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Beijing expresses 'gratitude' for S'pore's stance on Taiwan issue

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SM, Chinese leaders discuss recent developments in S-E Asia and Asean

CHINA has expressed its 'gratitude' for Singapore's stance on the cross-straits issue with Taiwan, and leaders from both countries have agreed that India and China have important roles to play in fostering the development and stability of the region.

Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, who is on a week-long trip to China, yesterday met Jia Qinglin, the chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

During their meeting, Mr Jia briefed Mr Goh on the ongoing Kuomintang-Chinese Communist Party Economic forum and China's current policy on the Taiwan issue, while Mr Goh reiterated Singapore's long-standing one-China policy and the country's opposition to Taiwanese independence.

The two leaders also discussed recent developments in South-east Asia and Asean. In particular, they agreed that India and China have important roles to play in fostering the development and stability of the region.

Mr Jia said that Mr Goh was a 'known friend' to the Chinese people, and had made 'important contributions to the growth of friendship' between the two countries.

He also said that during a meeting with Mr Goh in 1999, he was 'greatly inspired' by Mr Goh's views on the economic and urban development of Singapore.

Mr Goh yesterday also called on State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan, who hosted an official dinner for him.

Mr Tang said he believes Mr Goh's visit to China will be 'very important' in facilitating bilateral and economic ties. 'I think one of the most valuable characteristics of China-Singapore relations is that we not only attach great importance to each other, but have also set reliable mechanisms to ensure further and continued bilateral ties,' he said.

He added Singapore has been 'long committed' to the one-China policy and its issues relating to Taiwan. 'Singapore has always rendered to us valuable and important support.'

In particular, Mr Tang cited Singapore's position after Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian scrapped the National Unification Council, a dormant but politically symbolic body aimed at one day reuniting Taiwan with China. 'This is a very important moral and diplomatic support to us . . . and I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to you.'

During the meeting, Mr Goh reiterated Singapore's concurrence with Premier Wen Jiabao's proposal on Wednesday that both sides adopt a strategic perspective to advance bilateral cooperation. They also discussed Sino-Japan relations extensively. Mr Tang thanked Singapore for its constructive role and ideas in helping to foster better Sino-Japan ties.

Mr Goh is scheduled to travel to Suzhou in eastern Jiangsu province today to meet provincial leaders and update himself on the city's developments, and to visit the Suzhou Industrial Park.

On the final leg of his trip, Mr Goh will travel to Shanghai to meet leaders there, before travelling to Washington to attend the first Meeting of the World Bank Commission on Growth and Development.

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