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## Background

The Republic of Singapore comprises the main island of Singapore and some fifty-four small islets within its territorial waters and jurisdiction. The country has a total land area of only 716.1 square kilometres, 500 of which are taken up by the diamond-shaped main island which is 41.8 kilometres in length and 22.5 kilometres in breadth. Singapore is situated at the southern extremity of Peninsular Malaysia, to which it is linked by the 1,056-metre rail-and-road causeway spanning the Straits of Johor. In its wider context, the Republic occupies a strategic position in the principal sea, air, and trade routes between Europe and the Far East and Oceania. Singapore, being only 136.8 kilometres north of the Equator, has an equatorial climate with uniform and high temperatures of about 28°C, high humidity of about 70 per cent, and fairly abundant rainfall of some 2,400 millimetres per year. There is an absence of marked seasonal changes though December is often the wettest and coolest month.

The topography of Singapore is one lacking in contrast as the whole country is of very low elevation with a few small hills no higher than 166 metres. There are many rivers, with the larger ones such as the Kranji and Seletar Rivers used as catchment areas for reservoirs and, of course, the Singapore River which is the traditional busy waterway for small boats in the very heart of the city. The lowland forests that used to cover the island in the early days have retreated with the advance of roads, houses, factories, and cultivated vegetation. What remain are some small pockets of protected reserves, such as the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve and the Kranji Nature Reserve, totalling some 2,797 hectares. The built-up area is dominated by public housing high-rise apartments and factories which are concentrated mainly in the industrial town of Jurong on the western side of the main island.

The early history of Singapore prior to the nineteenth century remains largely uncharted, being interwoven with that of the various Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic empires that existed in the Southeast Asian region. The British, led by Stamford Raffles, landed on the island on 29 January 1819 and soon signed a treaty with the Malay ruler, Sultan Hussein Mohamed Shah of Johor, and established a trading post. In 1826, Singapore joined the two other British settlements of Penang and Malacca in the Malay Peninsula to form the Colony of the Straits Settlements. This arrangement continued until after World War II in 1946 when Penang and Malacca became part of the Malayan Union and Singapore was governed as a separate colony. Singapore attained full internal self-government with a completely elected Legislative Assembly of fifty-one members in 1959 when the People's Action Party (PAP) secured a majority in the May election.

Four years later, Singapore joined Malaya, Sabah, and Sarawak to form the Federation of Malaysia, but this political union proved to be short-lived as Singapore separated from Malaysia on 9 August 1965 and became an independent and sovereign state within the Commonwealth. With full powers to manage the affairs of the state, the PAP government led by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew proceeded to embark on a series of measures designed to expedite the country's social and economic development. Since then, the PAP has remained in government, with Lee Kuan Yew continuing as Prime Minister until November 1990 when Goh Chok Tong took over. The latest leadership changeover occurred in August 2004 when Lee Hsien Loong became the third Prime Minister of Singapore.

After World War II, the population of Singapore was quickly enlarged from 938,144 in 1947 to 1,445,929 in 1957, an increase of 507,785 or an annual growth rate of 4.5 per cent. This rapid rate of population increase recorded in the early post-war years may be attributed to an accelerated decline in mortality and a persistently high level of fertility. Another factor was the net movement of people from the hinterland of Peninsular Malaysia to the island of Singapore. As mortality declined less slowly, fertility commenced to fall, and Malaysia-Singapore movement of people diminished, the rate of population increase began to slacken to 2.8 per cent during 1957-70 and to 1.5 per cent during 1970-80. With the importation of foreign guest workers to alleviate the shortage of labour, the population increased at a faster rate again, 2.3 per cent during 1980-90 and 2.9 per cent during 1990-2000. The

economic difficulties in recent years led to a slow rate of population increase, 1.0 per cent in 2002 and 0.3 per cent in 2003. The total population of Singapore numbered 5,535,002 in 2015, with 3,902,690 or 70.5 per cent resident population defined to include Singapore citizens and permanent residents. The racial composition of this resident population consists of Chinese with 2,900,007 or 74.3 per cent, Malays with 520,923 or 13.3 per cent, and Indians with 354,952 or 10.2 per cent.

The economy of Singapore has undergone dramatic changes to emerge as a very advanced one nowadays viewed in terms of the economic structure and per capita income. Transport, communications, power, and other basic facilities are well developed; standards of public administration are high and efficient. In 2014, manufacturing contributed 17 per cent to the gross domestic product, wholesale and retail trade 17 per cent, business services 15 per cent, financial services 12 per cent, and transport and storage 7 per cent. Out of the total 2,103,500 resident working persons in 2014, some 12 per cent were employed in manufacturing, 17 per cent in wholesale and retail services, 15 per cent in business services, 9 per cent in transport and storage, and 8 per cent in financial and insurance services. The per capita income was estimated to reach the high of US\$56,287 in 2014, propelling Singapore into the small club of rich countries in the world.

An integral part of the overall development strategy in the early post-war years to raise the standard of living of the people in the small island state devoid of most natural resources had been the government population control programme. The principal component of this programme was first introduced in 1966 when the Singapore Family Planning and Population Board was established by the government. Prior to this, there was the Private Family Planning Programme that had been operated by the Family Planning Association since 1949. The national programme was strengthened in the late 1960s with the introduction of measures that went beyond family planning to achieve its demographic goals. In 1970, the restrictive laws concerning induced abortion and sterilization were legalized and liberalized. They were further amended in December 1974 to make abortion and sterilization freely available on request. Stringent social and financial incentives and disincentives introduced in the late 1960s and early 1970s constitute the final component of the national programme.

The comprehensive population control programme has been responsible for sustaining and accelerating the decline in fertility that first commenced in 1958, and the eventual attainment of the replacement fertility level in 1975. The attainment of replacement fertility is a precondition for achieving its stated demographic goal of zero population growth in the future. But the second condition of maintaining fertility at the replacement level was never fulfilled as fertility was allowed to remain well below replacement level since 1975. The key reason is that the strong antinatalist policies and programmes were not relaxed or reversed until the mid-1980s. Some relaxation of the old antinatalist policies and the introduction of limited pronatalist policies were made in 1984. In the meantime, fertility — as measured by the total fertility rate (TFR) — continued to fall well below the replacement level to touch the record low of 1.33 in 2003, with only 37,485 births. This led the government to introduce, by far, the most comprehensive pronatalist measures in 2004 aimed at raising fertility to a less dangerously low level, but recognizing the futility of trying to push it back to replacement level.

The term "population policies" is usually used to refer to those policies adopted by a government to influence the course of population trends and patterns in the country. Some examples of such explicit population policies are immigration policy regulating the inflow of foreigners into the country, population distribution or redistribution policy governing the movement of people within the country, mortality policy affecting the general health of the people, and fertility policy affecting the reproductive behaviour of the people. There are two types of fertility policy — those designed to encourage childbearing and those designed to discourage childbearing. Those policies adopted by a government to persuade its people to produce fewer children in order to lower the rate of population growth are known as *antinatalist* policies, while those meant to do the exact opposite are known as *pronatalist* policies. The adoption of a population policy will normally lead to a population programme being implemented to achieve the objective of the policy. For example, the adoption of an antinatalist policy in the early days resulted in the implementation of a national family planning programme in Singapore to provide island-wide family planning services to the people.