LEE KUAN YEW

The Final Journey

THE STRAITS TIMES
At 3.18am on Monday, March 23, 2015, while the rest of Singapore slept, Mr Lee Kuan Yew died at the age of 91.

His death was not unexpected as he had been at the Singapore General Hospital since Feb 5, when he was admitted for severe pneumonia. In the week before he died, the Prime Minister’s Office had said that his condition had worsened.

Still, the announcement of his death came as a shock to
Singaporeans when they woke up that morning.

For more than 50 years, “LKY”, as most knew him, was there — to lead, guide, cajole, persuade, exhort, scold. There was no one as synonymous with Singapore as he. And now he was gone.

The news was made public at about 4am. By the time dawn broke, people were flocking to SGH where an area near Block 7 was already filled with flowers, gifts and cards wishing him a good recovery. This time, they came to offer prayers of condolences.

Others headed for the gates of the Istana when it was known that a private wake would be held at Sri Temasek for the first two
days, before the lying in state at Parliament House.

In the seven days of national mourning that followed, Singapore saw an unprecedented outpouring of grief.

In all, more than 1.2 million people visited tribute sites around the country to pen messages to Mr Lee. A total of 450,000 queued — some up to 11 hours, most four to five — to pay their last respects to him in Parliament House, and 100,000 braved pouring rain to line the street for his funeral procession.

The numbers are just one part of the story of how Singaporeans came together to mourn the death of the country’s first prime minister. Beyond the numbers, every mourner had his own story of what Mr Lee meant to him and how the values and ideas Mr Lee believed in and fought for — excellence, incorruptibility, meritocracy, multi-racialism, bilingualism — had made a difference in his life.

Businessman Guay Boon Bing, 49, said he was from a Chinese school and used to feel very disadvantaged after Mr Lee introduced the bilingual policy. “But now, as a businessman, knowing English has helped me to expand my semiconductor business overseas, in countries like the United States.
Bilingualism has changed my life,” said Mr Guay at the Padang.

Ms Clara Miles, 60, a former hotel guest relations officer, valued how Singapore was safe. Children can wander around after school — “it was all his doing, making Singapore into a safe place”.

Former Singapore Airlines stewardess Sharon Chong, in her 50s, spoke for many when she said it was partly guilt that drove her to express her thanks.

“It was important for me to go out into the streets to say goodbye to Mr Lee,” she said at Commonwealth Avenue where she waited in the rain for the cortege. “I want him to know I’m grateful to him. We’re the silent, sleeping ones who have kept quiet all these years. We are awakened now that he has passed on. We feel ashamed that we have not done much for the nation and never bothered with his contributions until now.”

When Mr Lee was Prime Minister, he would stay up till 3.30am, working. Even as Senior Minister and Minister Mentor, he was often awake till the wee hours thinking and planning how to improve the lives of Singaporeans.

“Deep into the night, while the rest of Singapore slept, it was common for Mr Lee to be in full work mode,” revealed Education Minister Heng Swee Keat, who was once Mr Lee’s principal private secretary.

That Monday morning when he passed away at 3.18am, he left behind a people who showed gratitude, grace and unity in their sorrow.

Lee Kuan Yew: The Final Journey looks back at the events of that week. It contains photographs and stories that appeared in The Straits Times print version and some that were not used, as well as audio and videos that you can find in our site at straitstimes.com.
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Photo: ALPHONSUS CHERN
Singapore entered the post-Lee Kuan Yew era on March 23, 2015, with the passing of founding father Lee Kuan Yew, 91. It was a day that had been widely anticipated, not least since Mr Lee himself had often spoken of the need for leadership succession and had
pushed for it relentlessly, giving up his own job as Prime Minister in 1990 after 31 years, and while still robust at 67.

Yet, when the time finally came - he died at 3.18am at the Singapore General Hospital where he had been hospitalised since Feb 5 with severe pneumonia - there was a palpable sense of loss in the country, from the halls of the Istana to the streets of Tanjong Pagar.

As soon as the Prime Minister’s Office announced the news an hour later, an unprecedented outpouring of tributes and messages of condolence began appearing online, and continued all day. An emotional Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong fought back tears when he appeared live on television from the Istana at 8am to deliver the news that the first Prime Minister, his father, had died. He said he was “grieved beyond words”.

“The first of our founding fathers is no more. He inspired us, gave us courage, kept us together, and brought us here. He fought for our independence, built a nation where there was none, and made us proud to be Singaporeans. We won’t see another man like him,” he said.

To many here and abroad, he said, “Lee Kuan Yew was Singapore. Singapore was his abiding passion. He gave of himself, in full measure, to Singapore. As he himself put it towards the end of his life and I quote, ‘I have spent my life, so much of it, building up this country. There’s nothing more that I need to do. At the end of the day, what have I got? A successful Singapore. What have I given up? My life.’ “
At 8am on March 23, 2015, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong addressed the nation on the passing of his father, Mr Lee Kuan Yew. He spoke first in Malay and Mandarin. This is the text of his English speech.

“Good morning my fellow Singaporeans. I am deeply saddened to tell you that Mr Lee Kuan Yew passed away peacefully this morning at the Singapore General Hospital.

The first of our founding fathers is no more. He inspired us, gave us courage, kept us together, and brought us here. He fought for our independence, built a nation where there was none, and made us proud to be Singaporeans. We won’t see another man like him.
To many Singaporeans, and indeed others too, Lee Kuan Yew was Singapore. As Prime Minister, he pushed us hard to achieve what had seemed impossible. After he stepped down, he guided his successors with wisdom and tact. In old age, he continued to keep a watchful eye on Singapore.

Singapore was his abiding passion. He gave of himself, in full measure, to Singapore. As he himself put it towards the end of his life and I quote: “I have spent my life, so much of it, building up this country. There’s nothing more that I need to do. At the end of the day, what have I got? A successful Singapore. What have I given up? My life.”

I am grieved beyond words at the passing of Mr Lee Kuan Yew. I know that we all feel the same way. But even as we mourn his passing, let us also honour his spirit. Let us dedicate ourselves as one people to build on his foundations, strive for his ideals, and keep Singapore exceptional and successful for many years to come.

May Mr Lee Kuan Yew rest in peace.”
PM Lee called on Singaporeans to honour Mr Lee’s spirit, even as they mourned his loss, and work together to “build on his foundations, strive for his ideals, and keep Singapore exceptional and successful for many years to come”.

On hearing news of Mr Lee’s passing, people immediately began making their way to the Istana, his constituency Tanjong Pagar and Parliament House, their numbers growing through the day. Many, both men and women, were wet-eyed.

At the Istana’s Orchard Road gates, the crowd waited patiently to pen heartfelt condolence messages and catch a glimpse of Mr Lee returning to the grounds for the last time.
Mr Toh Hoo Kee buried his face in grief at news that Singapore's founding father had died. He was spotted at the SGH tribute area near Block 7. Photo: MARK CHEONG

The hearse carrying Mr Lee's body entered the Istana at about 1pm on March 23 for a private wake at Sri Temasek. Some in the crowd outside called out his name. Photo: KEVIN LIM

On Tuesday, March 24, PM Lee, his wife Ho Ching (standing, left) and their son Hongyi (standing, centre) visited the crowds outside the Istana. Photo: CHEW SENG KIM

Mr Lawrence Hee (above) was one of those who paid their last respects to Mr Lee soon after news broke of his death. This photo was taken at the SGH tribute area at about 6am, March 23. Photo: LIM SIN THAI

People lined up outside the Istana on March 23 to pay their last respects. Some left flowers, others penned tributes. Photo: DESMOND FOO
When the silver hearse bearing his casket arrived at about 1pm, applause and cheers broke out, as well as cries of “Thank you, Mr Lee!”

Over at Tanjong Pagar, which Mr Lee had represented for 60 years since 1955, thousands more turned out to pay tribute to the man some called the “father of the nation”, bowing respectfully before a large portrait of him.

Retired calligrapher Seow Cheong Choon, 80, wept as he recounted how he had once railed against Mr Lee, doubting he would deliver on his promises to house Singapore’s slum dwellers and squatters. “He said he would give us all a house. Not just one or two people, but the thousands living in attap houses,” he
said in Mandarin. “I was angry with his promises of false hope. Who could believe him? Singapore was chaotic, muddy, full of gangsters.”

He was referring to the time Mr Lee had declared at a 1965 grassroots event: “This country belongs to all of us. We made this country from nothing, from mudflats... Today, this is a modern city. Ten years from now, this will be a metropolis. Never fear!”

That vision was to become a reality, and one of those who lived through the city’s transformation was Mr Seow, who moved into a new three-room flat in Kim Tian Road in the late 1960s.

Mr Lee led a pioneer generation of Singaporeans to overcome similarly daunting challenges, including rebuilding the economy after the sudden pullout of British forces and the oil shocks of the 1970s, and a major economic recession in the mid-1980s.

Little wonder then that he came to be regarded as the man most instrumental in shaping this country, from the time he and his People’s Action Party colleagues pushed for self-government in the 1950s to their quest for merger with the Federation of Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak to form the new nation Malaysia in the early 1960s, and their efforts to secure the Republic’s survival after independence was thrust on it on Aug 9, 1965.

He famously wept on TV announcing the “moment of anguish”, when Singapore was “severed” from Malaysia. Not only had he believed deeply in a unified Malaysia as a multiracial society, but he must also have sensed the enormity of the task for the new city-state to make a living in an inhospitable world.

His decades in office were not uncontroversial. Having survived
life-and-death battles with the communists and communalists in Singapore’s troubled early years, he made plain that he was not averse to donning “knuckledusters” to take on and “demolish” his political adversaries. He refused to be swayed by popular sentiment or opinion polls, believing that voters would come round when they eventually saw the benefits of policies he had pushed through.

He was both a visionary and a radical thinker, and was instrumental in a host of major policies that have shaped almost every aspect of Singaporeans’ lives, from promoting public housing, home ownership, racial integration in public estates and, later, estate upgrading, to adopting English as a common language for the disparate races in Singapore.

He made multiracialism and meritocracy as well as economically sound and corruption-free government hallmarks of the Singapore way. He carried over his own frugal ways to the business of government and was relentless in his fight against the “cancer of corruption”, making plain that no one was beyond being investigated and ejected from office if they strayed.

He pushed for ministers and senior civil servants to be paid salaries pegged to private sector rates, despite that being controversial, believing it was necessary if Singapore was to continue to enjoy good, clean government.

And if this city gained a reputation worldwide for also being one of the cleanest and greenest, it was because the Prime Minister himself took a personal interest in enhancing the island’s greenery, parks and waterways, long before such environmental consciousness became fashionable.

World leaders acknowledged this track record and were lavish with their accolades on March 23. Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak noted that Mr Lee’s “achievements were great, and
his legacy is assured”, while Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed him as a “far-sighted statesman and a lion among leaders”.

United States President Barack Obama said in a statement: “He was a true giant of history who will be remembered for generations to come as the father of modern Singapore and as one of the great strategists of Asian affairs.”

At home, even opposition politicians who bore the brunt of Mr Lee’s no-holds-barred broadsides put aside their partisan differences, with leaders such as those from the Workers’ Party and Singapore Democratic Party extending their condolences to PM Lee and his family.

March 23 was the first of a two-day private family wake at Sri Temasek in the Istana, when family members, past and present Cabinet ministers and MPs, as well as old friends of Mr Lee and his family paid their last respects. Among them were Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, former Chief Justice Yong Pung How and Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka Shing.

On March 25, his body will be taken to Parliament House to lie in state until Saturday, March 28, and members of the public will be able to pay their last respects. A State Funeral will be held on Sunday at 2pm at the University Cultural Centre in Kent Ridge, followed by a private cremation at Mandai Crematorium.

Mr Lee leaves his two sons, PM Lee, 63, and Mr Lee Hsien Yang, 57, daughter Lee Wei Ling, 60, daughters-in-law Ho Ching, 61, and Lee Suet-Fern, 56, seven grandchildren and two siblings. His wife, Madam Kwa Geok Choo, died in 2010 at the age of 89.

He had soldiered on with his public duties after retirement, and even after the loss of his wife of 63 years, whom he mourned deeply, but mostly in private.

They had married secretly as undergraduates in Cambridge
in 1947, and Mr Lee is said to have instructed, in a note to his children, that when the time came, their ashes should be mixed so they might be “joined after life as they had been in life”.

Summing up his life’s work in his two-part memoirs, The Singapore Story, Mr Lee once revealed how he and his colleagues believed that Malaysian leaders anticipated the day when an independent Singapore would fail and be forced to appeal for readmission to the Federation, on Malaysia’s terms.
“No, not if I could help it,” he once declared. “People in Singapore were in no mood to crawl back after what they had been through. The people shared our feelings and were prepared to do whatever was needed to make an independent Singapore work. I did not know I was to spend the rest of my life getting Singapore not just to work, but to prosper and flourish.”
THE PRIVATE FUNERAL
It was a fitting resting place for the body of Singapore’s founding Prime Minister. Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s casket was laid out in a simple room on the ground floor of Sri Temasek, the official residence of the Prime Minister in the Istana grounds.
In life, he had spent many happy moments taking strolls on the Istana’s green lawns with his wife, Madam Kwa Geok Choo.

At a private family wake on March 23 and March 24, the casket rested on a bed of white orchids in the two-storey detached house. More than 5,200 people paid their respects over the two-day private wake.

The mood at Sri Temasek was sombre. Staff members were dressed in crisp white shirts and black trousers, and each wore a black band around the left elbow that signified mourning.

Several visitors, including political leaders past and present, also had black ribbons pinned to their shirts. They were received by Mr Lee’s elder son, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Like many of his family members, PM Lee wore a white polo shirt, dark trousers and formal black shoes. He moved among the guests, accepting their condolences and asking after them in turn.

Most Cabinet ministers and MPs were accompanied by their spouses. Others, like Deputy Prime Minister and Home Affairs Minister Teo Chee Hean, also took their children along.

Mostly in silence, they filed past Mr Lee’s immediate family members, who stood at the entrance to the hall.

What caught their eye was a black-and-white portrait of Mr Lee. Dressed in a dark suit with a mandarin collar, he gazed to the side, hands clasped contemplatively together. As they approached the casket, some bowed their heads. Others said a simple prayer.

Several, like Dr Lily Neo, who was Mr Lee’s fellow MP in Tanjong Pagar GRC, could not hold back their tears as they left the hall. Mrs Lee Suet Fern, who is married to Mr Lee’s younger son Hsien Yang, comforted her.

Tables were laid out on the verandah outside the hall, where guests lingered for a while and spoke in hushed tones.
Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean and his wife, daughter and son.

PM Lee Hsien Loong with Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong and his wife, their daughter-in-law and son.

President Tony Tan and his wife Mary at the private wake.

PM Lee’s wife, Ms Ho Ching, with Mrs Nathan and former president S R Nathan.

Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean and his wife, daughter and son.
Ms Ho Ching with Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugatnam and his wife Jane Yumiko Ittogi. Photo: NEO XIAOBIN

Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister for Communications and Information and Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs, and his wife, with Ms Ho Ching. Photo: NEO XIAOBIN

Ms Ho Ching with Professor Ivy Ng and her husband Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Defence. Photo: NEO XIAOBIN

Ms Ho Ching with Education Minister Heng Swee Keat and his wife. Photo: NEO XIAOBIN
Mr Lim Swee Say, the outgoing secretary-general of the NTUC, and his wife. With them is the late Mr Lee’s daughter-in-law Lim Suet Fern. Photo: NEO XIAOBIN

The Sultan of Brunei, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, and his wife Queen Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Hajah Saleha with PM Lee. Photo: NEO XIAOBIN

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Law K. Shanmugam and his wife. Photo: NEO XIAOBIN

Environment and Water Resources Minister Vivian Balakrishnan and his wife. Photo: NEO XIAOBIN
MPs of Tanjong Pagar GRC (from left) Dr Chia Shi-Lu, wife of MP Sam Tan, wife of Mr Chan Chun Sing, Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for Defence, Mr Chan, and Ms Indranee Rajah, Senior Minister of State for Education.

Photo: NEO XIAOBIN

Manpower Minister Tan Chuan-Jin and his wife.
Photo: NEO XIAOBIN

Transport Minister Lui Tuck Yew and his wife. With them are Mr Lee’s daughters-in-law Lim Suet Fern and Ho Ching. Photo: NEO XIAOBIN

Health Minister Gan Kim Yong and his wife.
Photo: NEO XIAOBIN

MPs of Tanjong Pagar GRC (from left) Dr Chia Shi-Lu, wife of MP Sam Tan, wife of Mr Chan Chun Sing, Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for Defence, Mr Chan, and Ms Indranee Rajah, Senior Minister of State for Education.
Photo: NEO XIAOBIN
(From right) Ms Ho Ching with Singapore Press Holdings CEO Alan Chan and his wife (right). Also in the picture are Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore CEO Andrew Tan, Mr Tan’s wife Jacqueline Poh, managing director of the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, and Mr Chee Hong Tat, second permanent secretary for the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Mr Chan, Mr Tan and Mr Chee were once Mr Lee’s principal private secretaries.

Photo: NEO XIAOBIN

Former Finance Minister Richard Hu (third from left) and his wife, with PM Lee, Ms Ho Ching and their son Hongyi. Photo: MCI SINGAPORE

Ms Ho Ching with nurses from the Singapore General Hospital. Photo: NEO XIAOBIN

Singapore Press Holdings chairman and former Cabinet minister Lee Boon Yang and his wife, with Ms Ho Ching. Photo: NEO XIAOBIN
Paying their last respects to Mr Lee at Sri Temasek.

Photo: NEO XIAOBIN

Puan Noor Aishah, the widow of Singapore’s first President Yusof Ishak, with PM Lee and Ms Ho Ching. With them are (from left) her granddaughter Fatimah Imran Yusof Ishak and son Rayyan, and friends Najma Begum and Sakdiah Mohamed Din.

Photo: NEO XIAOBIN

Hong Kong businessman Li Ka-Shing and son Richard, with Ms Ho Ching.

Photo: NEO XIAOBIN

Former Minister of Social Affairs Othman Wok with Ms Ho Ching, his son-in-law and Mr Othman’s wife Lina Abdullah.

Photo: NEO XIAOBIN

Paying their last respects to Mr Lee at Sri Temasek.

Photo: NEO XIAOBIN
Many of Mr Lee’s old comrades, who had fought alongside him in politically tumultuous decades, were there to catch a final glimpse of the man. They included Mr Ong Pang Boon, Mr Othman Wok, Mr S. Dhanabalan, Mr Chan Chee Seng and Mr Hwang Soo Jin.

The widow of Singapore’s first President, Mr Yusof Ishak, Puan Noor Aishah, was also there.

Calling Mr Lee a friend and a leader, she said: “We are indebted to him... for having been a good friend to us, to my late husband and to our family. Both Mr and Mrs Lee were very gracious to us.”

Among the foreign guests in attendance on March 23 was Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka-Shing, who was accompanied by his son, Richard. Sultan of Brunei Hassanal Bolkiah and his wife, Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Hajah Saleha, also arrived in the afternoon. Just before 4pm, President Tony Tan Keng Yam visited the wake with his wife, Mary.

Speaking to reporters afterwards, President Tan paused for long stretches at a time to collect himself. His voice was strained. Struggling to speak at points, he said: “(Mr Lee’s) passing is an end of an era, and nobody can replace him. But we can honour his legacy by carrying on what he has started and that is to continue to make Singapore successful and a good home for Singaporeans for many years to come.”

Other ministers were also visibly emotional. Foreign Minister K. Shanmugam and Education Minister Heng Swee Keat, who was Mr Lee’s principal private secretary from 1997 to 2000, were red-eyed as they spoke to the media.

From about 5pm onwards, and on March 24, more grassroots groups and others representing businesses arrived to pay their respects.
There were also several nurses, dressed in their smart uniforms. Some were from the Singapore General Hospital and others were colleagues of Mr Lee's daughter, Dr Lee Wei Ling, who is a senior adviser at the National Neuroscience Institute.

As the sun set and the warm lights of Sri Temasek came on, more visitors headed home, leaving small pockets of family members at the tables to talk quietly among themselves and to their guests.

On March 24, NParks presented to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong a new hybrid orchid named after Mr Lee.
The Aranda Lee Kuan Yew produces sprays of up to 10 flowers each. Its sepals and petals are a bright greenish golden yellow with a tinge of white at the base. It is the result of a cross between a native orchid, the arachnis hookeriana, and another orchid from Hawaii, the Vanda Golden Moon.

NParks, which bred the orchid, described the Aranda Lee Kuan Yew as being well-matched with another orchid hybrid called the Vanda Kwa Geok Choo, which was named after Mr Lee’s late wife. Both hybrids share a few species in their lineages.

In a blog post, Minister for National Development Khaw Boon Wan said. “For some time, we have been looking out for a suitable orchid hybrid to name after Mr Lee. NParks officers who have staffed him on his many visits to the Singapore Botanic Gardens have a good sense of what he enjoyed and liked amongst the flora and fauna.”

Noting that the Aranda Lee Kuan Yew has just flowered and matches the Vanda Kwa Geok Choo, Mr Khaw added: “The match is not only in terms of colour, form and stature, but both hybrids also share a few species in both their lineages.”

The orchid was placed near Mr Lee’s casket.
Mrs P. Pusparani had not slept well since Saturday. That was the day she rushed down to the Singapore General Hospital on hearing that Mr Lee Kuan Yew was critically ill.

This was why she was awake in the wee hours of the morning on Monday. Just after 4am, she learnt that Mr Lee had died shortly before, at 3.18 am. She was distraught. Tears gushed.

“The first placard I wrote for this morning was covered by so much tears I had to write another one,” she said.
The 57-year-old housewife was at the gates of the Istana on Monday morning. She told The Straits Times: “I will grieve for the entire year. I can’t imagine a Singapore without Lee Kuan Yew. Singapore is Lee Kuan Yew and Lee Kuan Yew is Singapore.”

Singaporeans mourned Mr Lee in their own ways. In Aljunied, one housewife stayed glued to the television, following the news and commemorative programmes. In Holland, another woman asked family members to shut off the radio and television, unable to bear the sadness.

Thousands travelled down to the Istana, or to Tanjong Pagar Community Club (CC), or to Parliament House, to pen condolence messages and leave cards, flowers and soft toys.

But the display of grief was also orderly in a quintessentially Singaporean way, with people forming queues along Orchard Road, pinning their messages neatly onto condolence boards, using up 13,000 condolence cards handed out to mourners outside the Istana.

Many, including those who had never met him, shed tears, feeling both gratitude for what Mr Lee had done for Singapore, and a sense of loss at the death of the father of the nation and the passing of an era.

Over at Tanjong Pagar CC, Mr James Loo, 59, was dry-eyed but his heart was heavy. Fifty years ago, his parents operated a
Among those paying their last respects outside the Istana on March 23 and 24 were former SIA stewardess Jenny Angie Fleming (top left) and Chan Yu Ping and friend Wong Si Min (top right).

Photos: REUTERS, MARK CHEONG, DESMOND FOO, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
stall at the street market nearby, selling eggs and taugeh (bean sprouts). As a young boy, he met Mr Lee when the latter did his rounds of the market, talking to market vendors and solving their problems.

“The street market lay at the end of a slope. When it rained, the drains would overflow. Mr Lee took care of us. Look at the beautiful market and food centre now,” he said, gesturing towards the building a stone’s throw away. The son of the egg-seller is today the chief information officer of Singtel Group Enterprise.

Across the nation, many Singaporeans from all walks of life reflected on the way their own lives had moved from Third World to First, in parallel with the development of the nation led by Mr Lee and his Old Guard colleagues.

Ms Adeline Sum’s father was an odd-job labourer who eventually settled into a steady job as a bus driver for 30 years, raising three children with his seamstress wife. Growing up, Ms Sum depended on union bursaries for pocket money and to pay for school expenses. Scholarships helped her get a degree and then, a Master’s. She joined the labour movement and is now, at 46, CEO of Singapore Labour Foundation.

The bus driver’s daughter now sits on the board of bus and taxi company ComfortDelGro. She said: “It was the meritocratic system set by Mr Lee and his colleagues that gave people like me opportunities in education and employment.”

Opportunities in Singapore were what lured new citizens here - and many turned up, joining born-and-bred Singaporeans in their mourning.

Standing in line at Tanjong Pagar CC, Mr Stanley Lai, 46, who works in the marine industry, said in Mandarin that he emigrated from Hong Kong to Singapore in 1991 and became a citizen in 1995. Asked about his feelings when he first heard of Mr Lee’s
death, he paused, then said: “So many emotions. I really respect him, he laid the foundation for us and for the country. Without him, I would not be here.”

Mr Sun Chen Hin, 64, left Malaysia as he did not see a future for himself there, and took a gamble on Singapore in 1969. He went on to become a manager at a bicycle components manufacturer. Now retired, he said in Mandarin that Singapore finds its own way as a society. It is a highly developed economy that did not copy Western ideals of democracy, he said with pride, adding that he tries to make sure his daughter understands just how “unique” Singapore is.

He penned a tribute to Mr Lee in Chinese: “China has Sun Yat Sen, we have Lee Kuan Yew. Two great men in one generation. We will miss you.”

Singaporeans also took to social media to pay tribute, penning messages on the rememberingleekuanyew.sg website and creating visual icons to share.

In another uniquely Singaporean habit, thousands rushed to 4D outlets to buy their pick of numbers relating to Mr Lee. The number 0318 (his time of death) was unavailable by 8am. By 1pm, numbers like 2303 (his death date) and 1609 (his birth date) were sold out, as too many had bought tickets with those numbers, and the house was no longer accepting bets with them.

But for hundreds of thousands other Singaporeans, it was another Monday at the office – although not quite work as usual. Lawyer Andrew Mak, 45, said the mood at his office was unusually quiet and sombre. “Everyone’s continuing with work and getting things done. That would be what Mr Lee wanted - that Singapore continues to thrive.”
The day Singaporeans set aside differences to say ‘thank you’

Ignatius Low
Managing Editor

They came dressed in black, some clutching white roses, carnations and lilies. There were mothers who had just picked up their sons and daughters from school, civil servants with their elderly parents and lone executives who had taken an hour off their busy work schedules.

As Singaporeans from all walks of life streamed to the four condolence sites to pay their respects to the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew, one question awaited them at the end of the queues they had
patiently joined. What do you say to the founder and architect of modern Singapore? What can you write, in that minute or two, that can adequately sum up the way you feel?

Many simply said “thank you”, going by the hundreds of little notes penned on white cards at the Istana and Parliament House. They thanked Mr Lee for making Singapore what it is today - a country with safe and secure streets, a clean and green environment, economic prosperity and a stable political system.

In achieving this, he was a great leader destined to be remembered, many added. “Your legacy needs no statues or museums, it is all around us today,” read one card.

Some tributes were written in foreign languages like Japanese and others were signed off by foreign workers, expats and tourists. A few had so much to say that they ran out of space, their words growing desperately smaller as they reached the bottom right-hand corner of the card.

Others were more succinct, like one unsigned card I saw that bore just one elegantly conceived hashtag: #NO YEW NO US.

Some of the notes were philosophical, with many simply wishing Mr Lee yi lu hao zou (a Chinese phrase for “safe journey”) in the afterlife. A few said they were glad that he was reunited with his wife and love of his life, Madam Kwa Geok Choo, who died in 2010.

Not all the authors of the notes were older Singaporeans who had lived through the Lee Kuan Yew era. Many young students penned tributes, with photo collages depicting Singapore's success and child-like drawings of flowers and the sun.

Those who were too young to know him or his politics cited those who did. “My late grandma adores you, sir. R.I.P.” was the one line on a card at Parliament House signed off simply as “Jen”.

Reading it, I could not help but smile. For whether one had
known Lee Kuan Yew, or agreed with him, or even liked him seemed immaterial to Singaporeans in the immediate aftermath of the news of his death.

I have a long list of Facebook friends who wear political stripes in every colour. I’ve come to know that many are unafraid to voice their views, and some are downright strident and combative.

But all put aside their differences to post online tributes to the man, turning my Facebook news feed into a virtual reunion of old friends that I haven’t heard from in months, even years.

Many penned simple messages thanking him and wishing him peaceful rest. Those who did not have the words posted tribute videos or links to media obituaries extolling his achievements.

“Many today and before us remain divided about the steadfast

Tributes to Mr Lee were penned by thousands of people. The messages in the photo above were on display outside Parliament House. Photo: CAROLINE CHIA
decisions you have made,” wrote one friend, summing up the view of many. “However, all can see or enjoy the legacy of your decisions. Thank you Mr Lee, I am proud to share your surname.”

Another friend, whose father was a political dissident arrested and jailed by Mr Lee's government in the turbulent 1960s, said: “If there is one thing your life taught me, it is that one must sometimes be more unreasonable than the toughest thug in town to make a reasonable dream come true.”

For me, it felt like a rare moment of national unity that I haven’t seen in a long time in Singapore.

For better or for worse, so much of the conversation here in the last decade or so has centred on the deficiencies of this nation, how discontented we have become with the status quo and how hard it is to compromise on every difference of opinion.

It was refreshing to see people count their blessings for once and be openly thankful for being able to “walk down the streets safely with my earphones plugged in, blasting away”. Or for the “education I received that I’m able to read official letters my English illiterate mother is unable to”, without worrying about what this might say about them or their politics.

It was great to see people here declare they are proud to be Singaporean, yesterday or any other day, and that they “beam with pride when I produce my passport to immigration officers”.

So my biggest takeaway from the day after Mr Lee Kuan Yew died was not that the nation collectively grieved the loss of a great leader, but rather that it appeared ready to face the future united and proud.

And the tribute card that ultimately made me cry was the one that said: “Thank you, Mr Lee. We will not let anyone knock the country you spent your whole life to build.”
TO PARLIAMENT
HOUSE
Outside, thronging the roads, the public were waiting. But inside Sri Temasek on the grounds of the Istana, the family of Mr Lee Kuan Yew gathered after sunrise as the private wake for their patriarch drew to a close.

Just an hour later, the casket containing Mr Lee would leave the two-storey house for the journey to Parliament House and four days of lying in state.

But for now, in quiet moments away from the public eye, the extended families of Mr Lee and his late wife, Madam Kwa Geok
Choo, paid their respects.

After them, Mr Lee’s immediate family members stepped forward to say individual goodbyes, all dressed in white shirts and black trousers or long skirts.

The first was younger son Lee Hsien Yang, followed by his wife Lee Suet Fern, and their sons Shengwu, Huanwu and Shaowu.

Mr Lee’s daughter Wei Ling, who had lived with her late parents in the family home in Oxley Road, went next.

Last of all came Mr Lee’s elder son, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, his wife Ho Ching, and children Xiuqi, Yipeng, Hongyi and Haoyi.

Over Monday and Tuesday, they had received and hosted more than 5,200 visitors at the private wake held at the official residence of the Prime Minister in the Istana grounds.

Too soon, 9am, Wednesday, came - the hour when the gun
Setting off on the final journey from the main hall of Sri Temasek (above), accompanied by his family (below), including his grandchildren Yipeng (below left) and Huanwu (below right) holding his portrait.

Photos: NEO XIAOBIN
carriage waiting in the driveway outside would carry Mr Lee away.

Inside, the Lee family watched solemnly as a team of white-jacketed pallbearers from the defence services and police draped the Singapore flag over the casket. As the officers - their headgear removed as a mark of respect - carried the casket onto the gun carriage, and the strains of Beethoven’s Funeral March No. 1 filled the air, the family filed out of the hall and into the public eye.

Among the group of at least 20 people were grandsons Yipeng and Huanwu bearing a portrait of their grandfather, with Yipeng’s left arm resting at times on his cousin’s shoulder in solidarity.

The ceremonial procession on foot behind the carriage was led by PM Lee, the chief mourner.
Slowly, slowly, the family trailed the carriage to the beat of a military drum, as it descended the hill, for about 70m.

Mr Lee Hsien Yang and his wife Suet Fern walked hand-in-hand, their heads frequently bowed. Behind them, Mr Lee’s grandchildren walked together, hands at their sides. Daughter Wei Ling was not in the procession as she was unwell.

Along the way, through the grounds of the Istana, they passed a military line of honour and representatives from Tanjong Pagar GRC, the constituency where the late Mr Lee was an MP, and the Teck Ghee ward in Ang Mo Kio GRC, where PM Lee is an MP.

The gun carriage then went past the main Istana building, where President Tony Tan Keng Yam and Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong and staff paid their respects, while a bagpiper from the Singapore Gurkha Contingent played Auld Lang Syne.

As the first part of the ceremonial procession ended, still within
the grounds of the Istana, the Lee family proceeded separately by vehicle to Parliament House, where Mr Lee’s casket will lie in state until 8pm on Saturday.

They were there to receive the casket when it arrived just before 10am, bearing silent witness as it was transferred from the gun carriage to its bier. As the pallbearers removed the national flag from Mr Lee’s casket and marched off, the family was ushered forward.

PM Lee stood front and centre, his wife beside him. The grandsons placed Mr Lee’s portrait on a pedestal before the casket.

Then, as one, the Lee family bowed once in front of the head of their family before departing.
They came simply to say ‘Thank you, Mr Lee’

Rohit Brijnath and Rachel Au-Yong

This street has never known such silence. This city of perpetual motion, but for a solemn breeze brushing the leaves, is strangely still. This area in Orchard Road, outside the Istana, usually filled with the sound of hissing buses and a thousand conversations is now a mute gathering. Even the phone, that Singapore accessory, does not dare to ring.
Remembrance has its own appropriate hush.

Long before the gun carriage emerges from the Istana grounds at 9.37am, people are in anxious attendance. Businesswoman Angela Tan, 54, arrives in the darkness at 5.30am. “I didn’t get to see him come to the Istana,” she says. “So I must see him leave it for the last time or I will regret this all my life.” Mr Fikri Omar, 63, has shrugged off tiredness after a night shift as a security guard to be here by 7.20am.

Under a blue sky speckled with clouds, mourning is in the
Some of those waiting outside the Istana openly sobbed, while others used their phones to take photos and videos as the gun carriage bearing the coffin left for Parliament House. Photos: KEVIN LIM, DESMOND FOO
air. Beneath a kind canopy of trees near the gate, where police officers gently marshal foot traffic, a solitary flag flutters behind a barricade. It is a small flag on a stick, the type you might wave at a sporting event or at a parade. Yet, in keeping with the moment, even this one held up by a man in the crowd deliberately flies at half-mast.

When first light comes, the crowd between the Istana and Plaza Singapura is a trickle, then a stream, then a river of a thousand people. Mr Lee Kuan Yew stood for all Singaporeans, now Singaporeans of all races and religions and types and dress come to stand for him. Three sweaty runners arrive, a doctor in scrubs appears, women in wheelchairs make their way through. A monk stops by as does part-time taxi driver Tajuddin Mohd Isa, 39, with his wife and young son in tow. A group sings a song in praise, women carry flowers and others just hold on to a contained grief.

On one side of the Istana gate, under small white tents, are tables to write condolence messages. On the ground, bouquets cover the earth, white lilies wrapped in plastic, yellow carnations in a bunch, all bringing colourful life to a sombre day. Aleusheya Singh, nine, is here to leave her own scribbled message. “I like his policy on bilingualism best because now everyone speaks two languages,” she earnestly says. She is late for school but her father is a willing accomplice in this act: perhaps he appreciates this is a history lesson of its own.

A nation reserved in speech and reticent in expressing itself has made an exception these past few days for an exceptional man. Emotion has been expressed widely, but more through quiet gratitude than gushy sentimentality. On the numerous handwritten notes left here - for a man their writers may have never met but whose death they take personally - two words repeatedly stand out: “Thank you.”
People want to write what they feel, they want to speak, as if words are their only form of respectful repayment. A city proud of its present and fixated on its future is pausing to remember this man from its past and it is an admiration that is conveyed through every medium.

Mr Robert Lai Tien Kean, 46 and shy, articulates it on a typed note which he hands to reporters, part of which reads: “He was mighty in thought, courageous in decisiveness and swift in action immediately taken.”

A child’s unbiased opinion is revealed through a drawing of a crayoned figure, below which is scrawled the words: “Mr Lee You Are a Superhero.” But most people just mine their memories to talk freely of this man, a nation constructed and a self-esteem built.
Madam Rathika Ravindran, 45, remembers growing up in a kampung in the 1970s. “It used to have just a public toilet out in the open. It was very scary, very smelly. But in no time at all, Singapore has developed so much. I believe we can thank him for that.”

Madam Toh Bok Hua, closing in on 70, describes her childhood during the time of Mr Lim Yew Hock, Singapore’s second chief minister, when she helped her family sell kueh by the roadside.

“I used to sit on a milk crate - we were illegal hawkers and the policemen would come and we would run.” Sometimes, she says, the kueh was kicked into the drain. “They weren’t very compassionate then. But then Mr Lee Kuan Yew came along and things changed, and we got a stall to sell kueh.”

Then suddenly it is time and the motorcycle engines of the outriders, waiting outside, start to hum. First a police car appears, then the stately gun carriage carrying the flag-draped coffin, and the hush cannot be held any more. For a brief while, grief breaks its chains as if silence is both inappropriate now and unbearable.

The eruption of noise is spontaneous and diverse. A few clap and then the applause rises. A chant of “MM Lee, we love you!” begins, because to some he is still Minister Mentor, and a few join in. From across the street comes the yell “Majulah Singapura!”, from behind comes the cry “Grandfather of Singapore”. One man says nothing at all: he only bows.

As the gun carriage travels from the shade of the Istana into the sun of the street, citizens offer a digital salute: arms raised with smartphones in hand, filming every second, photographing every movement. Yet through the clicking symphony of cameras can be heard the convulsive sounds of stifled sobs.

A tear trails down a woman’s cheek and old men wipe their tear-stained spectacles. A photographer simply weeps and works. Only the soldiers in the following trucks, young men on duty, rigid in
their seats, disguise any loss with stoicism. A once-silent street is now just a sad one.

Some have waited for hours but, in just over a minute, the funeral cortege has passed. It winds its dignified way to Parliament House where cries of “Lee Kuan Yew!” will rent the air.

Here, outside the Istana, buses reclaim the street and noise returns to the morning. Their leader has gone and people begin to disperse. Many of them presumably returning to work. Just as Mr Lee would have liked it.

A woman with her hands clasped in prayer as the carriage passed Plaza Singapura. Photo: JOYCE FANG
THE WAIT
THE WAIT

Photo: KUA CHEE SIONG
We queued — the old, the infirm, the famous, the nameless. We lined up — the native, the foreigner, the glorious rich, the huddled poor. The admirer, the critic, the silver-haired who remembers when Singapore was just an idea, the later-born who knows nothing but — we came.

On the first day that Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s body lay in state at Parliament House, tens of thousands of people queued for up to eight hours under a blazing sky to see him. At about 10am, I joined the line near Elgin Bridge in North Bridge Road, one among thousands streaming in from all parts of the country.
Some were carrying flowers, others umbrellas — and every single one of us had the same look of dismay and self-doubt on our faces when we discovered how long the line already was.

Fifteen minutes in, the gentleman next to me left.

Two hours in, policemen began putting barricades in place to separate the snaking queue. One of them informed us that it would be six more hours. At this, a middle-aged woman named Janet peeled off. She had to start her work shift at 5pm, she said.

The rest of us tried to stay strong. Mr Geoffrey Low, a 63-year-old retired policeman, valiantly insisted it would pass quickly: “We’re almost at UOB Plaza.”

We were fortified by cold water and orange punch that a kind-hearted shop owner in Canton Street left out for us.

My fellow queuers and I were a band of brothers. We shared umbrellas and tissue packets, and urged one another to use the toilet and get lunch while we held the places.

I fell in with the Ho family. Mr and Mrs Ho had taken the day off, and Xingda, a 20-year-old Singapore Polytechnic graduate, was there as “I’m quite free nowadays, just waiting for national service, so I came along”.

I asked him what he knew of Mr Lee and he said the usual, phrases like “he built the country”, repeated so often lately that they sounded almost rote.

Did he know about any of the more controversial things that Mr Lee did? I asked.

“He locked up some people for, like, 20 years, right? I know he was quite hard on the opposition.”

Satisfied that our young people are alive to the complexities of his legacy, I told Xingda about some of Mr Lee’s lieutenants, like Dr Goh Keng Swee and Mr S. Rajaratnam, who also built the
On the first day the public could pay their respects, the queue meandered through Boat Quay (above) and past Fullerton Hotel (below). Photos: KUA CHEE SIONG, NEO XIAO BIN
nation. Mr Lee always credited the importance of a good team, I said. He would not have wanted anyone to think he did it alone. They are all gone now. With Mr Lee, the last leaf has fallen. In a way, we are orphans now.

I sensed Xingda losing interest when he said, pointing at a lavender-haired pint-sized woman up ahead: “Eh look, there’s Xiaxue!” The local celebrity blogger was in line with about 50 friends.

The wait became easier when we reached UOB Plaza. The cool river breeze and wide open vista were a welcome change from being stared at by the office lunch crowds over their mee goreng.

But I began to lose heart around 2pm, about four hours in.
Bearing flowers to pay their last respects.

Photo: WANG HUI FEN
“Why are we doing this? I’m so tired and I think I’m getting a sunburn,” I complained to Geoffrey.

He gave me a pep talk that, to my surprise, had little to do with how much Mr Lee sacrificed for Singapore. “You’ll never get a chance like this again,” he told me. “This is history. It’s like when Mao Zedong died.

“There won’t be another like him. So we should be here.”

It reminded me of that Shakespearean quote, when Cassius calls Julius Caesar a Colossus who “bestrides the narrow world”.

“We petty men/Walk under his huge legs and peep about,” goes the line.

Transformative leaders like Mr Lee come around once in a lifetime, maybe less. A life like his is out of the reach of us ordinary folk. But we can be a passing part of the great acts of an extraordinary journey. To be here, to bear witness at the final moment - this is important, somehow. Perhaps more important than anything else we will do in our lives.

I went to use the toilet at one of the office buildings while Geoffrey held my place in the line.

As the sliding doors whooshed open and air-conditioned air caressed my face like the hands of an angel, I remembered that Mr Lee once called air-conditioning the greatest invention in history.

It changed life in the tropics, he said, and he once inquired after the possibility of air-conditioned underwear.

Back at the queue, we passed by a bust of Deng Xiaoping outside the Asian Civilisations Museum. Deng admired Mr Lee and saw Singapore’s success as one reason to embark on his epochal reform and opening up of China.

Mr Lee had called him the exception to the rule that great leaders are of tall stature. He always told it like it was, I thought to myself. Mr Lee drummed it into Singaporeans that we were
The hours-long queue to pay their last respects took some mourners from Fort Canning (above) to the former Supreme Court building (below). Photos: CHEW SENG KIM, ONG WEE JIN
small and vulnerable and yet he was never cowed or bullied by any larger nation. Stature is about more than literal size.

Once we crossed Cavenagh Bridge, the line moved briskly. Soon we were at the tentage.

Geoffrey let on that this was far from the longest he had ever queued for anything. He once lined up overnight for Bee Gees concert tickets.

After we passed through security screening, all the flowers that people had brought as final gifts for Mr Lee were rather unceremoniously taken by a young full-time national serviceman.

We walked into the air-conditioned Parliament House and everyone tensed up. I don’t know what I expected, but the moment happened almost as if by accident.

Later, I learnt that because of the unexpectedly massive crowd, the authorities changed the system to get people to pass through more quickly. We were supposed to have stood in a group and bowed.

But instead, we started walking through the hall and before we knew it, we were passing by a flag-draped coffin, and then were past it and out the hall.

All the while, the guards told us to “please keep moving”.

We exited the building and everyone looked a bit disoriented at how fast that happened, after the hours of build-up.

As we rounded the back, people were stopping in front of a tinted window.

It was almost completely opaque, but if you looked closely, you could make out the lines of Mr Lee’s coffin and the stars on the flag that covered it. Without the opportunity to linger in front of his coffin, people resorted to bowing, weeping and saying their prayers for Mr Lee to that tinted window.

There was a loosening in my chest. It felt like I had done
something important and necessary, even if all I did was stand in line for five hours.

I said to Geoffrey: “Well, we were there.” I was aiming for a note of sarcasm at the anti-climax of it all, but my voice came out a little strained.

He nodded in full understanding, replying: “That’s all that matters.”
11-hour wait — yet they kept coming

Tham Yuen-C, Andrea Ng and Chong Ziliang

Told to stay away, they came anyway.

People continued to turn up from late Thursday into the early hours of Friday to queue outside Parliament House to pay their last respects to Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

This was despite the fact that from Thursday night, the state funeral organising committee advised people not to join the queue until further updates, warning that the wait could get as long as 11 hours.
However, most of those on the ground reported waiting a much shorter time — although this was before the crowds surged again last night.

Engineer Veron Koh, 37, who was there at 4am on Friday because she was “scared of the sun” and had to work, but still wanted to pay her respects, was told that she would be waiting for eight hours. But she was done in four.

She said: “I was prepared to take urgent leave if I had to but they were very organised, and I waited only a while at the Padang, then our whole group walked straight to Parliament House.”

The difference between the estimated and actual times was due to the different organisation of the queue system on Friday compared with the first two days of public mourning on Wednesday and Thursday. Instead of one long queue around the Padang, people were broken up into groups, with each group assigned a holding area at the Padang.

The groups could expand or contract, depending on the number of people. When there were fewer people, each group moved quicker.

For some, the faster flow of the general queues was still not fast enough — financial analyst Dawn Huang, 32, left the Padang at around 8am, after waiting about two hours.

“I have to go to work but I plan to come back later,” she said as she hurried off.

On the other hand, retiree James Chan, 64, was undaunted when he arrived at midnight and was told that it would be an eight-hour wait.

He decided to stay, saying: “That’s the least I can do to repay the debt of gratitude that generations in Singapore owe to Mr Lee.”

Others who had gone there at around the same time gained a
small respite in the end — the waiting time was more like seven hours.

Nanyang Technological University student Lee Jing Shen, 23, was one, emerging from Parliament House at 6.45am.

Asked why he waited, he said pragmatically: “The MRT and buses had already stopped running when we got here and found out how long it would take.”

However, university mate Kee Han Chong, 23, said: “Based on my calculations, the queueing times would only get longer from Friday, so I had to do it. Mr Lee is a very important part of our history.”

Those who arrived not long before daybreak on Friday persevered for the same reason. Counsellor Diane Choo, 31, who got there at 5.30am, said she got into the hall where Mr Lee’s body lay in state after a wait of “only” five hours.
Queues stretched from the Marina Bay Floating Platform (above) to the Padang (below). Photos: ALPHONSUS CHERN
“It was only right that I had to put in that energy and effort to say thank you,” she said.

Amid the large turnout in the wee hours on Friday, there was confusion about where to start queueing. Some joined in at Raffles City to make their way to the Padang, while others did so at Esplanade Park, unwittingly cutting the queue.

Meanwhile, those in the priority queue — for the elderly, disabled, pregnant and those with children below six years of age — had a much shorter wait, after the system was changed on Thursday night so only parents could go with their children, and just one adult could accompany an elderly person.

Childcare centre principal Angela Ang, 57, who was there at 6am with her 77-year-old mother Nancy Wu, “breezed through” in about 45 minutes. She said: “I would’ve come even if the queue was long because I’m a beneficiary of his legacy.”

For teacher Sally Chew, 37, in the priority queue with her husband and sons aged five and 11, it was her second try.

The first time, she had to go and pick up her children from school, and was not allowed to rejoin the queue where her husband was waiting. Just to be safe, her husband took leave on Friday and her children skipped school.

She said: “I came mainly for the education of the kids. They can read a lot about Lee Kuan Yew but it’s nothing like going through (this).”

Throughout the day, people continued to stream into the area, even when it rained for a spell in the afternoon, and with the sun beating down afterwards.

Ms Joyce Khoo, 30, got there at around noon with her husband, just as it started to drizzle. The Singaporean pilates instructor, who now lives in Jakarta, had flown back on Friday for a day, specially to pay her respects to Mr Lee.
“Living overseas makes you very conscious of how lucky we are as Singapore citizens... It’s all due to the dogged determination of Mr Lee and the first generation of Singaporeans. I would have regretted it if I hadn’t come back,” she said.

As night fell again, the crowd grew larger, backing up to Raffles City. Public transport operators extended their hours on Friday, with buses and MRT trains to operate overnight.

Father-and-son pair Albert and Alex Lim were among those who arrived by public transport. The older Mr Lim, 54, and his son, 24, came prepared to wait through the night. They said they “will be here as long as it takes”. 

The first day of Mr Lee’s body lying-in-state saw queues which reached Clarke Quay. Photo: WANG HUI FEN
Orderly queues near the Floating Platform were a common sight. Photo: ALPHONSUS CHERN

Near the Esplanade Bridge. Photo: KEVIN LIM
The Padang was filled with people even at 6.38am on March 27. Photo: DESMOND WEE

Mobile devices kept the mourners occupied. Photo: ALPHONSUS CHERN
I was afraid the queue would be too long if I came later. I have a flight to catch at 1pm, so I wanted to make sure I get to pay my last respects before I leave. Mr Lee has done a lot for us.

Mr Edward Ho, 39, Asia-Pacific area manager of a healthcare company, who was first in the line into Parliament House at 3am on March 25, together with his cousin Alvin Loh

I can’t queue for eight hours but I can still handle four hours. I have to come and pay my respects or I won’t feel good.

Madam Lee Yong Jong, 81, who leans on an umbrella for support when she walks

I came today to say goodbye and to thank him for his service and dedication to Singapore. It feels like my own father has passed away.

Ms Waheda Ahmat, 27, waitress
I had to ask someone to leave my flowers and a note thanking him. Last time, very dirty, but thanks to Mr Lee, change and change, so we now have clean toilets. Hope his children will be able to do the same.

Madam Wong Ah Mee, 74, a cleaner, who queued during her lunch break on March 25, but had to give up after an hour.

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The wait is definitely worth it, we would have waited longer. This is nothing compared to what Mr Lee did for us. In particular, what he has done for the minority races is very important. We are given equal rights.

Mr R. Vijayakumar, 50, who closed his barber shop for the day on March 25. He was there with his whole family, including his mother-in-law, who was due to undergo knee surgery the next day.

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I thank Mr Lee Kuan Yew for being a ‘nice’ teacher who has taught Singaporeans many lessons in life. I feel proud each time I hear the National Anthem. Majulah Singapura.

Mr Mohamed Basheer Ali Shahul Hameed, 59, a cleaner.

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When I was much younger, I watched the footage of him crying when he announced the separation from Malaysia. I remember thinking: ‘But why? We’re doing fine.’ It was only later that I appreciated that we’re doing fine because of him.

Ms Wendy Cheng, 31, celebrity blogger known as Xiaxue.
LYING IN STATE
Members of Parliament paid tribute to Mr Lee in a special sitting on March 26. Photo: MCI

MPS HAIL MR LEE’S 60 YEARS IN THE HOUSE

Chua Mui Hoong
Opinion Editor

An empty chair with a small spray of white flowers was a poignant reminder of a vast gap in Parliament House. Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s
seat in the front row, fourth from the corner, opposite the Front Bench, was empty. He will never sit there again.

When former deputy prime minister Wong Kan Seng came in and was confronted with the sight, he took his seat next to it and dabbed his eyes discreetly. He later described the day as one of the saddest of his life. Mr Goh Chok Tong, whose seat is on the other side of Mr Lee’s, kept looking left. “But he was not there,” he said later.

On Thursday, March 26, the House that Mr Lee served for 60 years gave him a fitting farewell, with a special 110-minute sitting both understated and simple. Most male MPs wore white shirts and dark ties with black ribbons; the women came in dark dresses and jackets, white roses on their chests.

In the public galleries were former MPs, unionists, civil servants, students and members of the Lee family.
The 11 MPs who spoke recorded the nation’s thanks for Mr Lee’s contributions and highlighted his role in leading Singapore from mudflats to metropolis and in building a multiracial society.

Speaker Halimah Yacob kicked off the proceedings, recounting how Mr Lee entered the colonial Legislative Assembly as the Member for Tanjong Pagar in 1955.

He led the People’s Action Party to victory and self-government in 1959. He went on to lead Singapore for 31 years till 1990 as
Prime Minister, and remained in Cabinet until 2011. He was still representing Tanjong Pagar when he died on Monday, aged 91, the longest-serving MP.

Madam Halimah highlighted remarks he made in 1999, when MPs moved from the old Parliament House to the current building. Noting that Parliament was an arena for the contest of ideas on policies, he said: “In this Chamber, we are playing for keeps. The future of Singapore and its people... is not a question for light-hearted banter.”

Matters of life and death, of policy and politics, were raised by Mr Lee over the decades. Leader of the House Ng Eng Hen highlighted one milestone - Mr Lee’s call to Singaporeans to adapt to the reality of the British military withdrawal in 1968, taking away one-fifth of Singapore’s GDP: “Adapt and adjust, without any whimpering or wringing of hands.” He added that “the world does not owe us a living and ... we cannot live by the begging bowl”.

That hard-headed approach would extend to debates on bilingualism, the judiciary, ministerial salaries and race, among others.

Mr Low Thia Khiang of the Workers’ Party credited Mr Lee’s “outstanding wisdom and courage” in promoting Singapore to the world, and winning the respect of major powers. But his remark that “many Singaporeans were sacrificed during the process of nation-building and policymaking” drew a swift rebuttal from Ms Indranee Rajah that the sacrifice required was to “set aside divisions and animosity in the interest of national unity”.

Mr Masagos Zulkifli said in Malay that Mr Lee’s most precious legacy is “a harmonious, multiracial society”. The Malay community in Singapore, he said, was proud that it could compete and excel in education and employment on an equal footing,
without special treatment for minorities.

Mr Vikram Nair quoted lines from a poem in Tamil that praised Mr Lee for treating all races equally, and for making Tamil one of the four official languages.

Several MPs also alluded to the way Singaporeans had queued for hours in the sun, or overnight, without complaint, to wait their turn to pay respects to Mr Lee.

His body lies in state in the lobby of Parliament House until Sunday, when he will be cremated after a state funeral.

Ms Indranee said Singaporeans responded thus because they knew that all of Mr Lee’s actions sprang from his deep care for Singaporeans. She said that was Mr Lee’s legacy: “a people united; a people with heart; a nation strong and free”.

The most emotional tribute came from someone who never met Mr Lee.

Nominated MP Chia Yong Yong, who uses a wheelchair, said that if she had been born anywhere else in Asia, “as a girl with a disability coming from a poor family with no connections, I would not have been able to go to school, enter a profession and serve the community today”.

In words that drew hearty thumps of approval in the House, and will resonate with many more outside it, Ms Chia said: “Son of Singapore. Father of Singapore. Pardon my inability to craft a tribute worthy of you. Words fail me.

“And today, all that I can say to you, my first Prime Minister, is what I never had the opportunity to tell you in person: Thank you, Mr Lee.”

MPs then stood to observe a minute of silence, before filing out in groups to pay homage to the man who started it all.
World leaders gather to mourn Mr Lee’s passing

Ravi Velloor
Associate Editor

Singapore’s closest friends and allies are gathering to mourn the loss of Mr Lee Kuan Yew, in a remarkable tribute to a man who stepped down from national leadership almost a quarter of a century ago.

United States President Barack Obama, who spoke with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on March 24, reached out to his Democratic Party’s eminence grise, former president Bill Clinton,
to lead the US presidential delegation for Sunday’s funeral service for Mr Lee. Mr Clinton, who continues to be enormously popular in his country, will be accompanied by Dr Henry Kissinger, who was secretary of state to former president Richard Nixon and had been a longstanding friend of Mr Lee’s since they first met at Harvard University in 1967.

Also in the official US delegation are former national security adviser Tom Donilon, US Ambassador to Singapore Kirk Wagar and Mr Steven Green, a former American envoy to Singapore.

Vice-President Joe Biden yesterday signed the condolence book for Mr Lee at the Singapore Embassy in Washington. “What a wonderful legacy Mr Lee Kuan Yew left his beloved country Singapore. I met scores of world leaders in my time in office but few possessed the insight and wisdom of (Mr Lee),” he wrote.

One of his fondest and lasting memories was meeting Mr Lee in Singapore last year, he wrote. “We discussed the relative position and prospect of India, China, Russia and the United States – the breadth and depth of his understanding impressed me. “My only regret was that I did not have a full week just to ask him questions regarding world affairs.”

More global leaders confirmed their attendance for Sunday’s funeral, while Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak flew down to pay his respects to Mr Lee at the wake yesterday.

Mr Najib was accompanied by his wife and four Cabinet ministers, including Foreign Minister Anifah Aman. Malaysia will be represented at the funeral by its King, Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu’adzam Shah.

Also here for the funeral is Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, who told reporters before his departure that he was travelling with “a sense of respect” for the people of Singapore.

“I am going to represent Israel and its citizens not only to
Former Indonesian president Megawati Sukarnoputri. Photo: DESMOND FOO

Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and his wife (hidden). Photo: JAMIE KOH

Former US president Bill Clinton paying his last respects. Photo: DESMOND WEE

Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his wife. Photo: KEVIN LIM

Former Indonesian president Megawati Sukarnoputri. Photo: DESMOND FOO
Former Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and wife. Photo: DESMOND FOO

Datuk Kadir Jasin and former Malaysian finance minister Daim Zainuddin. Photo: JAMIE KOH

Israeli President Reuven Rivlin. Photo: MARK CHEONG

Former US ambassador to Singapore Steven Green. Photo: JAMIE KOH
express condolences at the passing of the founder of Singapore, but also to express our appreciation for his work as an important and valued leader,” Mr Rivlin said, referring to the founding Prime Minister. “Israel sees Singapore as a significant and important friend,” he added.

Other global figures who have confirmed their attendance include Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Prime Minister Tony Abbott of Australia, Indonesian President Joko Widodo, South Korean President Park Geun Hye, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, Myanmar President Thein Sein, Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong of Laos and Japan’s Prime Minister Mr Shinzo Abe.

Across the world, leaders continued to mourn Mr Lee’s passing. Germany, one of the first 13 countries to recognise Singapore’s independence, yesterday described Mr Lee as a “remarkable historical figure” as President Joachim Gauck and Chancellor Angela Merkel sent their condolences.

Among those who called PM Lee over the past few days were Mr Obama, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon.

In Beijing, President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang and Communist Party and government leaders sent wreaths to the Singapore Embassy. In a rare move, four of the seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee – namely Mr Xi, Mr Li, National People’s Congress chief Zhang Dejiang and Executive Vice-Premier Zhang Gaoli – sent their condolences on Monday. An official spokesman said a senior leader from China – Vice-President Li Yuanchao - will be attending the funeral service.
THE FINAL JOURNEY
THE FINAL JOURNEY

Photo: DESMOND FOO
The Singapore Navy honoured Mr Lee with a ceremonial sailpast off the Marina Barrage. Photo: LIANHE ZAOBAO

THE LIFE MAY HAVE EBBED AWAY, BUT THE LIGHT WILL CONTINUE TO SHOW THE WAY

Ravi Velloor
Associate Editor

Shortly after midnight on Saturday, streaks of lightning lit up the night sky over central and eastern Singapore as the heavens
blazed forth. As dawn broke, a misty haze hung over the city after
days of clear skies. Business in the coffee shops seemed thinner
as Singaporeans, normally eager to stumble to the nearest
convenient outlet for their Sunday breakfast, seemed to tarry.

It was as though they were reluctant to meet this day when Mr
Lee Kuan Yew, lionised leader of the Lion City, would pass into
history.

Along Orchard Road, the city’s most famous boulevard, a
gusting wind flung laburnum and other flowers on the road, as
though the “city in a garden” felt compelled to pay its own unique
tribute.

Then, the heavens emptied, pouring moisture upon the earth.
Perhaps Mr Lee would not have minded; one more opportunity
to funnel every drop of water into one of the island’s 17 reservoirs.

It had to happen some day, and so it has. This man who led
Singaporeans to independence, not only from Britain, but from
poverty, want, ignorance, diffidence - and water dependency - has
made his final journey.

On Sunday, thousands braved rain and slush to travel the
last mile with him, lining the road along which Mr Lee’s cortege
travelled to the state funeral service, wearing plastic ponchos
and carrying umbrellas to protect themselves from the elements.
Others used floor mats they had brought for the wait against the
rain. In places, the crowd was ten- and fifteen-deep.

Elsewhere, hundreds of thousands more stayed in the shelter
of homes in residential estates like Toa Payoh and Paya Lebar,
mostly unaware that their districts got their names from Hokkien
and Malay words for “big swamp”.

Such has been the Singapore journey to urbanisation and 90
per cent home ownership. Not to speak of the arboreal fantasy
the island is today, with a green cover over fully half of it.
The route itself was a tribute to the man, cutting across the key sites that marked his life and career. The cortege passed Collyer Quay and Shenton Way, and between Queenstown and Commonwealth, British-era names Mr Lee felt no shame in retaining, having helped his people shed the colonial cringe long ago and, like him, look the world in the eye.

Mr Lee’s coffin was mounted onto a ceremonial gun carriage by officers from the army, air force, navy and police. Photo: KEVIN LIM
The gun carriage consisted of a 25-pounder Howitzer gun on which a tempered glass case was mounted. The carriage was driven by a ceremonial Land Rover. Photo: KEVIN LIM

As the gun carriage left the porch of Parliament House, a group of pallbearers - comprising eight former and serving MPs, sent him off. Photo: KEVIN LIM
Carrying Mr Lee’s portrait were his grandsons Hongyi (left) and Shaowu. Photo: KEVIN LIM

The pallbearers included past and present MPs. Among them were Mr Mahmud Awang and Mr Chiam See Tong, and Senior Minister of State Josephine Teo. Photo: KEVIN LIM
Thousands lined the street to greet the gun carriage as it made its way to the state funeral service at University Cultural Centre. Photo: ALPHONSUS CHERN

Rain pelted down as the procession left the gates of Parliament House to make its 15.4km journey to the University Cultural Centre. Photo: KEVIN LIM
Overseas, thousands gathered in front of television sets or computers to watch the live streaming of the funeral service, wet-eyed and longing to connect with home. Others had taken a flight to be in Singapore yesterday. Just to be here.

Why would a taxi driver called Micky Tan, recovering from prostate cancer surgery, don a cap and show up in the rain to shout, “Lee Kuan Yew, Lee Kuan Yew”? Why would a Kala Pillay keep an all-night vigil in Calgary, Canada?

Because they wanted to.

As a proportion of their populations, the 454,700 who turned up to pay respects at Mr Lee’s bier exceeded the throng at Nelson Mandela’s passing. When Winston Churchill lay in state for three days, a total of 321,360 filed past the catafalque, according to the BBC’s figures.

Churchill had been out of office for only ten years when he died. Singapore’s founding father stepped down from national leadership a quarter century ago.

Mr Lee, who in his governing years preferred to be feared over being loved, may have been pleasantly startled by the public outpouring of grief at his passing.

And what of the potentates, the heads of state and government from two dozen nations who travelled to the island to pay him respect?

There was the young king of tiny Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, who, in 2006, had sought him out for advice on developing his nation. There was Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who leads the world’s second largest nation, saying he had been inspired to believe he could work to transform India because of Mr Lee’s record in developing Singapore within a generation.

There were Mr Bill Clinton, Mr Tony Abbott, Mr Hun Sen, General Prayut Chan-o-cha, Mr Shinzo Abe and others listening
to the funeral orations on Mr Lee’s record - in incorruptibility, raising living standards, in providing security to their minorities and the vulnerable, in his ability to forgive historical slights in the national interest, and his devotion to family.

Thanks to the relentless media coverage of the past week, Mr Lee has come alive for Singaporeans in all his vigour. In the months and years that lie ahead, there surely will be times when the Gans and Tans of Singapore will turn their eyes towards him, longing to hear that strong voice and reassuring firmness.

In 1959, an 11-year-old Peter Gan had peeked down from his Neil Road home and spotted jubilant crowds carrying a newly elected Lee Kuan Yew on their shoulders. Yesterday, the Tanjong Pagar constituent watched him pass through the streets a final time. The next time Mr Gan looks for Mr Lee, he will not be there.

And yet, Singaporeans know he will endure.

Not just in the physical landmarks around the island that bear his mark, but in other ways as well.

He will be in their minds when they hear an incoherent in-flight announcement and wonder how Mr Lee would have reacted, when aspiring politicians hitch up their trousers and square their shoulders, LKY-style, as they approach a lectern; when parents go to bed without worrying about children having a late night out, in the confidence with which people step towards pedestrian crossings looking neither to right nor left; in the mini-United Nations that the country’s work districts, shopping malls and restaurants have come to be.

As Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said, what was said of the British architect Christopher Wren could apply to Mr Lee - for Lee Kuan Yew’s monument, just look around Singapore.

As he began his eulogy, PM Lee, alternating between pride for his father’s life and grief over his death, said the “light that guided
us all these years has been extinguished”.

It was a faint echo from the poignant words Jawaharlal Nehru used for Mahatma Gandhi’s death, as he broke the news to his then young nation about its first big tragedy.

Mr Lee Kuan Yew began his anti-colonial struggle admiring Nehru’s words and vision.

If only for that reason, it is not inappropriate to borrow Nehru’s words as Mr Lee himself departs the stage.

“The light has gone out, I said, and yet I was wrong,” Nehru said on Jan 30, 1948.

“For the light that shone in this country was no ordinary light. The light that has illumined this country for these many years will illumine this country for many more years, and a thousand years later, that light will be seen in this country and the world will see it and it will give solace to innumerable hearts.”

Jasmine petals were strewn in the path of the gun carriage at Jalan Bukit Merah.

Indian eatery Brinda’s gave out 100kg of the flowers. Photo: WANG HUIFEN
National grief:
Why such an outpouring?

Clarissa Oon
Deputy Life! Editor

The guestbook spoke volumes: the entry from the young girl who thanked Mr Lee Kuan Yew for giving her safe streets at night and “the luxury of deciding what and where to study”; the scrawl of the Indian gentleman beside her expressing gratitude for this “great country”.

Invocations of “Allah” and “God”, declarations like “I love you”, as well as Malay phrases and Chinese characters peppered other entries on the facing page.
Standing at the East Coast and Joo Chiat Community Tribute Centre on Sunday afternoon, I who make my living from words was at a loss for them. Finally I wrote, simply: “My condolences to you, PM Lee Hsien Loong and family, on the loss of your father and our first Prime Minister.”

One of the big questions of the past seven days must surely be what accounted for the emotional outpouring among usually reticent Singaporeans in reaction to Mr Lee’s death at age 91.

Veteran opposition politician Chiam See Tong provided part of the answer when he likened the man who was arguably his fiercest political opponent to the country’s Churchill.

“He was there at the time when Singapore was swamped with numerous problems, ranging from domestic to international issues. He was there, just as Britain needed Winston Churchill during World War II - always taking a strategic and long-term view of Singapore,” said Mr Chiam, 80, now almost bent double from old age and illness but with the clarity that sometimes comes from a rival rather than a friend.

In a nutshell, many Singaporeans felt they owed something to Mr Lee, and this cut across age, gender, race and religion. This was their last chance to express it to the strongman leader whose tough love had mobilised a nation and carved out a place for it in the sun; the arch-pragmatist whose devastating, take-no-prisoners brand of oratory had a way of bringing all political debates down to earth.

He did not leave anything to faith or chance, but believed in being two steps ahead of the competition. To improve Singapore’s chances of success, he retooled everything from the languages we spoke to the number of babies we had. We lived with the rapid economic growth, legislated multiracialism, bilingual education policy and overarching state control that were his imprints,
internalising these to no small extent even if we disagreed with some policies.

Crowd psychology is a complex affair, of course, and gratitude is only one of the elements fuelling the overwhelming turnout to say a final goodbye. One can discern group solidarity - the cheers of the crowd along the route of yesterday’s funeral procession and the
shouts of “Lee Kuan Yew, Lee Kuan Yew!” evoked a National Day Parade or post-election victory parade, rather than a state funeral.

The most bandied-about question of the past week, “Are you going?”, carried with it a fear of missing out on a historic moment and even peer pressure. Mr Lee’s body had lain in state at Parliament House until Saturday, and several hundred thousand people formed snaking queues to pay their last respects to him there.

Finally, the public mourning carries with it nostalgia for an earlier era when Singapore faced a crisis of survival and needed forceful leadership.

Today that survival is taken for granted, but the aspirations of Singaporeans are more complex, the hunger for alternative voices is greater and the divisions in society no less deep. In that sense, Mr Lee was a product of his time and it is debatable if a young man cut from the same cloth as him would succeed as spectacularly in today’s political arena.

In a 1986 parliamentary debate, Mr Chiam once likened Mr Lee’s dominance to that of a banyan tree with roots so well spread out that nothing else can grow under it.

In a sense then, the national grieving over the past week has also been about release, much in the same way that the death of an elderly parent allows one finally to find oneself.

In the years ahead, the country will look to new leaders across the political spectrum to fill the void. Until then, the collective mourning is akin to that last great imagined huddle under the banyan’s shade, before new shoots spring up to take its place.
The scene at Raffles Quay. Photo: LAU FOOK KONG

The scene in front of The Treasury near Parliament House. Photo: NEO XIAOBIN

At Cantonment Road facing The Pinnacle@Duxton. Photo: DESMOND WEE
At Cantonment Road near The Pinnacle@Duxton. Photo: DESMOND WEE

Rain-soaked crowds at Bukit Merah. Photo: AZIZ HUSSIN
A coming of age for ‘good life kids’

Janice Heng

An hour before Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s body left Parliament House, the hipster cafes of Tanjong Pagar were busy with the usual young crowd, though the flowing tops and short-sleeved shirts were in more sombre shades than usual.

Later, I recognised some of those same 20-somethings nearby as we stood in the rain at the junction of Cantonment Road and Neil Road, waiting for the arrival of a man most of us had never met.
Our generation are the lucky ones. We are the “good life kids”, as our elders remind us in dialects that the late Mr Lee did not quite manage to eradicate.

We knew this well before the past week, of course. We had Social Studies lessons and the stories of our parents, stories so distant that we imagined them in sepia: night-soil carriers, kampung games, a life before television.

But perhaps it was only with Mr Lee’s death that that history has become real to us.

“When he was still around, you just didn’t grasp what he had done,” said researcher Raymond Khoo, 29, who was also at the same rain-lashed junction.

“His passing made us more curious about him, and made us realise how much he did.”

Like other 20-somethings to whom I had spoken, while Mr Khoo was sad about Mr Lee’s death, grief was not his greatest reaction: “It’s more that we’re grateful that he has contributed so much.”

In a sense, we grew up in a post-Lee Kuan Yew age. I was two years old when the prime ministership passed to Mr Goh Chok Tong in 1990. The improvements we have seen in our lifetime are small in comparison: the disappearance of non-air-conditioned buses, say, or the rise of Marina Bay Sands.

As 29-year-old Lin Wei Liang, who works in human resources, said: “I haven’t been through the tough times. What we understand is really from the books, from the news, from our parents.”

But precisely because my generation does not know - cannot know - the vast changes which Mr Lee wrought, we can only
marvel at them in retrospect.

What were we trying to do, this past week, with our mourning Facebook statuses?

For a generation whose life experiences feel more like current affairs than history, perhaps there was some selfishness under all that emotion and reflection.

In our own way, we strove to become part of this historical moment, to stake a claim on a chapter of the Singapore story that we had always thought about in the past tense.

And so we gathered, yesterday morning, on that rain-swept corner.

The crowd perked up as the first police motorcycles sped past. As the cortege drew into view, flags rustled urgently.

A cry went up - “Lee Kuan Yew! Lee Kuan Yew!” - but then the coffin passed, just like that, and silence fell in its wake.

Even before the vehicles were out of sight, people began to peel away from the barricades: old men shaking the rain off their sandals, families in matching raincoats.

But a few of us lingered a little longer. There was Mr Lin, sharing an umbrella with his girlfriend. There was a young man with a stylish quiff, staring ahead, smartphone forgotten in his hand.

We kept peering down the road, watching as the procession disappeared into the distance, as if still unsure what exactly we had come to bid farewell to.

Something far greater than us had come and gone, and was even now fading into the rain.

But perhaps in bearing witness to its passing, we too became part of something greater. This was history, right before us, and for once - for perhaps the first time - it was a history we could call our own.
THE EULOGIES
This has been a dark week for Singapore. The light that has guided us all these years has been extinguished. We have lost our founding father Mr Lee Kuan Yew, who lived and breathed Singapore all his life. He and his team led our pioneer generation to create this island nation, Singapore.

**MR LEE KUAN YEW’S EARLY YEARS**

Mr Lee did not set out to be a politician, let alone a statesman, as a boy. In fact, his grandfather wanted him to become an English gentleman! But events left an indelible mark on him. He had been a British subject in colonial Singapore. He had survived hardship, danger and fear in the Japanese Occupation. These life experiences drove him to fight for independence.

In one of his radio talks on the Battle for Merger, many years ago (on 15 September, 1961), Mr Lee said: “My colleagues and I are of that generation of young men who went through the Second World War and the Japanese Occupation and emerged determined that no one – neither the Japanese nor the British – had the right to push and kick us around.”

Mr Lee championed independence for Singapore through Merger with Malaya, to form a new Federation – the Federation of Malaysia. He worked tirelessly to bring this about, and succeeded. Unfortunately the merger did not last, and before long we were
expelled from Malaysia. Separation was his greatest “moment of anguish”, but it also proved to be the turning point in Singapore’s fortunes.

BUILDING A NATION

From the ashes of Separation he built a nation. The easiest thing to do would have been to appeal to Chinese voters alone. After all, Singapore had had to leave Malaysia because we were majority Chinese. Instead, Mr Lee went for the nobler dream of a multi-racial, multi-religious nation. Singapore would not be based on race, language or religion, but on fundamental values – multi-racialism, equality, meritocracy, integrity, and rule of law. Mr Lee declared: “This is not a country that belongs to any single community; it belongs to all of us.”

He checked would-be racial chauvinists, and assured the minorities that their place here was secure. He insisted on keeping our mother tongues, even as English became our common working language. He encouraged each group to maintain its culture, faith and language, while gradually enlarging the common space shared by all. Together with Mr S. Rajaratnam, he enshrined these ideals in the National Pledge.

He kept us safe in a dangerous and tumultuous world. With Dr Goh Keng Swee, he built the SAF from just two infantry battalions and one little wooden ship, into a well-trained, well-equipped, well-respected fighting force.

He introduced National Service (NS), and personally persuaded parents to entrust their sons to the SAF. He succeeded, first because he led by example. His two sons did NS just like every
Singaporean son; in fact my brother and I signed up as regulars in the SAF “tan jiak bing” (in Hokkien), and we took up SAF Scholarships. Secondly, people trusted Mr Lee, and believed in the Singapore cause. Therefore today, we sleep peacefully at night - confident that we are well protected.

Mr Lee gave us courage to face an uncertain future. He was a straight talker, and he never shied away from hard truths, either to himself or to Singaporeans. His ministers would sometimes urge him to soften the tone of his draft speeches - even I would sometimes do that - to sound less unyielding to human frailties. He often took in their amendments, but he would preserve his core message. As he said, “I always tried to be correct not politically correct”.

He was a powerful speaker: moving, inspiring, persuasive, in English and Malay, and by dint of a lifelong hard slog, Mandarin and Hokkien. MediaCorp has been broadcasting his old speeches this week, reminding us that his was the original Singapore Roar: passionate, formidable and indomitable.

Above all, Lee Kuan Yew was a fighter. In crises, when all seemed hopeless, he was ferocious, endlessly resourceful, firm in his resolve, and steadfast in advancing his cause.

Thus he saw us through many battles: the Battle for Merger against the communists, which most people thought the non-communists would lose; the fight when we were in Malaysia against the communalists, when his own life was in danger; Separation, which cast us out into a hazardous world; and then the withdrawal of British forces from Singapore, which threatened
the livelihoods of 150,000 people.

Because he never wavered, we didn’t falter. Because he fought, we took courage and fought with him, and prevailed. Thus Mr Lee took Singapore and took us all from Third World to First.

In many countries, anti-colonial fighters and heroes would win independence and assume power, but then fail at nation building. Because the challenges of bringing a society together, growing an economy, patiently improving peoples’ lives are very different from the challenges of fighting for independence - mobilising crowds getting people excited, over throwing the regime. But Mr Lee and his team succeeded at nation building.

Just weeks after Separation, Mr Lee boldly declared: “Ten years from now, this will be a metropolis. Never fear!” And indeed he made it happen. He instilled discipline and order, ensuring that in Singapore, every problem gets fixed. He educated our young. He transformed labour relations from strikes and confrontation to tripartism and cooperation. He campaigned to upgrade skills and raise productivity, calling this effort a marathon with no finish line.

He enabled his economic team – Goh Keng Swee, Hon Sui Sen, Lim Kim San – to design and carry out plans to attract investments, grow the economy, and create prosperity and jobs. As he said, “I settled the political conditions so that tough policies ... could be executed”.

However, Mr Lee was clear that while “the development of the economy is very important, equally important is the development
of the nature of our society.” So he built an inclusive society where everyone enjoyed the fruits of progress. Education became the foundation for good jobs and better lives. HDB new towns sprung up one after another – Queenstown, Toa Payoh, Ang Mo Kio, and many more. We had roofs over our heads, and became a nation of home owners. With Mr Devan Nair in the NTUC, he transformed the union movement into a positive force, cooperating with employers and the government to improve the lot of workers.

Mr Lee cared for the people whom he served, the people of Singapore. When SARS struck in 2003, he worried about taxi drivers, whose livelihoods were affected because tourists had dried up, and pressed us hard to find ways to help the taxi drivers. Mr Lee also cared for the people who served him. One evening, just a few years ago, he rang me up. One of my mother’s WSOs (woman security officers) was having difficulty conceiving a child, and he wanted to help her. He asked whether I knew how to help her to adopt a child. He was concerned for people not just in the abstract, but personally and individually.

Internationally, Mr Lee raised Singapore’s standing in the world. He was not just a perceptive observer of world affairs, but a statesman who articulated Singapore’s international interests and enlarged our strategic space. At crucial turning points, from the British withdrawal “East of Suez” to the Vietnam War to the rise of China, his views and counsel influenced thinking and decisions in many capitals.

In the process, he built up a wide network of friends, in and out of power. He knew every Chinese leader from Mao Zedong and every US president from Lyndon Johnson. He established
close rapport with President Suharto of Indonesia, one of our most important relationships. Others included Deng Xiaoping, Margaret Thatcher, Helmut Schmidt, George Shultz, as well as President Bill Clinton and Henry Kissinger, whom we are honoured to have here this afternoon. They all valued his candour and insight. As Mrs Thatcher said, “(Mr Lee) had a way of penetrating the fog of propaganda and expressing with unique clarity the issues of our times and the way to tackle them. He was never wrong.” Hence despite being so small, Singapore’s voice is heard, and we enjoy far more influence on the world stage than we have any reason to expect.

Mr Lee did not blaze this path alone. He was the outstanding leader of an exceptional team, the team, which included Goh Keng Swee, S. Rajaratnam, Othman Wok, Hon Sui Sen, Lim Kim San, Toh Chin Chye, Ong Pang Boon, Devan Nair, and quite a number more. They were his comrades, and he never forgot them. So it is very good that Mr Ong Pang Boon is here today with us to speak about Mr Lee later on. Thank you Mr Ong.

Mr Lee received many accolades and awards in his long life, but he wore them lightly. When he received the Freedom of the City of London in 1982, he said: “I feel like a conductor at a concert bowing to applause, but unable to turn around and invite the accomplished musicians in his orchestra to rise and receive the ovation for the music they have played. For running a government is not unlike running an orchestra, and no Prime Minister ever achieves much without an able team of players.”

Because he worked with a strong team and not alone; because people knew that he cared for them, and not for himself; and
because he had faith that Singaporeans would work with him to achieve great things, Mr Lee won the trust and confidence of Singaporeans. The pioneer generation, who had lived through the crucial years, had a deep bond with him. I once met a lady who owned a successful fried rice restaurant. She told me: “Tell Lee Kuan Yew I will always support him. I was born in 1948, and I am 48 years old (this was 1996). I know what he has done for me and Singapore.” She and her generation knew that, to use a Chinese phrase, “跟着李光耀走不会死的” – if you follow Lee Kuan Yew, you will survive.

**LEAVING HIS MARK ON SINGAPORE**

Mr Lee imbued Singapore with his personal traits. He built Singapore to be clean and corruption-free. His home was spartan. His habits were frugal. He wore the same jackets for years, and patched up worn bits instead of buying new ones. He imparted these values to the government. Even when old and frail, on his 90th birthday when he came to Parliament and celebrated his birthday with MPs, he reminded them that Singapore must remain clean and incorruptible, and that MPs and Ministers had to set the example.

He pursued ideas with tremendous, infectious energy. He said of himself: “I put myself down as determined, consistent, persistent. I set out to do something, I keep on chasing it until it succeeds. That’s all.” Easy to say, but very few do it. This was how he seized opportunities, seeing and realising possibilities that many others missed.

So it was he who pushed to move Paya Lebar airport to Changi. It was he who rejected the then conventional wisdom that multi-
national corporations (MNCs) were rapacious and exploitative, and wooed foreign investments from MNCs, bringing us advanced technology, overseas markets and good jobs.

He was not afraid to change his mind when a policy was no longer relevant. When he saw that our birth rates were falling below replacement, more than 30 years ago, he scrapped the “Stop at Two” policy and started encouraging couples to have more children. Having upheld a very conservative approach to supervising our financial sector for many years, he eventually decided that the time had come to rethink and liberalise, in a controlled way. This was how Singapore’s financial centre took off in a new wave of growth, to become what it is today. He was always clear what strategy to follow, but never so fixed to an old strategy as to be blind to the need to change course when the world changed.

Nothing exemplifies this better than water security, a lifelong obsession of his. He entrenched the PUB’s two Water Agreements with Johor in the Separation Agreement, and personally managed all aspects of our water talks with Malaysia. He launched water saving campaigns, built reservoirs, and turned most of the island into water catchment to process the rain for use. He cleaned up the Singapore River and Kallang Basin. He dreamed of the Marina Barrage long before it became feasible, and persevered for decades until finally it became a reality. And he lived to see it become a reality. When PUB invented NEWater, and when desalination became viable, he backed the new technologies enthusiastically. The result today is Singapore has moved towards self-sufficiency in water, become a leader in water technologies, and turned a vulnerability into a strength. So perhaps it is appropriate that
today at his State Funeral, the heavens opened and cried for him.

Greening Singapore was another of his passions. On travels when he came across trees or plants that might grow well here, he would collect saplings and seeds and hand carry them back home. He used the Istana grounds as a nursery, and would personally check on the health of the trees, not just in general, but on particular trees. He would even know their names, the scientific names. Singapore’s Prime Minister was also the Chief Gardener of the City in a Garden.

He had a relentless drive to improve. He continued to learn well into old age. At 70, to write his memoirs, he started learning how to use his computer. Every so often he would call me for help, sometimes late in the night, and I would give him a phone consultation, talking him through the steps to save a file, or find a document which had vanished somewhere on his hard drive. And if he could not find me, he would consult my wife.

He made a ceaseless effort to learn Mandarin over decades. He listened to tapes of his teacher conversing with him, daily in the morning while shaving at home, and in the evening while exercising at Sri Temasek. He kept up his Mandarin classes all his life. Indeed, his last appointment on February 4, before he was taken gravely ill early the next morning, was with his Mandarin tutor.

He inspired all of us to keep giving of our best.

He was constantly thinking about Singapore. At one National Day Rally (in 1988), he declared: “Even from my sickbed, even if
you are going to lower me into the grave and I feel something is going wrong, I will get up”. And he meant that. And indeed, even after he left the Cabinet, he would still occasionally raise with me issues he felt strongly about.

During the Budget Debate two years ago, MPs hotly debated the cost of living, public transport and so many other matters preoccupying Singaporeans. Mr Lee felt that we had lost sight of the fundamentals that underpinned our survival. He emailed me and sent me a draft speech. He told me that he wanted to speak in the Chamber, to remind Singaporeans of these unchanging hard truths, what our survival depended upon. But I persuaded him to leave the task to me and my ministers, and he took my advice.

His biggest worry was that younger Singaporeans would lose the instinct for what made Singapore tick. This was why he continued writing books into his 90s – Bilingualism, Hard Truths, One Man’s View of the World, and at least one more, guided by him and still in the process of being written – so that a new generation of Singaporeans could learn from his experience, and understand what their security, prosperity, and future depended upon.

One of Mr Lee’s greatest legacies was preparing Singapore to continue beyond him. He believed that a leader’s toughest job was ensuring succession. He systematically identified and groomed a team of successors. He made way for Mr Goh Chok Tong to become Prime Minister after him, but stayed on in Mr Goh’s Cabinet to help the new team succeed. He provided stability and experience and quietly helped to build up Mr Goh’s authority. He knew how to guide without being obtrusive, to be watchful while letting the new team develop its own style and authority. He
described himself as a “mascot”, but everyone knew how special this mascot was and how lucky we were to have him.

It was likewise when I took over. Mr Goh became Senior Minister and Mr Lee became Minister Mentor, a title he felt reflected his new role. Increasingly he left policy issues to us, but he would share with us his reading of world affairs, and his advice on major problems that he saw over the horizon. Some other Prime Ministers told me that they could not imagine what it was like to have two former PMs in my Cabinet. But it worked, both for me and for Singapore.

For all his public duties, Mr Lee also had his own family. My mother was a big part of his life. They were a deeply loving couple. She was his loyal spouse and confidante – going with him everywhere, fussing over him, helping with his speeches, and keeping home and hearth warm. They were a perfect team, and wonderful parents. When my mother died, he grieved. He felt the devastating loss of a life partner, who as he said had helped him become what he was.

My father left the upbringing of the children largely to my mother. But he was the head of the family, and cared deeply about us, both when we were small, and long after we had grown up. He was not very demonstrative, much less was he touchy feely - so not New Age, but he loved us deeply.

After my first wife Ming Yang died, my parents suggested that I tried meditation. They gave me some books to read, on mindfulness and tranquillity meditation. I read the books but I did not make much progress. I think my father had tried it too,
also not too successfully. When his teacher told him to relax, still his mind and let go, he replied: “But what will happen to Singapore if I let go?”

When I had lymphoma, he suggested that I try meditation more seriously. He thought it would help me to fight the cancer. He found me a teacher and spoke to him personally. With a good teacher to guide me, I made better progress.

In his old age, after my mother died, my father started meditating again, this time with help from Ng Kok Song, whom he knew from GIC. Kok Song brought a friend to see my father, a Benedictine monk who did Christian meditation. My father was not a Christian, but he was happy to learn from the Benedictine monk. He even called me to suggest that I meet the monk, which I did. He probably felt I needed to resume meditation too. To give you some context, this was a few months after the 2011 General Elections. I was nearing 60 by then, and he was nearly 90. But to him I was still his son to be worried over, and to me he was still a father to love and appreciate, just like when I was small.

So this morning, before the ceremonies began at Parliament House, when we had a few minutes, I sat by him and meditated.

Of course, growing up as my father’s son could not but mean being exposed to politics very early. I remember as a little boy, I knew his constituency was Tanjong Pagar. I was proud of him becoming legal advisor to so many trade unions, and was excited by the hubbub at Oxley Road whenever elections happened, and our home became the election office.
I remember when we were preparing to join Malaysia in the early 1960s, going along with my father on constituency visits – the “fang wen” tours which he made to every corner of Singapore. For him, it was backbreaking work, week after week, every weekend, rallying the people’s support for a supremely important decision about Singapore’s future. For me, these were not just Sunday outings, but also an early political education.

I remember election night in 1963, the crucial general election when the PAP defeated the pro-communist Barisan Sosialis. My mother sent me to bed early, but I lay awake in bed to listen to the election results until the PAP had won enough seats to form the government again and then I think I fell asleep.

I remember the day he told me, while we were playing golf at the Istana, that should anything happen to him, he wanted me to look after my mother and my younger brother and sister.

I remember the night the children slept on the floor in my parents’ bedroom at Temasek House in Kuala Lumpur, because the house was full of ministers who had come up from Singapore. Every so often my father would get up from the bed to make a note about something before lying down to rest again, but obviously he was not asleep. That was 7 August 1965, two days before Separation.

Growing up with my father, living through those years with him, made me what I am.

This year is the 50th anniversary of Singapore’s independence. We all wanted Mr Lee to be present with us on August 9 to celebrate
this milestone. More than anybody else, it was he who fought for multiracialism, which ultimately led to our independence as a sovereign republic. It was he who united our people, built a nation, and made our 50th anniversary worth celebrating. Sadly, it is not to be.

But we can feel proud and happy that Mr Lee lived to see his life’s work come to fruition. At last year’s National Day Parade, when Mr Lee appeared and waved, and it appeared on the big screen on the Floating Platform, the crowd gave him the most deafening cheer of the whole parade.

Last November, the People’s Action Party celebrated its diamond anniversary at the Victoria Concert Hall, where Mr Lee had founded the party 60 years ago. Party members were so happy to see that Mr Lee could be there, and they gave him a rousing, emotional, standing ovation. Those of us who were there will never forget it.

St Paul’s Cathedral in London was built by Sir Christopher Wren. He was the architect, and he is buried in the cathedral, his life’s work. The Latin epitaph on his grave reads: si monumentum requiris, circumspice. It means: “If you seek his monument, look around you”. Mr Lee Kuan Yew built Singapore. To those who seek Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s monument, Singaporeans can reply proudly: “Look around you”...

I said the light that has guided us all these years has been extinguished. But that is not quite so. For Mr Lee’s principles and ideals continue to invigorate this Government and guide our people. His life will inspire Singaporeans, and others, for
generations to come.

Mr Lee once said that “we intend to see that (Singapore) will be here a thousand years from now. And that is your duty and mine”. Mr Lee has done his duty, and more. It remains our duty to continue his life’s work, to carry the torch forward and keep the flame burning bright.

Over the past month, the outpouring of good wishes, prayers and support from Singaporeans as Mr Lee lay ill has been overwhelming, and even more so since he passed away on Monday. People of all races, from all walks of life, young and old, here and abroad have mourned him. Hundreds of thousands queued patiently for hours, in the hot sun and through the night, to pay respects to him at the Parliament House. I visited the queue on the Padang. Many Singaporeans, not so few non-Singaporeans, who all came out of deep respect and a sense of compulsion, that here was a man they wanted to do honour to. Many more wrote heartfelt messages and took part in tribute ceremonies at community sites all over the island.

Thousands of overseas Singaporeans gathered in our embassies and consulates to remember Mr Lee. Later in this funeral service, all of us – in this hall, across our island, and in far flung lands – will observe a minute of silence, say the National Pledge, and sing Majulah Singapura together.

We have all lost a father. We grieve as one people, one nation. But in our grief, we have displayed the best of Singapore. Ordinary people going to great lengths to distribute refreshments and umbrellas to the crowd, and help one another through the
night. Citizen soldiers, Home Team officers, cleaners, all working tirelessly round the clock. Our shared sorrow has brought us closer together, and made us stronger and more resolute.

We come together not only to mourn. We come together also to rejoice in Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s long and full life, and what he has achieved with us, his people, in Singapore. We come together to pledge ourselves to continue building this exceptional country.

Let us shape this island nation into one of the great cities in the world, reflecting the ideals he stood for, realising the dreams he inspired, and worthy of the people who have made Singapore our home and nation.

Thank you Mr Lee Kuan Yew. May you rest in peace.
On behalf of all Singaporeans, my wife Mary and I convey our deepest condolences to Prime Minister Lee and the family of the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew on Mr Lee’s passing.

Today, Singapore bids farewell to our country’s first Prime Minister — the founder of our modern Republic. As a nation, we mourn a man who made a difference. A man who shaped our very identity as a society. A man who was devoted to ensuring that Singapore succeeded when no one thought we could.

But we do not mourn alone. Mr Lee’s impact stretched far beyond our shores. He raised the profile of our Republic, earning respect and admiration around the world. On behalf of Singapore, I thank the many friends of Mr Lee — friends of Singapore — who have travelled great distances to be with us today.

Two years ago, I asked to visit Mr Lee to see how he was doing. With Mr Lee’s increasing frailty and out of respect, I planned to meet him at his office. Mr Lee, however, was adamant that he should come to my office. It took him a great deal of effort. But he did it as a mark of respect for the Office of the President. This incident was more than a matter of protocol. To me, it demonstrated Mr Lee’s strong regard for our Constitution. For the institutions of our state.
And even though he played a lead role in creating these institutions, he also knew that they had to be greater than any one man. It is often said that Singaporeans are a pragmatic people. And we are. But we are also fundamentally a nation built on ideals.

Mr Lee once said: “Each generation is fired by its own vision of the ideal society in the ideal world. The ideal can never be achieved, but because men have ideals, those societies progress.”

Mr Lee’s ideals were clear. He believed in them, and he lived them. Meritocracy. Honesty. Integrity.

When Mr Lee became Prime Minister in 1959, he pulled together a strong team of leaders from diverse backgrounds. He ensured that positions in government were filled by the most capable people, rather than those with connections or money.

Mr Lee took severe measures to curb corruption, a root cause of inequality. He put in place tough laws to investigate those suspected of corruption and heavy penalties for those caught taking bribes. By ensuring that our government and economy stayed honest, accountable and free of corruption, Mr Lee assured investors and companies that Singapore was the right place for their investments. Companies from around the world came, and continue to come to Singapore – creating opportunities for employment, learning and growth for Singaporeans.

Mr Lee demanded, without compromise, complete integrity in personal and professional matters from himself, his family and his colleagues. He said in Parliament in 1979, “the moment key
leaders are less than incorruptible, less than stern in demanding high standards, from that moment the structure of administrative integrity will weaken, and eventually crumble".

To make sure that our public services were working well to serve the people, he made unannounced visits to inspect our HDB estates, hospitals, parks and other public places.

Integrity, however, was more than a basis for a strong economy and a capable government. Mr Lee had a vision of Singapore as a fair and just society. Today, all Singaporeans have the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from Singapore’s development regardless of race or religion, connections or family background. Through his personal example, Mr Lee embedded a sense of integrity into our very identity as a nation.

With integrity as our nation’s bedrock, Mr Lee forged a cohesive society that shares common values and experiences across races and religions.

When Singapore gained independence, we were a fractured and divided society. This past week, Singaporeans from all walks of life came together to mourn the loss of Mr Lee. Large numbers of Singaporeans queued patiently for hours to pay their last respects at Parliament House and Community Tribute Sites across the island. Many individuals and businesses offered shelter and refreshments to those who had been waiting in line, lending a helping hand to fellow Singaporeans. This would have made Mr Lee very proud. This was what he had worked for his whole life – to build a united people, who respect and care for one another as fellow citizens.
Every National Day, we looked forward to seeing Mr Lee. I remember vividly our National Day Parade two years ago. There had been some uncertainty about Mr Lee’s health. While I was waiting to enter the Floating Platform to officiate the Parade, suddenly I heard a huge roar, a cheer, — the biggest that day. My staff informed me that Mr Lee had just made his entrance to take his seat. That roar captured the feelings of a nation, of all of us, towards Mr Lee. It rang with respect, affection, friendship and deep emotional attachment. It is not something that can be easily put into words. But I know that all Singaporeans, in their hearts, understand what I am talking about. It was the sound of one nation united.

We will miss Mr Lee at this year’s National Day Parade. But he will be foremost in our minds. And in our hearts.

Over the past week, we have mourned the passing of a man and an era. There will never be another Lee Kuan Yew. No one person can take his place nor do what he did.

But Mr Lee believed passionately that Singapore had to be greater than any single individual. When Mr Lee stepped down as Prime Minister a quarter of a century ago, he was still in good health. He had many more years to contribute. But he knew that Singapore would always be a work in progress. That each generation needs its own leaders. Now is the time for us to take up the torch to further the ideals upon which Singapore was built, and to make them our own.

There is a well-known saying, most famously used by Isaac Newton: “If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of
giants.” We are held aloft by Mr Lee and our founding generation. They have given us the foundation, the ability and the confidence to look forward to the future, to shape an even better Singapore for all Singaporeans. Together, we can respond to challenges. Together, we can create new opportunities for our children and grandchildren in Singapore. This is Mr Lee’s legacy for us.

We must continue to pursue our ideals with courage and commitment. And so I call on all Singaporeans to honour the memory of Mr Lee by working together to achieve happiness, prosperity and progress for our Singapore. This will be our tribute to Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

Goodbye Mr Lee. May your soul rest in peace.
Mr Lee Kuan Yew gave his life to us. To truly appreciate this, you had to have marched alongside him in his long political journey. Or studied him closely – his words and actions, his ideas and vision, his values and philosophy. Or carried along by his passion in building a nation and improving the lives of Singaporeans. Or lived his worries, day in and day out.

To Singaporeans, he was our first Prime Minister, our leader who fought for our Independence, the man who turned Singapore from Third World to First, our national father. For me, he would always be my teacher.

I first met Mr Lee in 1958 when I went to his office to invite him to speak to my school (Raffles Institution). He was the Leader of the Opposition. Later, I nervously chaired the talk to a packed hall. That was my high point in school.

Mr Lee Kuan Yew was Singapore. But it surprised me that he had earned that accolade just two years after Singapore’s independence. On a field trip with my class of international students to Puerto Rico in 1967, a Puerto Rican excitedly shouted “Chino, Chino” when he saw me. I shouted back, “Singapore!” He replied, “Lee Kuan Yew!”
Mr Lee drove his people hard because he had to toughen fledgling Singapore quickly. As he put it, he had to account for the lives of millions of Singaporeans. He rallied and united a disparate population to share a common identity. He braved necessary long-term painful policies. Farmers were resettled and land acquired. Old mosques and temples made way for public housing, roads and schools. Gangsters and drug traffickers were detained without trial.

Some people alleged that these policies lacked compassion. But Mr Lee taught people how to fish and brought fish to Singapore waters. He housed and schooled millions. He gave us safe streets and parks. He was a leader, not a populist politician. The outpouring of grief, gratitude and love for him says it all.

People know that Mr Lee did immense good for them. Mr Lee consulted widely with colleagues and people he trusted. He told his Backbenchers to bring out the people’s concerns and gossip from the coffee shops and the hawker centres.

Mr Lee never muzzled anyone. But he robustly defended his convictions and Singapore’s interests, very often to the discomfort of his critics. To those he believed were out to destroy Singapore, he put on his knuckle-dusters.

Mr Lee was a good teacher. He was always scanning the future, anticipating challenges, pre-empting problems, and thinking out solutions. He shared with the Cabinet useful articles, his conversations with world leaders, and insights from overseas trips. He studied best practices and explored innovative ideas for Singapore. Where there were no precedents, he thought out
Mr Lee was a worrier. He worried incessantly whether Singapore would survive after he and the Old Guard were gone. He wanted to be judged on this, not by the city he had built and the lives he had improved. As Singapore prospered, and hard times and history forgotten, he did not believe that able, committed and honest leaders would emerge naturally, unlike his generation who were born with fire in their bellies to fight for independence, multi-racial equality and a fair and just society. And so, Mr Lee single-mindedly planned for leadership succession. He emphasised character, motivation, commitment and ability over academic grades. He underlined the importance of having the moral authority to govern.

In pushing for leadership renewal, he had to cut short the political careers of his old colleagues. This was painful for him. He said that it was “emotionally difficult but necessary ... I had to do it, whatever my own feelings”. I know he felt for them. He would occasionally ask me about them.

Learning from Mr Lee, I too planned for leadership renewal. He was surprised when, soon after the 2001 General Election, I intimated my intention to step down. He told me that there was no hurry. I explained that Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong was already approaching 50. I wanted to give him a long runway to lead Singapore and develop the 4th generation leadership.

After I took over as Prime Minister, Mr Lee was punctilious in observing the protocol of my office. He made sure he arrived before me for all events. As I respected him as my elder and
mentor, I told him to dispense with this practice at non-formal events. But he explained that it was important to observe this protocol. Otherwise, people might draw the wrong conclusion that he did not respect me and take their cue from there.

I valued Mr Lee’s advice when he was Senior Minister in my Cabinet. He sought to understand my thinking and objectives, and suggested refinements, and sometimes alternatives, to my policies and programmes. But he always made it clear that the decision was mine to make. He was, as he put it, a resource and data bank.

We lunched regularly. Our conversations never drifted far from his life’s work. We shared many common concerns, including the emerging trend of income stratification and social fragmentation. He worried about almost every aspect of Singapore. He never ceased sharing and I kept on learning.

Once in a while, he showed his soft side. We talked about our families and health. After Mrs Lee’s death, I glimpsed how lonely and sad he was. Sadly, we had to discontinue our lunches in 2013 because of his health. Sadly, his physical health declined. Sadly, Mr Lee is gone.

I cannot put his legacy more eloquently than his Old Guard comrade, the late S Rajaratnam. He wrote: “There is one monument which I think would bring warmth and comfort to him in the twilight years of his life. And that is the city and society which he, more than anybody else, has literally built out of nothing... The question today is not what Mr Lee has done – what he has done is on record and indelible – but whether the city and society
he has built will endure after he is gone.... (And) how much of the past that will help shape the future will be remembered and understood by succeeding generations.”

Mr Lee has completed his life-journey. He transformed our lives. He touched our hearts. We grieve. But I believe Mr Lee would say, “What to do? This is life.”

He would want us to move on with the Singapore Story. He would want us to fight our own battles and conquer our own peaks. He would want Singapore to succeed long after he is gone. We must honour him.

I have seen and heard many acts of kindness over the past week – Singaporeans helping those who need help, staying strong together even as we mourn. This shared, compassionate moment is the people’s tribute to Mr Lee. Let us stay united, across race, language, religion, across young and old, across rich and poor, across our whole society, to write an exciting sequel to his and our Singapore Story.

Thank you Mr Lee.
A translation of his Mandarin speech. Mr Ong, 86, was Cabinet minister from 1959 to 1984, during which he led the ministries of Home Affairs, Education, Labour and the Environment.

The first time I heard of Mr Lee Kuan Yew was during the 1952 postal workers’ strike, when I was a student at the University of Malaya. At the time, the English and Chinese papers reported widely on how this legal adviser representing the unions argued successfully against the colonial government for the unions’ and workers’ welfare.

Like many other young people, I was deeply impressed by this brilliant lawyer. So when the People’s Action Party decided to contest the 1955 election, I did not hesitate to support the PAP as a volunteer, and was assigned to be Mr Lee’s election agent. But after the election, my employer posted me to Kuala Lumpur, and I thought that was the end of my political involvement.

In 1956, Mr Lee was en route to Cameron Highlands for a holiday with his wife and elder son, and arranged to see me at the Kuala Lumpur Station Hotel. To my surprise, he asked me to join the PAP as its organising secretary.

I was determined to join the battle for independence from colonial rule, and accepted his offer without a second thought and
joined the march for change. I have never regretted that decision.

As the PAP’s organising secretary, I had to work closely with Secretary-General Comrade Lee and other Exco members. This gave me a better understanding of Mr Lee. He was a consummate and farsighted politician, maximising every opportunity to advance his political advantage and the PAP’s interests. Although English-educated, he understood that power rested with the pro-communist students from Chinese schools and the trade unions. Hence, he was always worried that the PAP could be hijacked by the pro-communists.

We fought with the pro-communists several times in the early years. But we won because Mr Lee had the strong support of like-minded comrades like Dr Toh Chin Chye, Dr Goh Keng Swee and Mr S. Rajaratnam.

In 1959, the PAP won the general election on the back of the Chinese-educated voters of Singapore. I joined the first PAP Cabinet, with Mr Lee as Singapore’s first Prime Minister. He was a dedicated Prime Minister with broad perspectives. During Cabinet meetings, there would sometimes be differing views on certain issues but, after active discussion, he was able to accept alternative views and ideas. I served in the Cabinet until 1984.

What struck me most about Mr Lee was his complete passion for Singapore. He spent every moment thinking of how he could improve Singapore and Singaporeans’ lives. Once he decided that a certain policy was in the interest of his beloved Singapore, he would implement it, even if it meant making himself unpopular.
Mr Dhanabalan held various ministerial portfolios from 1980 to 1992, and was chairman of Temasek Holdings from 1996 to 2013.

As one who worked closely with Mr Lee Kuan Yew for a period I just want to focus on just four aspects of his leadership that remain with me.

First, he had an absolute obsession to ensure an honest, corruption free political process and public administration system. He had seen the damage a nation and society suffer when well meaning leaders allow those close to them to take advantage of their position. Mr. Lee demanded and expected honesty and probity from political colleagues, from his equivalent of “Long March” comrades, public servants and from all members of his family.

He was sometimes seen as a hardhearted man who acted without feelings. But on the few occasions he discussed privately with me the decision to act against someone, I know that he agonized over the decision. He was convinced that a softhearted approach would undermine the ethos, he wanted to embed deeply in public service.

The second point is how he planned succession. What is still vivid in my mind is the time and mental energy he spent
to prepare us for the responsibilities ahead. Much of the time in Cabinet meetings was spent with him sharing his experience in politics, in policy making and implementation. He circulated and discussed critically, essays and commentaries from journals and newspapers.

When he made official visits and went to conferences, he always made it a point to take a few of us in the younger team along with him to familiarize us with how to interact with the leaders of other nations and observe how to probe, to get a better understanding of global events.

He would always try to seek the relevance to Singapore of his and our observations. We were deeply sensitized to looking at everything in terms of what we could do in and for Singapore or, equally important, what we should avoid doing.

Mr Lee never tired of repeating his war stories, observations, and conclusions about events and personalities. To me he was Minister Mentor from the time I started working with him.

The third point is the way he took decisions. The myth is that he brooked no opposition to what he wanted and that the Cabinet members merely fell in line. That was not my experience. He argued tirelessly to get Cabinet to accept his views not because it was the PM’s view but because of the strength of his arguments. I think he felt he had failed were he not able to convince his Cabinet colleagues.

When he spoke as Prime Minister at important occasions he sent drafts of his speeches to his colleagues for views and
suggestions before he settled on the final version. The idea that he expected his team to follow him like a herd of sheep without question completely misrepresents the man and his values.

The last point concerns his reputation as the complete political pragmatist who did not allow idealism to get in the way of what would work in and for Singapore. He was a pragmatist, yet in a very deep sense he was an idealist. He was obsessed with not only what would work in Singapore, but what the feel and timbre of our society should be. This is well illustrated by his approach to the language policy. In a population comprising 75% Chinese, the easiest way to ensure political support and electoral support would have been to champion Chinese language and, behind that, Chinese chauvinism.

He was convinced that for our nation to be distinct and different from other nations we had to be multi-lingual with English as the main language of administration and commerce. But each racial group must maintain its cultural identity with their mother tongue as a second language. To convert Chinese schools into national type schools and push for Mandarin against Chinese dialects were the acts of an idealist not the acts of a pragmatist.

To-day we come to say our farewell to Mr Lee Kuan Yew who is in a complete sense the Father of our Singapore that we know. Up to the very end he was committed to this nation. In the words of Tennyson, though ‘made weak by time and fate’ he remained ‘strong in will’, determined not to ‘rust unburnished’ but ‘to shine in use’.

Farewell Sir.
This is a translation of his Malay speech. A Member of Parliament since 1976, Mr Sidek was Senior Minister of State for Education when he stepped down in 2001.

When Mr Lee Kuan Yew asked me to stand as a candidate in the 1976 General Elections, I was surprised. My decision to accept his offer to stand as a PAP candidate created quite a stir in the Malay community. Just a few years earlier, I had expressed differing views from the Government about education.

He was a tough taskmaster but always full of advice. Never waffle, he would say. Be open. Be attentive, firm. But above all, be polite. His advice was to concentrate on education. This would ensure our children would go on to become trustworthy trustees of our nation, he argued. I am most grateful to Mr Lee for fully supporting the formation of the Mendaki foundation.

In 1979, when I was to accompany Hon Sui Sen, then Minister of Finance, to China, Mr Lee asked me if I could take the cold Chinese winter. "Do you have an overcoat?" he asked. I said that I would buy one. "No, don't waste money," he replied. After pausing, he said: "Ahmad Mattar has a good overcoat. Borrow from him."

“What about boots to cover your shoes for walking?” he
continued. I said I didn't have any but I would buy a pair. "No, no don't waste money." He paused. "Borrow from Chok Tong!" So off I went to China with a borrowed overcoat and a borrowed pair of boots!

Mr Lee believed in frugality, both in his personal life as well as nationally. And he walked the talk. This episode is an example, and also showed his fatherly character and sharp eye for detail.

Speaking of not being wasteful, Mr Lee disliked wasting time. He was not one to procrastinate. In late 2010, when I presented him with a copy of my book of speeches and news articles entitled The Singapore Malay Paradigm, he sent me a personal note of "Best Wishes" a few days later. I felt touched by his gesture and replied that the book would not have been possible but for Mr Lee's foresight. He responded on that very day itself, with his own handwriting. He said: ‘Thank you, Sidek’.

I had several opportunities to accompany him abroad. When he travelled to Israel and Jordan in 1995, I was on the Singapore delegation. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Jordan’s King Hussein both entertained us in their respective homes. This was a classic example of Jewish and Arab hospitality: It was appreciation and respect being bestowed on our former PM. Respect tinted in gold.

Fellow Singaporeans, today we register our deepest respect and appreciation to this great man. Mr Lee was the embodiment of the term ‘statesman’. Someone who comes along once every few decades to make an indelible mark on society and the world at large.
To his family, the nation shares the sorrow that you feel. Please accept our heartfelt condolences. May you be consoled in the knowledge that our founding father, your father, had lived a long and meaningful life. Singaporeans are indeed indebted to him.

Let me recite a Malay pantun or short poem: Pisang emas dibawa belayar Masak sebiji diatas peti Hutang emas boleh dibayar Hutang budi dibawa mati. A Malay quatrain which means that monetary debts can be paid off, but debts of good deeds cannot be repaid. A person brings such debts to his grave.

There is also a Malay saying or pepatah Melayu: "Harimau mati tinggalkan belang, manusia mati tinggalkan nama", that means a person who has done many great deeds will always be remembered.

Mr Lee, we would like to assure you that your legacy remains intact. We shall always cherish your advice, especially in governing. You said: “If you want to be popular all the time, you will misgovern”. And you always urged us to be pragmatic. And above all, you insisted we remain honest and clean. Two characteristics that have deep solid meaning.

PM, SM, MM, farewell.

Farewell, my friend. Farewell.
This is a translation of his Tamil speech. Mr Muthukumarasamy is the General Secretary for the Amalgamated Union of Public Daily Rated Workers.

Thank you for the opportunity to say a few words about our former Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr Lee Kuan Yew. There is so much to talk about Mr Lee. He was an outstanding leader and I feel very privileged to have met him. Mr Lee has inspired my own personal development as a worker, a unionist and a leader.

When I was young, my father would often tell me about Mr Lee. Mr Lee saw the hardships experienced by the Indian community at the time and he was determined to help and make a difference. During those days, most Indian families had single incomes because they did not allow their women to work.

However, Mr Lee greatly encouraged and emboldened Indian women to join the workforce, to learn a skill and help their families financially. As more Indian women started to work, their families began to earn higher incomes. Because Mr Lee had also made sure that public housing was affordable, the combined incomes of the husband and wife enabled Indian families to purchase a basic house and start families. Today, we see many dual-income families in the Indian community. We have to thank Mr Lee for that.
I would like to share with you a personal interaction I had with Mr Lee many years ago. Many people talk about Mr Lee’s dedication, self-discipline and strictness – you can say that I experienced this firsthand! When I was an apprentice wireman at PWD, my colleagues and I were asked by my supervisor to go to the newly-built Changi Cottage to service the air-conditioning system. We did not know who lived there or used the space. When we got there, we serviced the air-conditioning system as per my supervisor’s instructions.

As we were finishing up, Mr Lee, who was then PM, came in to the room. When we saw him, we got extremely nervous but finished the job. When we were done, Mr Lee asked me to call in my supervisor. What happened next is still in my mind like it happened yesterday. When my supervisor came in, Mr Lee said, “When a job is given to you, you should do it. I asked you to service the air-conditioning. Please service it now.”

My colleagues and I were worried that we had not done the job correctly. We watched as my supervisor serviced the air-conditioning. When he was done, Mr Lee reiterated that he had given him the job because he thought he could do it – not for him to turn around and re-assign it to his team. He told my supervisor that he did not want to see him again.

The incident left a deep impression on me. Mr Lee believed in one thing – one must do correctly what he is told and everyone should do their own work. If a third person is asked to do the job, the impact would not be right. We must not pass the job to others, and walk away from it. We must show involvement in our work and do it properly. This is how a leader should be. I felt I
should share this experience.

Mr Lee also gave much support to the unions and their members. In those days, there used to be lembaga (Adult Education Board). He strongly encouraged union members to study at the Board. In his May Day speeches, he would urge union members to upgrade their skills. Many heeded his call to do so and became technicians and engineers. Mr Lee would also encourage union members to live and work together harmoniously and help each other out. He would often say, do not be contented with what you have, and motivated all to progress in life. We are very fortunate to have had a leader like him.

Mr Lee’s passing is a great loss to our country. He was passionate about and dedicated to Singapore and Singaporeans, and this cannot be merely expressed with words.

Nevertheless, we cannot help but sing his praises. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to express what is in my heart at this moment.
Mr Leong Chun Loong

Eulogy by Mr Leong Chun Loong
at University Cultural Centre

Mr Leong is a Tanjong Pagar community leader.

Today, we mourn the loss of our country’s first Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

I have been a grassroots leader in Tanjong Pagar Constituency for 39 years. I am privileged to be able to stand here today to pay tribute to Mr Lee Kuan Yew. I consider him my leader and my friend. His departure is not only a loss to the country but also a deep personal loss for me. Having worked closely with him for so many years, I have developed a profound respect and admiration for Mr Lee. I now wish to share with you some stories of my encounters with this great man throughout these years.

Back in the early days, Chinese New Year celebrations would kick off with the lighting of firecrackers, followed by the singing of the National Anthem. There was a particular case when the firecrackers were lit but did not go off. Getting impatient, the MC decided to move on to play the National Anthem, but then the firecrackers went off. We thought it was quite funny but Mr Lee was not amused at all. He told us later: “If we can’t even do this right, how do we run the country?”

This incident showed us how serious he was about all things concerning Singapore and how he always expected us to do our best.
Mr Lee cared for his people. At a “Tanjong Pagar Family Day Function”, we had set up a stage for the day’s activities. The key officials were sitting on the stage and the residents were sitting in front of the stage. The place was hot and sunny. Mr Lee noticed that the residents were perspiring and he turned around and asked us what we were going to do about it. He was always thinking about the people and he expected us to put their interest above our own.

At constituency dinners, Mr Lee would usually sit with grassroots leaders so that he could talk to them. We would always arrange the seating such that his old friends would be seated en-route to his table. It would take him some time to get to his table as he would stop by to speak to every familiar face. When Mr Lee heard that his old friends were doing well, his face would light up with pride.

Even though Mr Lee is no longer with us, his legacy is something that we Singaporeans will always remember.
Ms Chew is a civil servant and former journalist with The Straits Times.

I did not know Mr Lee Kuan Yew personally for most of my life. We met while I was on two assignments as a journalist - documenting his life at home and collecting photographs for a picture book for his 90th birthday.

I met him up close six times, for meetings and interviews, from July 2011. Most were large, formal meetings at the Istana. Naturally I was on my best behaviour. After all, this was the man who had led Singapore to independence, triumphed over his opponents in a storied political career spanning over 60 years, and transformed a sleepy colonial outpost into a bustling metropolis. And there he was, in person.

I didn’t dare to say a word to him until my editor made me lead one of the interviews. He thought Mr Lee would enjoy the interaction with a younger Singaporean. I was so nervous I could hear my heart pounding before the meeting, and actually felt a headache coming on. I braced myself to be peppered with questions on whether I was married, when I planned to have children or whether I spoke Mandarin often enough – questions Mr Lee, as you know, was known to ask young Singaporeans he met.
But there was none of that during the 80-minute interview, which was focused on the beginnings of his political career. There was no room for nervousness either. He came in, sat down, and asked, “Who’s going to start?” And with that, the interview began. As always, Mr Lee was focused on the task at hand.

Over time, I gained more glimpses of what he was like as a person. For instance, it was a thrill for me to learn from his oral history that he once failed an art exam in primary school. But that was of course a small blemish on his distinguished academic record.

I also learned that in his later years he craved his late mother’s gado-gado and mee siam, which thankfully, his sister, Madam Monica Lee, could replicate.

I made at least eight visits to 38 Oxley Road, where I went into all the rooms. But the only time I saw him at home was during our 20-minute photo shoot which began in his study, where he spent most of his time while at home. He was in good spirits that day, dressed in a white, short-sleeved shirt, dark trousers and his trademark sports shoes. It looked as if he had been going through his email at his desk, which also had newspapers, magazines, binders of papers and stationery, all neatly arranged.

It was clear that even at home, his focus was on his work. It didn’t matter to him that his furniture was more than 60 years old and outdated. They served their purpose and that was all that mattered. That was how he lived his life: very simply and frugally, and always putting the country first and his own creature comforts second.
We moved to the living room, which was also a very private space because it was where the late Mrs Lee was remembered. Her photographs were displayed in two rows above her urn, and I was told Mr Lee would gaze at them daily as he had his meals. I could feel how much Mr Lee missed his late wife. She was his partner, his anchor, for more than 63 years.

The last set of photos we took at his home are my favourite. Seated on a chair by a wooden table on the verandah, Mr Lee flashed a bright smile. They turned out to be the best photos on the reel.

No one knows about this, but to thank him for the photo shoot that day, I had prepared two chocolate cupcakes after learning how much he enjoyed chocolate. I even got the bakery to label each cupcake so he’d know exactly what kind of chocolate cupcake it was. But, on the day, I was far too excited and dropped the box before I could present them to Mr Lee.

I had been reflecting on what I was learning about Mr Lee, as a person and founder of independent Singapore, and had just begun to understand just how much he and his family had sacrificed to ensure Singapore’s success. I realised how much I had taken for granted, and how much more I had to thank him for.

To me, Mr Lee had transformed from an elderly statesman who our textbooks say did a lot for us but didn’t quite seem relevant to my daily life, to a man for whom I developed a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation. So much of Singapore began to make sense to me now that I had seen the world through his eyes.
I decided to try to express my thanks again, and wrote him a Thank You card. I had so much to say, but did not know how to say it, and ended up writing four simple lines. A few weeks later, I received a reply. True to his personality, his response was brief and to the point. “Thank you”, he wrote, and signed off as “LKY”. I was thrilled to have heard back from him, but a little sad that I did not convey what I felt in my heart.

This is my last chance. Mr Lee, thank you for everything. Some days I cannot believe how fortunate I am to have been born a Singaporean. We don’t have everything, but we have more than most, because of your lifelong labour. On behalf of young Singaporeans everywhere, I’d like to say: thank you.
He is the second son of Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

Singapore has lost the father to our nation. For my family we have lost our beloved father and grandfather. We are bereft.

I was born in 1957, And for as long as I can remember, Papa was a public figure. As a child, I was only vaguely aware that my father was an “orang besar” or “VIP” in Malay. All little children must think their fathers are special; I do not remember when it dawned on me that he was not just my own special father and not just an ordinary “orang besar”, he was an extraordinary “orang besar”.

Papa was immersed in his work for much of my childhood. In September 1998, he gave Fern and me our copy of his book, “The Singapore Story”. In it, he penned a note with a tinge of regret: “To Yang + Fern, You grew up while I was running around as I describe in this book.”

Perhaps in different circumstances, he would have been a very successful businessman or an entrepreneur; but he chose to dedicate his life and serve the people of Singapore and to build a better future for all. He wanted to ensure his three children had a “normal childhood”. He didn’t want us to grow up with a sense of privilege and entitlement.
As a teenager in secondary school, seeking to assert my independence, I would sometimes ride the public bus. Papa did not object, and my poor security officer had to follow me around the buses. When I was in junior college and keen on outdoor activities, my security officer had to shadow me as I trekked around Pulau Ubin, Pulau Tekong and canoed around Singapore. But Papa’s principles ensured that I had as normal a childhood as possible, although I think I put out the security detail often!

Family holidays were happy occasions. We were able to see more of Papa. We did not go anywhere far away, posh or exotic: the government rest houses in Fraser’s Hill, Cameron Highlands, and later Changi Cottage, a small seaside bungalow that holds many precious memories for me.

Golf was Papa’s principal recreation and passion, so golf featured prominently not only on vacations, but also after work in the evenings. The nine-hole course in the Istana grounds provided ample room for us children to find adventure whilst he golfed. Both Loong and I were sent for golf lessons. We learnt to hit a long drive from the tee box, but neither of us really took to the game and we stopped when we grew up.

But eventually, Papa too, prompted by Ling, gave up golf, and for exercise he took to jogging, swimming, stationary cycling as well as walking. He had read of the benefits of aerobic exercise, examined and accepted the evidence, and he had changed his old habits. Papa was like that: firm in his convictions, but open-minded enough to accept fresh evidence and to change, even to sacrifice something he loved and enjoyed, like golf. Like with much else that he had set his mind to do, Papa remained disciplined.
and exercised regularly even to the last.

In January 1973 when I was 15, Ling and I joined Papa and Mama on a trip to visit Loong who was at university in Cambridge. It was our first family holiday where we travelled so far away. On that trip, Papa and Mama took the family to Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare’s birthplace. We watched the Royal Shakespeare Company’s production of Coriolanus and toured the usual Shakespearean sites at Stratford. I had assumed that it was just Mama indulging her love for Shakespeare and trying to educate us while we were on vacation. But years later when Papa wrote his memoirs, we realised the hidden meaning of this visit for my parents. They had married secretly in Stratford-upon-Avon in December 1947.

When Fern and I married in 1981, Papa was keen to have us live with them at Oxley Road. Mama, perhaps because of her own difficulties living with in-laws as a new bride, and my wife Fern too, had reservations, so upon marriage, Fern and I made a home of our own.

When my brother Loong’s first wife, Ming Yang died in late 1982, leaving Loong with two very young children, the family felt the weight of the tragedy. Fern and I wanted to help the family hold together and create some happy occasions to continue to share. Although, growing up, all our birthdays, including those of Papa and Mama, remained unmarked and uncelebrated, we began inviting the family to our home for Papa’s and Mama’s respective birthdays, for which I would cook a simple meal. At the time, the family included my father’s father, Kung, Papa and Mama, Ling, Loong and his two children. Papa loved a good steak
and he had a Peranakan sweet tooth for desserts.

Over time, the group grew larger. The grandchildren had views of their own and they could be outspoken. They were often ready to engage with Papa on issues of the day. I recall one birthday dinner where Shengwu debated with his Ye Ye till late, long after we had finished dinner, both sides wanting to ensure that the other understood his perspective and point of view!

Whilst there have been public celebrations to mark my father’s key birthdays, these small private family celebrations were a source of much joy to him and Mama. It was anticipated for months before and savoured in the memory for months after, and was part of the ritual of each passing year.

The arrival of grandchildren was also a source of great joy for Papa and Mama. Mama was traditional enough that she was thrilled that I had one son after another but my sense is that Papa would have been equally delighted if Fern and I had had three daughters.

When the grandchildren were little, Papa would love to have them playing around him as he exercised after work in the evenings. At weekends he often took them out - to the zoo, the bird park, the science centre and other places where families would go.

Our youngest son, Shaowu, arrived long after all the other grandchildren, and long after they had given up hope of any more grandchildren. Papa was in his seventies, and less active in public life, so he and Mama took this as a wonderful opportunity to enjoy
their last grandchild.

Many know how privileged Singaporeans are to have benefited from my father’s contributions to building our nation. I know that growing up as his son, I have also been privileged to have witnessed what it means to be a good man, a good husband, a good father and grandfather.

To Singapore and Singaporeans, Papa was at various times PM, SM, MM. But whatever his office he was actually always LKY. Even after he stopped being MM, people found it awkward to refer to him by anything other than this alphabet soup. But to his grandchildren, he was always Ye Ye, and to Fern and me, he was and will always be Papa. We will miss him dearly.

This past week, my family and I have received a deluge of messages expressing appreciation for my father’s life, sometimes providing poignant memories of interactions with Papa. And although in life, Papa kept the two threads of public and private life apart, and shielded Mama and the children from the glare of the media, in his passing, the two threads come together as we share in the grief of loss.

We have been overwhelmed by the outpouring of grief and affection. We have been touched beyond words by the many Singaporeans who have braved the elements to pay their last respects at all hours of the night and day. Young and old, on foot or aided by walking sticks, in push chairs or wheel chairs, you came to pay your last respects, to sign condolence books and to write messages. You have posted touching tributes and poems online and waited patiently to greet his cortege as it passed.
Please accept my family’s inadequate but deep and heartfelt thanks. We know our loss is your loss too, and that the loss is deep and keenly felt. We are humbled that so many have come forward to demonstrate your affection for, respect of and gratitude to - my extraordinary father, a father we share - with Singapore.

Farewell Papa.
Family and Friends

We are gathered here to say our final farewells to Papa – Mr Lee Kuan Yew. After the formalities of the Lying in State and the State Funeral Service, in this final hour Papa is with his family, his friends of a lifetime, his immediate staff who served him loyally and well, his security team who kept him safe and sound, and his medical team who took such good care of him.

So much has been said about Papa’s public life in the past few days. His public life is something we share with all of Singaporeans, with the world. But we were privileged to know him as a father, a grandfather, an elder brother, a friend, a strict but compassionate boss, the head of the family.

Actually, Papa was the head of two families. As the eldest son, from a young age he was effectively head of his household, helping his mother – Mak – to bring up his younger brothers and sister. He remained close to them all his life. To my uncles and aunts, he was always “Kor”, never “Harry”. Sai Sok (Suan Yew) would have him over to dinner every Christmas, and Ku Cheh (Auntie Monica) would cook him his favourite dishes, and teach his cook how to do them, almost to the same standard as hers.

Papa made it a point to attend the Chinese New Year reunions
of the extended Lee family every year, even till last year, to catch up with his siblings, to meet his nephews and nieces, and later grand-nephews and grand-nieces. I think there are a few great grand nephews and nieces but I am not sure if they are here.

Pa was also head of his own family – my mother and the three children. He had plunged deep into politics by the time we arrived. In fact, the day I was born, when he visited Mama and the new baby in Kandang Kerbau Hospital. Instead of talking about the baby, he told her how he was going to represent the postmen’s union in their dispute with the government. This was the postmen’s strike which first made his name and launched him into active politics.

So day to day Mama ran the household, brought us up, saw to our schooling. But Papa set the tone, tracked our progress, and made the big decisions. He sent us to a Chinese school; he started us on Malay lessons with Cikgu Amin, wife is Cikgu Jamilah; he encouraged Yang and me to take up SAF Scholarships, to serve the nation; he persuaded Ling to become a doctor instead of a vet. He set us on the path to make our own marks in the world, and we are grateful.

We are also grateful that Papa guided and nurtured us to grow up into normal, well-adjusted people, even though we were the Prime Minister’s children, always in the spotlight, in every danger of being spoilt, indulged, and led astray. He and Mama decided that we would stay in Oxley Road and not move to Sri Temasek, lest we grow up thinking that the world owed us a living. He made sure we did not get the wrong ideas – no inflated sense of self; never to be inconsiderate to others; not to throw our weight around. We may not always have done it right, but we were never
left in any doubt as to what was the right way to behave.

He took pride in us children. When I learned to ride a bicycle, he was there. Once when I was just getting the hang of balancing on two wheels, he pushed me off from behind to get me started. I pedalled off across the field, thinking that he was still supporting and pushing me. Then I looked back after a few minutes and and few seconds later I found that actually he had let go, and I was cycling on my own! He was so pleased, and so was I.

Like all good fathers, Pa continued to be there for us, even after we grew up. When Yang and I got married, he wrote us long and thoughtful letters sharing advice on how to make our marriages successful. Precious lessons drawn from his own long and very happy marriage with Ma.

After Ming Yang died, and especially before I remarried, he and Mama spent time with our two little children Xiuqi and Yipeng, then still infants, to fill the gap and help bring them up. They took them for walks after dinner every night in the Istana. He was not an indulgent grandfather, but a loving one. There is a photo of Pa with the four grandsons, who were then toddlers, blowing soap bubbles in the garden in front of Sri Temasek.

When I was undergoing chemotherapy for lymphoma, Papa once rang up all the way from the Philippines. He was on some official trip. He called back and I thought it was something important. But actually he called to say he had arranged to send me some durians. He wanted to make sure I was properly nourished during my chemotherapy.
Pa was happy that all three children grew up to be successful and responsible people, contributing to society in our different ways. A few months after I became Prime Minister, he wrote me a letter on his Minister Mentor letterhead. It may be the only letter I will receive from him on that letterhead. It read: “These are mock-ups of my Christmas and New Year cards for the year 2005. The photograph after the swearing-in at the Istana records a memorable evening in my life. Have you any amendments or comments?” The photo was of me shaking hands congratulating him, I as the new Prime Minister and he as the new Minister Mentor and President S R Nathan looking. Naturally I replied that I agreed and had no amendments. He was proud of his son, but he wanted to do things in the proper way, as always.

He continued to teach us lessons in life even into his later years. We learnt from watching him grow old with Mama. She meant the world to him, as he to her. They delighted in each other’s company. After Ma’s stroke in 2003, he nursed her back to health, encouraged her to exercise and stay active, and continued to take her on trips abroad. He even learnt to measure her blood pressure using a traditional sphygmomanometer and stethoscope, and faithfully did this twice a day, everyday and emailed her results and report to her doctors. He would tell her: “Life is an endless series of adjustments. As you grow older, you adjust. Think how lucky we are and how much worse off we could be. Always look on the bright side of things”.

Mama’s passing five years ago was a huge blow to him. But the pictures of them together kept Papa company, to remind him of their 63 happy years together.
All his life, Pa kept up with his old friends – Yong Pung How, Chia Chwee Leong, Hon Sui Sen, and after Sui Sen died his widow Annie. As the years went by, their number dwindled. In recent years, he would occasionally host dinners for his tutors, doctors, his staff and friends, usually at Raffles Hotel, courtesy of Jennie Chua, in order to stay in touch and show his appreciation. And every fortnight or so Kim Li, his niece, on my mother’s side, would take him out for meals, and for a change of surroundings. They would go to Underwater World Sentosa, or to Changi Airport to see progress on Project Jewel or for a boat ride in the harbour. He enjoyed the outings and the company. A few other friends would join in, and take turns to host him – Wai Keung, Stephen Lee, Ong Beng Seng, Liew Mun Leong, Peter Seah, Robert Ng, among others. We are grateful to Kim Li, and to them.

I would also like to thank the medical team of doctors, nurses, and physiotherapists, led by Professor Fong Kok Yong, for taking such good care of my father. You have been competent, dedicated, and compassionate. Pa used to say that his father lived till 94 and his mother till 73. So if he made it to the average of these two ages, he would count himself lucky, and anything more would be a bonus. Pa was lucky to have such a great medical team taking care of him, and he enjoyed many bonus years, and we were lucky to enjoy him for many bonus years too.

For many years, Yang has made it a custom to host a family dinner at his home on our parents’ birthdays. On Pa’s 90th birthday, we had our usual cosy meal. I was taking pictures at the dinner table. Pa gave a radiant smile. I decided to soak in the moment and not grab my camera and scramble to capture the photo. So I do not have a photo but I have a memory that will be
there forever.

Thank you to the Security Command team who have protected my father. You not only ensured his security, but were always by his side, round the clock, beyond the call of duty. You became friends, and almost part of the family. Thanks particularly to the SOs who served as coffin bearers just now, for carrying my father today, on his last journey. And to the pall bearers here at Mandai, who were the SOs, doctors and nurses, for doing my father this honour.

Thank you also to Papa’s personal staff, especially Lin Hoe and YY, who have served him for more than 20 years each. Lin Hoe, his Private Secretary, helped to take care of my father in the office. YY did much more than would be expected of a Press Secretary. She made the video you saw earlier, before the service started and it was a labour of love.

I would also like to thank my sister Ling, who lived with Papa in Oxley Road, and did so much to help take care of him. You were not only his daughter, but also his doctor, one of them. You were his close companion throughout. You travelled with him, watched over him closely, and made sure he got medical treatment in time when problems were brewing and before any disaster could happen. You took on more than your fair share of our filial duties. Thank you, Ling.

Finally, I want to thank the dedicated grassroots volunteers from Teck Ghee and Tanjong Pagar. You have served for many years on the ground, helping Mr Lee and me to look after our residents. Over this last week, you have helped take care of
arrangements and guests at the private wake at Sri Temasek, as well as the State Funeral Service and this Cremation Service today. My family and I are deeply grateful.

When we are young, we think our parents will always be there. After we grow up, as we watch them age and grow frail, we know rationally that one day we will have to say farewell, yet emotionally we find it hard to imagine it happening. Then one day our parents are really gone, and so we are left with a sense of loss and pain. That is the human condition.

Papa had thought long and hard about this, as he had about many things. When preparing what to say today, I remembered that once upon a time he had made a speech about growing old and dying, to a gathering of doctors. I asked for it. Nobody else remembered it, except Janadas so that gave me confidence that I had not imagined it. We searched for the speech, and eventually after heroic effort, YY found it. Papa had made it to a congress of cardiologists, very long ago – in fact in 1972, 43 years ago! I must have read it at the time, and it left such an impression on me that I remembered it across four decades – or it could be I am just growing old and remembering long ago things.

I re-read the speech with delight. It was vintage Lee Kuan Yew – thoughtful, erudite, elegant, witty, but with a deeper point. Sadly, nobody makes such after-dinner speeches like that anymore. He titled it “Life is better when it is short, healthy and full”. He talked about cardiac health, decrepitude, the right to die, advanced medical directives (even though the term had not yet been invented), and much more. You have to read the full speech yourself, because it is impossible to summarise and it is
well worth reading. But I will just share one quote: “Life is better short, healthy and full than long, unhealthy and dismal. We all have to die. I hope mine will be painless. As de Gaulle said: ‘Never fear, even de Gaulle must die’, and he did.”

Papa had a long and full life. He was healthy, active and vigorous, until advanced old age. He used to say that life is a marathon, not a sprint. Papa’s marathon is done. He went away peacefully. He will leave a big hole in our lives, and in our hearts. But his values, his love, and his words – these will stay with us, inspire us, and live on in us for a long, long time.

Farewell, and rest in peace, Papa.
Family and friends, thank you for being here with us today.

After Mama died in October 2010, Papa’s health deteriorated rapidly. The past five years have been challenging. But as always, Papa was determined to carry on as normal as possible, as best as he could.

He developed Parkinson’s disease three years ago which severely limited his mobility. He had great difficulty standing and walking. But he refused to use a wheel chair or even a walking stick. He would walk, aided by his SOs.

Papa was also plagued by bouts of hiccups that could only be controlled by medication which had adverse side effects. Over and above the frequent hiccups, his ability to swallow both solids and liquids was impaired, a not uncommon problem in old age.

Papa searched the Internet and tried a wide variety of unorthodox hiccup therapies. For example, he once used rabbit skin and then chicken feathers to induce sneezing, so as to stop the hiccups. Although the sneezing sometimes stopped his hiccups, it did not do so consistently enough. Papa also tried reducing his food intake, because he felt that eating too much could precipitate hiccups, hence he lost a lot of weight, and appeared thin and gaunt.
Papa was stubborn and determined. He would insist on walking down the steps at home, from the verandah to the porch where the car was parked. Ho Ching had a lift installed so Papa need not negotiate those steps. But when he was aware and alert, he refused the lift though it was a struggle for him to walk down those steps even with 3 SOs helping.

But the lift was not installed in vain. On several occasions when he was ill and needed to be admitted to SGH, he did not protest when the SO guided him onto the lift. Still, even when ill, if he was asked if he wanted to use the lift, the answer would invariably be “no”.

The SOs were an integral part of Papa’s life, even more so in the last five years. They looked after him with tender loving care, way beyond the call of duty. One doctor friend who came to help dress a wound Papa sustained when he fell, noticed this and said to me: “The SOs look after your father as though he is their own father.”

Papa believed that goodwill goes both ways. He was very considerate towards his SOs. Once while in Saudi Arabia on an official trip, one SO came down with chicken pox. The doctors decided that the SO should be isolated in some hospital in Saudi Arabia for two weeks. Pa thought that very unkind to the SO and insisted that the SO return to Singapore together with the rest of the delegation. He wasn’t going to leave any Singaporean behind, not least an SO.

Sensing he was special, all the SOs have been very kind to Papa. On behalf of my family, I would like to thank all of them. I know
each of them well, even the number of children they have. To me, they were not only staff whose job was to look after Papa, but also friends of the family. They helped me pull out the SIM card from my blackberry when it hung; they were friends for me to share food and goodies with whenever the opportunity arose.

Soon after my father died, Yak called to inform me. After being in my room alone and unable to go back to sleep, I went downstairs to the SOs room, and sat with the two SOs on duty, watching black and white footage of Papa in his younger days. I needed the company of friends. Junji jichaou dan ru shui. There is a Chinese saying that the relationship between two honourable gentlemen is as understated as plain water. That was the relationship between the SOs and me.

One occasion, while having lunch at home, Papa choked on a piece of meat. It went down his trachea and obstructed his airflow. Fortunately the SOs knew what to do. ASP Yak and Kelvin together carried out the Heimlich manoeuvre several times, but to no avail, because Pa’s abdominal muscles were very tense.

Yak then called for help over his walky-talky. Liang Chye was the only senior SO downstairs, and sensing something strange in Yak’s voice, he came running up. They formed a human chain. Liang Chye, the shortest and probably the strongest, was positioned behind Papa; the tallest, Yak, at the furthest end of the human chain; and Kelvin, the one of middle height, between the two. They coordinated their pull, and after several attempts, the piece of meat was finally ejected. By this time, Papa had already turned purple. But within seconds of the meat being dislodged, he was mentally alert.
I would like to give special thanks to Liang Chye and Kelvin, and especially ASP Yak, whose presence of mind saved Papa’s life. To all the SOs who have served Papa over the years, I thank you on behalf of my family.

I would also like to thank all the nurses, doctors and specialists who have looked after Papa over the years, especially those who were involved in the last five years of his life, when his medical problems multiplied and became more complicated. At a ripe old age of 91, he had multiple medical problems and many specialists, so the list of people to thank is a very long one. I am grateful to each and every one of them for all the care they have provided to Papa.

When Pa was not well at home, I was the first line of defence. I would handle on my own what I could at home. At other times though, I had to call the relevant specialists outside of office hours when Papa had a medical emergency. Since the most common emergency was pneumonia, one particular doctor was called most frequently. He doesn’t wish to be named so I’ll call him Dr X. After several calls, I learned that Dr X would be up by 5:45am to send his children to school. One morning at 5am, I had to call him. I apologized for waking him up, and asked him to tell his registrar on duty at SGH what to do, adding: “You don’t need to rush in to see Pa. You can see him after you have sent your children to school.” Dr X replied, “Today is Sunday.” But even on Sundays, he made his rounds at SGH.

During his last illness, Pa had to be cared for in the medical ICU of SGH. This was a very difficult time for Papa, the medical staff, as well as for the family. The MICU staff were diligent and
meticulous in their care, and no effort was spared to help Papa and tend to his every need. The doctors had meetings twice a day to discuss how to proceed, including on weekends and Chinese New Year.

Again, I thank all the doctors involved in this last fight. That includes not only the respiratory specialist who ran the ICU, who played the most important role, but also Dr X who decided on what antibiotics to use, the cardiologists, and others who advised on how to maintain nutrition whilst Pa was sedated and intubated on respirator. Thank you all -- doctors, nurses and physiotherapists -- who have helped Papa be as comfortable as possible in his final days. My family is extremely grateful to all of you.

I also want to thank the PMO office staff who kept the office running smoothly in Papa’s absence. Thank you all for being with Papa and for helping to ease his suffering in the last five years of his life. Thank you for being here with us today, to bid farewell to Papa

My brothers have said much about Papa. I just want to focus on one point: what have I learnt from Pa? What is the biggest lesson he taught me?

The influence parents have on children depends on many things. To a certain degree, it depends upon the temperament of the parent and the child.

Temperamentally, I am very similar to Papa. So similar that in a given situation, I can predict how he would feel and respond. For example, the SOs would look on with some amusement at...
the way Pa struggled to complete his 12 minutes on the treadmill, even on days that he was tired. He may rest in between bouts on the treadmill, but he was always determined to hit 12 minutes. The SOs were amused because they knew I was equally fanatical about exercise. Today, I have run up and down my 20 meter corridor 800 times, making it to 16 km.

Once, about 15 years ago, my father told me: “Mama and I should be very happy that you remain single and hence will be able to look after us in our old age. But you will be lonely. Also, you have inherited my traits but in such an exaggerated way that they are a disadvantage to you.”

Papa, I know you would have preferred if I had married and had children. But I have no regrets, no regrets I was able to look after you and Mama in your old age.

What is the most important lesson I have learnt from Papa? It is never to push around anyone simply because he or she is weaker than me or in a socially inferior position. And never to let anyone bully someone else if I am in a position to stop such bullying. If I saw someone being bullied unfairly by his superior, I should have no hesitation to come to the rescue of the victim. Since I am by nature pugnacious like my father, and I enjoy a fight so long as it is for a just and good cause, I learnt these lessons readily.

We have seen an astonishing outpouring of emotion on the passing of my father this week. There are many reasons why people feel this way about Papa. But I think one reason is that they know Papa was a fighter who would always fight for them no matter what the odds were. They know that he was ready to fight
for them till his last breath.

This morning I noticed that the maid, in setting the dining table, had moved away Papa’s chair and placed it against the wall. It was a poignant reminder that this farewell is for ever. I have been controlling my feelings for this past week, but looking at this unexpected scene, I nearly broke down. But I can’t break down, I am a Hakka woman.

Farewell Papa. I will miss you. Rest in peace.
Honoured guests, friends and family

Papa was born in 1923 when Singapore was part of the British Empire, the Straits Settlements flag fluttered over Government House, and the people of Singapore sang ‘God Save the King’. He was given the name “Harry” at birth but he soon grew to feel that that did not fit him and the fact that he was a son of Singapore. When Papa was 10, his youngest brother Suan Yew was born. Papa who was only 10, persuaded his father and mother that it was not a good thing to give Suan Yew a western name. And so at 10 years old, he had prevailed in the household. Decades later, when Papa entered politics, he found the name Harry, to be a political liability. And many think it was for politics that he found it but in truth for two decades before that he had felt this was not right for him.

When Loong, Ling and I were born, Papa gave us only Chinese names, and in those days, there was no Hanyu Pinyin so he used the Wade Giles which was the prevailing system to spell the names. And as papa did not have a good commandment of Chinese and came from a Peranakan household, he sought the help from the court interpreter Mr Wong Chong Min in the choice of names. Two years ago, Loong while walking around in Queenstown met Mr Wong’s son, the man who had named the three of us.
The names parents choose for their children embody the hopes, aspirations and dreams they have for them. Chinese names in particular, with their many possible wonderful layers of meaning, allegory and poetry, lend themselves well to this.

For their eldest son, Papa and Mama chose the name 显龙 (Hsien Loong). It means “illustrious dragon”. It was an appropriate and auspicious name for a boy, especially one born in the year of the dragon.

For my sister they chose the name 玮玲 (Wei Ling), which means “the beautiful sound of tinkling jade”. I suppose Mama thought that that was an appropriate and feminine name for a daughter, thought I don’t think it in any way circumscribe Ling’s development!

For me, they chose the name 显扬 (Hsien Yang). Some people think that since I am called Yang, I must be born in the Year of the Goat. Actually it is several years before me, if I was born in the Year of the Goat, I would be 60 now.

The name 扬 which mean 赞扬 or 表扬 and indeed it has more literary origin. It was taken from (三字經). Though my mother used to tease me before I knew this and said, your name means that you are an “Illustrious show off”. Actually the phrase that it was taken from was 扬名声, 显父母 which means to bring honour and glory to your parents.

I am sure many Singaporeans travelling abroad have often received compliments on Singapore and its transformation over the last fifty years. Usually the conversation also would
acknowledge the contributions of Mr Lee Kuan Yew. I would nod in agreement and but I would not acknowledge my relationship and I just kept quiet, and say it’s been a remarkable journey. Unsolicited compliments like this are the most authentic and heartfelt. Keeping private my family connection only served to enhance the pleasure for me. Sadly, as I developed a more visible public profile, it became harder not to be recognized as Lee Hsien Yang and my father's son.

I have taught my children never to mention or flaunt their relationship to their grandfather, that they needed to make their own way in the world only on their own merits and industry. I have suggested to them that should they be asked whether they are related to Lee Kuan Yew, that a good answer was to say my name is spelt “Li”. Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s name is spelt “Lee”. “Li” is one of the most common Chinese surnames in the world and given it’s a Chinese surname it is probably one of the more common surnames in the world. This response which I suggested was not meant to mislead or to obfuscate. It is born out of a desire to be recognised for who we are as individuals and not for who we are related to. We are immensely proud of Papa and his achievements, and yet perhaps it is part of our DNA to seek our own way in life. I am sure that Papa would not have wanted otherwise.

Papa, thank you for a lifetime of service to the people of Singapore. You made this little red dot into the nation all of us are proud to call home.

Papa, thank you for being a wonderful husband and companion to Mama. For loving her completely and for caring for her during your illness and during your lives together.
Papa, thank you for being my own special father. Always there to guide, counsel and advise me, every step of the way, but also prepared to step back and to let me find my own wings and to make my own way.

Papa, thank you for loving my wife, and my children, Shengwu, Huanwu and Shaowu. You have been a loving grandfather to each of them, sharing small pleasures, enjoying their companionship.

Papa, it is hard to say goodbye. Your work is done and your rest is richly deserved. In our own different and diverse ways, my family and I will continue to honour you and your memory in all that we do.
Some years ago when I was preparing to go to university, Ye Ye gave me a camera. This was the first and only time he ever gave me a present. Over the next few years I got deep into photography and took many thousands of photos of my time in college. After I graduated I got a book printed of my favourite pictures and I presented it to him as a thank you for the gift and hopefully to show him that I had done something good with it.

Ye Ye was more than a grandfather to me. He was an inspiration. When I was young, I wanted to grow up to be the man like him. And even now, I still do.

We would have lunch with Ye Ye and Nai Nai every Sunday at their home. We always ate simple things: mee rebus, nasi lemak, popiah. He was never one concerned with luxury or lavishness. The idea that he would care about how fancy his food was or what kind of brand name clothes his wore was ridiculous.

His mind was always occupied on far more important things. He would have discussions with our parents while my cousins and I would sit by the side and listen. After listening I would always feel a little bit silly because he made me realise how petty all the little problems in my life were and how there were so many more important things in the world. He made me want to do something more with my life.
He was not an especially charming man. Yet when he spoke you felt compelled to listen. That's because when he spoke to you, you knew he was being straight with you. He would not try to cajole or flatter. He would always be frank and honest. After speaking with him in person you knew that his speeches were not fluffed up puff. They were truly his opinions on the matters he cared most about. He would never echo empty slogans or narrow-minded ideologies; it was always thoroughly researched and well-considered perspectives.

I had the privilege once of accompanying Ye Ye to a ceremony in Washington where he was receiving an award. Hearing him speak and watching the entire room listen made me feel so proud because his charisma came not from showmanship but from pure substance.

Ye Ye understood the limits of his knowledge. He made it a point to try and understand the flaws and risks of his perspectives better than anyone else. This was especially true when it came to Singapore. He refused to let blind nationalism run this country to the ground. He cared about this country deeply and made sure that he was aware of any weaknesses that could cause us harm. And yet he was very proud of Singapore and confident that we could be better.

Ye Ye showed me that you could make a difference in this world. Not just that you could make a difference, but that you could do it with your head held high. You didn't have to lie, cheat, or steal. You didn't have to flatter, charm, or cajole. You didn't have to care about frivolous things or play silly games. You could do something good with your life, and the best way to do so was
to have good principles and conduct yourself honourably.

People admired Ye Ye for his brilliant mind. They admired him for his ability to lead and rally us together. They admired him for all of his staggering accomplishments. These are all true. But to me, what made him a great man was the person he chose to be. A man of character, clarity, and conviction. We should remember him less as a man who gave us great gifts, and more as a man who showed us the kind of people we could be.

When Ye Ye gave me that camera years ago, he wrote me a note. It was a simple note without any flowery language or cheap sentiment. He simply told me that he hoped I make good use of it. I hope I have.
Honoured guests, friends, and family.

When the grandchildren were very little, Ye Ye would take us on walks to feed the fishes at the Istana. We would perch on the edge of the pond, the ripples of our breadcrumbs breaking the mirrored surface of the water. He liked to have the grandchildren nearby as he rode his stationery bike on the green grass. Sunday lunch with Ye Ye was an institution for our family. His voice and his hearty laugh would carry to the childrens’ table, talking about matters of state, recounting meetings with foreign leaders whose names we neither recognised nor remembered.

In a city of continual renewal, my grandparents’ house never changed. Always the same white walls, the same wooden furniture, the same high windows letting in sunlight. The food stayed the same too; Singapore cooking of a kind that would not be out of place at a good stall in a hawker center. Ye Ye and Nai Nai would take us on outings, to the zoo, to the science center, to National Day. I remember that when I was a child, I believed that the chief benefit of his position was that it came with a marvelous view of the fireworks.

Ye Ye loved his role as a doting grandfather. It delighted him, at each Chinese New Year, when the grandchildren would line up to greet him and receive hongbaos. After Nai Nai had her second
stroke in June 2008, he continued the tradition, preparing himself the hongbaos for his grandchildren.

As I grew up, sometimes I would talk to Ye Ye about politics and the state. Always he spoke with the courage of his convictions; with a certainty born of long consideration. As you might guess, we didn’t always agree. At the dining table, he never argued opportunistically – he never took a position he didn’t believe for a tactical advantage. The facts were the facts - our beliefs should accord with the evidence, and not the other way around.

To grow up in Singapore is to grow up in his shadow; to see in our skyscrapers, our schools, our highways, and our homes the force of his singular vision.

History is full of plans for the total transformation of society. Plato’s Republic. Abbe Sieyes’ What is the Third Estate? The Communist Manifesto. Few plans succeed, and many cause more bloodshed than happiness. As such plans go, his was compassionate - even humane. His objective was that his fellow citizens, you and I, would know peace and plenty. He believed that education, open markets, and clean government would make the people of Singapore a great people.

That his plan succeeded is beyond dispute. It succeeded so rapidly, so thoroughly, that to my generation of Singaporeans, the poverty and instability of Singapore’s beginning feels almost unreal - like a fever dream chased away by the morning light.

He was our man of tomorrow. From the day he took office in 1959, he fought to bring Singapore into the future. In real terms
in 1959, the average Singaporean was as poor as the average American in the year 1860. Today Singapore is one of the most developed countries in the world. The Singapore economy has advanced more in fifty years than the American economy has advanced in one hundred and fifty years. This is a pace of progress that is less like economic development, and more like time travel.

Once, at the suggestion that a monument might be made for him, my grandfather replied, “Remember Ozymandias”. He was, of course, referring to Shelley’s sonnet about Ramses the Second, the greatest Pharaoh of the Egyptian empire. In the poem, a lone traveller encounters a broken statue in the desert. On the statue, the inscription, “My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings; look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!” Nothing beside remains.

I think his meaning was that, if Singapore does not persist, then a monument will be no help. And if Singapore does persists, then a monument will be unnecessary. And that assessment is accurate: His legacy is not cold stone, but a living nation. We could no more forget him than we could forget the sky.

It is often said that my grandfather built great institutions for Singapore. But what is an institution? It is a way of doing things that outlives the one who builds it. A strong institution is robust, it is persistent. It does not depend precariously on individual personalities. It places the rule of law above the rule of man. And that is the sacrifice of being a builder of institutions. To build institutions is to cede power – is to create a system that will not forever rely on you. That this occasion passes without disorder or uncertainty shows that he succeeded in this task. We are bereft at his passing, but we are not afraid. The pillars that he built stand
strong, the foundations that he dug run deep.

The next task falls to us. I think my grandfather always saw my generation of Singaporeans with a mixture of trepidation and hope. We are children of peacetime, unacquainted with the long struggle to make Singapore a modern nation-state. We view stability, prosperity, and the rule of law as our birthrights, for good or ill.

We have our own visions for what Singapore will be. Some of our hopes may seem idealistic or far-fetched. But my grandfather’s vision must have seemed outlandish too, when he promised 50 years ago that an impoverished backwater would become a metropolis. He showed us that, with courage and clear thinking, Singapore can rise above its circumstances and be a light to the world.

Ye Ye, you started by fighting for Merdeka – for our right to rule ourselves. I found out this week that Merdeka has its roots in an old Dutch word, meaning a freed slave. When Singapore was cut adrift from Malaysia, you adopted an orphaned nation and made us all your children.

Ye Ye, you chose to forsake personal gain and the comforts of an ordinary life, so that the people of Singapore could have a better life for themselves, and for their children and for their grandchildren. That Singapore is safe, that Singapore is prosperous, that Singapore is – for this we owe a debt that we cannot repay.

Ye Ye, we will try to make you proud. Majulah Singapura.
Anywhere, anytime

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