

# **S I N G A P O R E**

## **SECTION A**

### **Capital**

Singapore 2,987,000 (1994 est.)

### **Area**

646,1 sq km (249,5 sq mi)

### **Form of government**

Unitary Multiparty Republic with one legislative house (Parliament)

### **GDP—per capita**

Purchasing power parity— \$27,800 (1999 est.)

### **Population**

4,151,264 (July 2000 est.)

### **Ethnic composition**

Chinese	76.4%
Malay	14.9%
Indian	6.4%
Other	2.3%

### **Official language**

Mandarin (Chinese); Malay; Tamil; English

Malay is the national language and English is the language of administration.

### **Other languages**

Various Chinese dialects including Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka, Hainanese and Foochow.

Aside from Tamil, some other languages spoken by the Indian minority are Malayalam, Punjabi, Telugu, Hindi and Bengali.

### **Legislation dealing with the use of languages**

*Singapore Constitution* as adopted on September 1963

*The Administration of Muslim Law Act Republic of Singapore (1968)* relating to Muslims and providing for the regulation of Muslim religious affairs through the establishment of a council to advise on matters relating to the Muslim religion in Singapore.

### **Background notes**

Independence was achieved from Malaysia on August 9, 1965.

The Constitution was drafted on June 3, 1959 and amended in 1965 was based on pre-independence State of Singapore Constitution.

The Republic of Singapore, an independent city-state in Southeast Asia, is comprised of one main island and fifty adjacent islands off the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula. Singapore is densely populated, with most of the country's people concentrated in the south central portion of the island, where the central business district and main port are located.

Singapore contained just a few fishing settlements and a small trading port when the islands became part of the United Kingdom's colonial empire in the 1820s. Britain developed Singapore into a major international trading center, and the local Malay population soon swelled with immigrants from China and India. Since becoming an independent republic in 1965, multiethnic Singapore has maintained political stability and achieved high economic growth. As a result, Singapore is now Southeast Asia's most important seaport, financial center, and manufacturing hub, and its citizens enjoy one of the world's highest standards of living.

The people of Singapore's are primarily descendants of immigrants from the Malay Peninsula, China, the Indian sub-continent and Sri Lanka. They have gradually acquired a distinct identity as Singaporeans while still retaining their traditional practices, customs and festivals.

## **SECTION B**

### **Where does one observe language to be a problem in the country?**

No problems were found.

One of Singapore's greatest strengths is its self-proclaimed "unity through diversity" which is also represented by the co-existence of four official languages.

The Constitution states that all persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law, and the Government carries out these provisions in practice. Mindful of the country's history of inter-communal tension, the Government takes affirmative measures to ensure racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural nondiscrimination. Social, economic, and cultural benefits and facilities are available to all citizens regardless of race, religion, or sex.

Of Interest is the issue of Singaporean Identity. Singapore's leaders explicitly rejected the ideology of the "melting pot", offering rather the vision of a confidently multiethnic society. One whose component ethnic groups shared participation in such common institutions as electoral politics, public education, military service, public housing, and ceremonies of citizenship. At the same time they were to retain distinct languages, religions, and customs. Singaporeans were defined as composed of three fundamental types: Chinese, Malays, and Indians. These ethnic categories, locally referred to as "races", were assumed to represent self-evident, "natural" groups that would continue to exist into the indefinite future. Singaporean identity thus implied being Chinese, Malay, or Indian, but self-consciously so in relation to the other two groups. The Singaporean model of ethnicity thus required both the denial of significant difference between each ethnic group while still highlighting the contrasts between the cultures.

### **The use of language in everyday life e.g. education, broadcasting and other**

Being Singaporean means being fluent in English, a language which serves both as a neutral medium for all ethnic groups and as the language of international business, science and technology. The schools, the government, and the offices of international corporations use English as their working language, for the most part. The four official languages may be used in Parliament or in the Courts; however, the proceedings are recorded in English only. The typical Singaporean is bilingual,

speaking English as well as the language of one of the three component ethnic groups.

The 1990 Census of Population showed that proportionately more Singapore residents were multilingual in 1990 as compared to the previous census of 1980. Among literate residents aged 15 years and over, those who were literate in two or more languages increased significantly, from 37% in 1980 to 45% in 1990. The use of English and Mandarin as home languages had also increased. The proportion of resident households speaking English at home increased from 12% in 1980 to 21% in 1990. Those speaking Mandarin at home more than doubled, from 10% to 24%. Consequently, Chinese dialect speaking households declined, from 60% in 1980 to only 38% in 1990.

Singaporeans have developed their own form of spoken English, though some features of it are sometimes seen in informal writings. Singaporean English, sometimes referred to as Singlish, differs from English in rhythm and intonation, stress patterns, vowel length and quality and sometimes also word order. It has taken in some features of Chinese and it has some distinctive discourse particles like lah, lé and á, which are frequently used in Singlish.

Literacy, numeracy, bilingualism, physical and moral education are emphasized in Singapore's education system. The bilingual policy requires each child to learn English and his or her mother tongue so as to ensure proficiency in English (the language of commerce, technology and administration) and their mother tongue (the language of respective cultural heritage).

The four official languages are used in broadcasting as well as in the press. In 1998, English language newspapers attained the highest circulation (538,529), followed by Chinese (458,154), Malay (64,342) and Tamil newspaper (9,179) language publications.

## APPENDIX A

### MAP OF SINGAPORE



## **APPENDIX B**

### **SINGAPORE - CONSTITUTION**

(Adopted on Sep 16, 1963)

#### **Article 44 (Qualifications for Membership of Parliament)**

A person shall be qualified to be elected or appointed as a Member of Parliament if

(e) he is able, with a degree of proficiency sufficient to enable him to take an active part in the proceedings of Parliament, to speak and, unless incapacitated by blindness or other physical cause, to read and write at least one of the following languages, that is to say, English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil;

#### **Article 53 (Use of Languages in Parliament)**

Until the Legislature otherwise provides, all debates and discussions in Parliament shall be conducted in Malay, English, Mandarin, or Tamil.

#### **Article 127 (Citizenship by Naturalization)**

(1) Subject to clause (4), the Government may, upon application made by any person of or over the age of 21 years who is not a citizen of Singapore, grant a certificate of naturalization to that person if the Government is satisfied

(c) that he has an adequate knowledge of the national language.

#### **Article 152 (Minorities and Special Position of Malays)**

(1).It shall be the responsibility of the Government constantly to care for the interests of the racial and religious minorities in Singapore.

(2) The Government shall exercise its functions in such manner as to recognize the special position of the Malays, who are the indigenous people of Singapore, and accordingly it shall be the responsibility of the Government to protect, safeguard, support, foster and promote their political, educational, religious, economic, social and cultural interests and the Malay language.

### **153 A.**

(1) Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English shall be the 4 official languages in Singapore.

(2) The national language shall be the Malay language and shall be in the Roman script:

Provided that —

(a) no person shall be prohibited or prevented from using or from teaching or learning any other language; and

(b) nothing in this Article shall prejudice the right of the Government to preserve and sustain the use and study of the language of any other community in Singapore.

### **Article 154 (Impartial Treatment of Government Employees)**

Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, all persons of whatever race in the same grade of the service of the Government shall, subject to the terms and conditions of their employment, be treated impartially.

Note: The complete text of the Singaporean Constitution and further information on the constitutional background of Singapore are provided by the International Constitutional Law Project at the University of Wuerzburg.

We acknowledge also with thanks data from the Singapore Ministry of Information and the Arts and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

# **EXCERPTS FROM THE ADMINISTRATION OF MUSLIM LAW ACT REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE**

(1968)

## CHAPTER 3

### LANGUAGE AND RECORD

#### **38.**

- (1) The languages of the Court shall be the national language and English.
- (2) All documents and written proceedings may be written or typewritten in the national language (Jawi or Rumi script).
- (3) The Court shall keep and maintain full and proper records of all proceedings therein and full and proper accounts of all financial transactions of the Court. [37]

### ORDER OF BUSINESS AND VOTING

#### **22.**

- (1) The chairman shall determine the order of business at any meeting.
- (2) The chairman may decide in what order members may address the meeting and may at any time require any member to cease addressing the meeting.
- (3) The chairman shall be entitled to vote and if upon any resolution there is an equality of votes the chairman shall have a casting vote.
- (4) The proceedings of the Majlis shall be conducted in the national language or in English.

Note: We acknowledge with thanks data from the Ministry of Information and the Arts, Singapore.

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