

THE STRAITS TIMES

Sweden seeks deepened defence ties with Singapore, especially in maritime security



Prime Minister Lawrence Wong and Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustaf witnessed the signing of agreements on Nov 21. PHOTO: MDDI



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SINGAPORE – Deepening defence ties, especially in terms of maritime security, emerged as one of Sweden's key priorities during a three-day state visit by the Scandinavian nation's King Carl XVI Gustaf that ended on Nov 21.

Existing defence agreements were expanded, while the King – a former naval officer – engaged in several activities that had a distinctly littoral element.

For instance, he rode on the Singapore Civil Defence Force's Red Manta rescue vessel on Nov 21 and toured the Singapore Navy Museum a day before.

In various engagements, top Swedish officials who accompanied the King on his visit, including Foreign Minister Maria Malmer Stenergard, stressed the importance of various aspects in the bilateral defence relationship.



Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustaf taking a ride on the Singapore Civil Defence Force's Red Manta rescue vessel on Nov 21. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

Earlier on Nov 15, both countries' defence ministries also inked an agreement to expand a 1998 memorandum of understanding (MOU).

This will see increased collaborations between start-ups, small and medium-sized enterprises, and universities of both countries, to tap dual-use critical and emerging technologies of mutual interest.

Dual-use technologies are those with both civilian and military applications.

This agreement was one of five signed between both governments during the trip, with the exchange of MOUs witnessed by Prime Minister Lawrence Wong and the King on Nov 21.

The other agreements pertained to aviation, energy, healthcare innovation and transport.

Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said these MOUs underscore the wide-ranging cooperation between Singapore and Sweden, and laid the groundwork for deeper collaboration in areas of mutual interest.



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A post shared by Lawrence Wong (@lawrencewongst)

Separately, on Nov 20, the Defence Science and Technology Agency expanded a 2023 MOU with Swedish defence firm Saab to include collaboration on underwater technology for maritime security.

Speaking at the International Institute for Strategic Studies' Raffles Lecture the same day, Ms Malmer Stenergard outlined ways in which Singapore and Sweden could jointly promote security in their surrounding regions.

Both nations have “gained from a world built on rules and order, rather than one based on brute force and disorder”, she said at the event held at the Raffles Hotel.

“That world, where everyone plays by the same set of rules, is now being challenged. But together, I’m convinced that states like Sweden and Singapore can defend it.”

Almost 90 per cent of the European Union’s external trade in goods is seaborne, often passing through key choke points including the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea, she noted.

“With your port, Singapore is at the heart of this.”

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As both nations are trade- and export-oriented economies, safe sea lines of communication and freedom of navigation are crucial to them, she said.

China's "growing capability to project power" has consequences for Asia, as well as Sweden and Europe, and there needs to be a global commitment to safeguarding the rules-based international order.

"It is clear the geopolitical centre of gravity has shifted eastwards," Ms Malmer Stenergard said, adding that India, as an economic and innovation powerhouse, will have an essential role to play in addressing global challenges.

"In the Indo-Pacific, we will rely on India to remain a defender of democracy, multilateralism, and the UN Charter."

Turning to defence cooperation with Singapore, she said this could also increase Sweden's own capabilities.

"One reason for this is that the maritime operation environment – the seabed and the undersea topography – in these waters is very similar to the Baltic Sea.

"Thus, despite being a world apart, even our geography is not as different as one might think."

On the last day of his visit, the King also visited PSA International and Pasir Panjang Terminal to see both existing and prospective collaborations between Swedish companies and the maritime industry here.

He was then hosted to lunch and a panel discussion by Nanyang Technological University that revolved around the impact and opportunities of artificial intelligence (AI).

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NTU said on Nov 21 that it signed an MOU with Sweden's Lund University to boost research collaboration and educational opportunities.

They will identify new opportunities to collaborate in research areas such as materials science, engineering, life sciences, sustainability and AI.

Graduate students from both universities, especially PhD students, will also have more opportunities for exchange programmes, NTU added.

Meanwhile, the Energy Research Institute @ NTU and Swedish firm Anodox agreed to collaborate on two research projects that involve using Anodox's immersion cooling technology for energy storage applications.

"By leveraging cutting-edge technologies and industry expertise, the joint research projects aim to develop more efficient batteries and energy storage solutions, contributing to a more sustainable and resilient energy future."

The King capped off the final evening of his state visit with a trip to Gardens by the Bay.

He visited the Flower Dome conservatory to view an exhibition on the life of Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus, who devised the naming system of all living organisms in the natural world.

The King also previewed a section of the Gardens' upcoming Christmas Train Show, where a recreation of a 1950s Swedish railbus carriage nestled amid a floral display inspired by Sweden is the centrepiece.



Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustaf previewing part of the Christmas Train Show featuring a Swedish railbus carriage at the Flower Dome at Gardens by the Bay on Nov 21. ST PHOTO: BRIAN TEO



Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustaf at the Flower Dome conservatory at Gardens by the Bay on Nov 21, where he viewed an exhibition on the life of a Swedish botanist. ST PHOTO: BRIAN TEO

He was then given a taste of local delicacies, including kueh pie tee, popiah, carrot cake and satay, at Satay by the Bay.

Summing up his visit, the King said that even though there are many cultural differences between Sweden and Singapore, there is always room for discussion and mutual learning.



Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustaf (second from left) looking at Singaporean delicacies, such as satay and popiah, at Satay by the Bay on Nov 21. ST PHOTO: BRIAN TEO

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