved Lee Kuan Yew's proposal to merge Singapore with Malaysia. Singapore joined Malaya, Sarawak and Sabah to form the Federation of Malaysia a year later. However, tension within the federation became evident afterwards, forcing Singapore to withdraw and become an independent republic on 9 August 1965. • Lee Kuan Yew stepped down as the Prime Minister in 1990, and was succeeded by his former deputy Goh Chok Tong (吳作棟). In 2004, Lee Hsien Loong (李顯龍), the eldest son of Lee Kuan Yew, took over from Goh as Singapore's third Prime Minister and has remained in office since then.
Passing of the founding father of Singapore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lee Kuan Yew died at the age of 91 on 23 March 2015. Singapore observed a weeklong period of mourning for the former founding leader.
Singapore's 50 th anniversary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In August 2015, Singapore marked 50 years of independence from Malaysia with nationwide celebrations including a huge military parade and firework display that also paid tribute to former founding leader Lee Kuan Yew.

Economy	
Gross Domestic Product ("GDP")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Singapore economy was the 36th largest in the world in 2014, with an estimated GDP of US\$308 billion (HK\$2,387 billion). • At US\$56,284 (HK\$436,431), Singapore's GDP per capita ranked ninth in the world in 2014.
Economic structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Singapore has virtually no agriculture and even has to import water from Malaysia. The estimated GDP composition by sector in 2015 was: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) industry (25.4%), and (b) services (74.6%). • Singapore's economic development has been characterized by a progressive broadening and deepening of its economic structure. In addition to being a financial centre and trading hub, Singapore retains a competitive export-oriented manufacturing sector with a particular focus on electronics, pharmaceuticals and petroleum refining. • The next phase of Singapore's economic development will be based on a shift to a more knowledge- and skills-based economy, driven by productivity gains to overcome inevitable supply-side constraints amid its ongoing economic restructuring to reduce reliance on foreign workers.
Recent economic performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From its independence in 1965, Singapore achieved almost uninterrupted economic growth averaging nearly 8% per annum over the three decades that followed. Singapore experienced a brief period of economic difficulty in the late 2000s. The global financial crisis of 2008 had a pronounced impact on the externally-oriented Singapore economy, with the GDP growth decelerating from a high of 9.1% in 2007 to 1.8% in 2008 and even turning negative at -0.6% in 2009. • The Singapore economy staged a V-shaped recovery to register a 15.2% GDP growth in 2010. It has continued to grow since then on the strength of renewed exports. Growth in 2014 was slower at 2.9%, largely as a result of soft demand for exports against a sluggish global economy and weak growth in Singapore's manufacturing sector.

Economy (cont'd)	
Recent economic performance (cont'd)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance estimates published by the Ministry of Trade and Industry shows that Singapore's GDP growth moderated further to 2.1%, the slowest in six years. The main drag came from the manufacturing sector which contracted for four consecutive months. • Going forward, the extent of economic slowdown of China (the largest export market) remains a concern for Singapore's growth prospects. Reflecting this downside risk, the Asian Development Bank recently downgraded its forecast for Singapore's 2016 GDP growth to 2.3% from the earlier 2.5%. Likewise, the economists polled in the quarterly survey conducted by the Monetary Authority of Singapore also lowered their forecasts to 2.2% from the earlier 2.8%.
Change of government	
Government leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PAP has dominated the political landscape in Singapore since it came to power in 1959, winning 14 successive general elections since then. In the general elections of 1968, 1972, 1976 and 1980, PAP won all of the parliamentary seats at stake. • In 1981, the Workers' Party became the first opposition party in Singapore to win a seat in a by-election. Since then, opposition parties gained small number of seats, ranging from one to four, in the parliamentary elections between 1984 and 2006. • In the general election held in May 2011, the governing PAP won 81 of the 87 elected seats in Parliament. However, its share of votes was reduced to a record low of 60.1%, down from 66.6% in 2006. The Workers' Party took six seats, representing the opposition's best performance since the independence of Singapore in 1965. In May 2012, it contested the vacant seat in a by-election and won with 54.5% of votes cast.

Change of government (cont'd)	
Government leadership (cont'd)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most recent general election took place on 11 September 2015, in which PAP won 83 of the 89 elected parliamentary seats and raised its vote share to 69.9%. The main opposition Workers' Party won six seats. PAP's overwhelming victory was partly attributable to its ability to capitalize on the goodwill engendered by celebrations to mark the 50th independence anniversary, as well as the patriotic fervour generated by the death of Lee Kuan Yew in March 2015.
Institutions of the <i>Constitution</i>	
Three Branches of government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The government is defined by the <i>Constitution</i> to mean the Executive Branch of government, which is made up of the President and the Cabinet. The Cabinet, composed of the Prime Minister and other Ministers appointed on his or her advice by the President, directs the government's policy. The Cabinet is formed by the political party that gains a simple majority in each general election. Being the head of state, the President of Singapore is elected for a term of six years⁽¹⁾ and performs a largely ceremonial role. Nevertheless, he or she possesses certain executive powers such as investigation into cases of abuse of power by the government and withholding assent to any bills passed by Parliament that draws upon the national financial reserves. The incumbent President, Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam (陳慶炎), won the 2011 presidential election by a narrow margin of just 0.35 percentage point over the closest of his three rivals. The Legislative Branch features the establishment of a unicameral legislature which sits for five-year terms. The Singapore Parliament comprises three categories of Members, namely (a) elected Members; (b) Nominated Members appointed by the President of Singapore; and (c) Non-Constituency Members appointed from among unsuccessful opposition candidates who obtained the highest percentage of votes in an election.

Note: (1) There are no term limits for the presidency. In Singapore, any persons wishing to stand for the presidential election must obtain the Certificates of Eligibility from the Presidential Elections Committee chaired by the Chairman of the Public Service Commission. The document certifies that the Committee is satisfied with the applicant's integrity, good character, reputation, and the experience and ability to carry out effectively the functions and duties of the President.

Institutions of the <i>Constitution</i> (cont'd)	
Three branches of government (cont'd)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Judicial Branch comprises the Supreme Court and the State Courts. The Supreme Court, which is made up of the Court of Appeal and the High Court, hears both civil and criminal cases. The State Courts handle more than 95% of the court cases and comprise the District Courts, the Magistrates' Courts, the Coroners' Court, the Family Court, the Juvenile Court and the Small Claims Tribunals.
Ties with Hong Kong	
Trade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Importance of Singapore to Hong Kong's external trade in 2015: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> fifth largest trading partner; eighth largest export market; and fourth largest source of imports.
Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2015, the number of Singapore's visitors decreased by 8.5%, to about 675 411 or 1% of Hong Kong's total visitor arrivals.
Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As at end-June 2015, Singaporean companies established 42 regional headquarters, 93 regional offices and 222 local offices in Hong Kong. In 2014, Singapore was the seventh largest source of inward direct investment in Hong Kong. The market value of investment from Singapore totalled HK\$319 billion at end-2014.

Research Office
Information Services Division
Legislative Council Secretariat
26 February 2016
Tel: 2871 2146

Fact sheets are compiled for Members and Committees of the Legislative Council. They are not legal or other professional advice and shall not be relied on as such. Fact sheets are subject to copyright owned by The Legislative Council Commission (The Commission). The Commission permits accurate reproduction of fact sheets for non-commercial use in a manner not adversely affecting the Legislative Council, provided that acknowledgement is made stating the Research Office of the Legislative Council Secretariat as the source and one copy of the reproduction is sent to the Legislative Council Library.

References

1. *Bank of International Settlements*. (2016) Available from: <http://www.bis.org/> [Accessed February 2016].
2. *Census and Statistics Department*. (2016) Available from: <http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/> [Accessed February 2016].
3. *Department of Statistics Singapore*. (2016) Available from: <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/> [Accessed February 2016].
4. *Elections Department Singapore*. (2016) Available from: <http://www.elections.gov.sg/> [Accessed February 2016].
5. *Government of Singapore*. (2016) Available from: <http://www.gov.sg/> [Accessed February 2016].
6. *Hong Kong Tourism Board PartnerNet*. (2016) Available from: <http://partnernet.hktourismboard.com/> [Accessed February 2016].
7. *Hong Kong Trade Development Council*. (2016) Available from: <http://www.hktdc.com/> [Accessed February 2016].
8. *International Monetary Fund*. (2016) Available from: <http://www.imf.org/> [Accessed February 2016].
9. InvestHK. (2016) *Singaporean community in Hong Kong*. Available from: <http://www.investhk.gov.hk/community-facts/singapore.html> [Accessed February 2016].
10. *Office of the President of the Republic of Singapore*. (2016) Available from: <http://www.istana.gov.sg/> [Accessed February 2016].
11. *Parliament of Singapore*. (2016) Available from: <http://www.parliament.gov.sg/> [Accessed February 2016].