A black and white profile photograph of Lee Kuan Yew, looking towards the left. The image is the background for the entire page.

# LEE KUAN YEW

## THE MAN AND HIS IDEAS

**"I'm very determined.  
If I decide that something  
is worth doing, then I'll put  
my heart and soul to it.**

**The whole ground can be  
against me, but if I know  
it is right, I'll do it. That's  
the business of a leader."**

Han Fook Kwang  
Warren Fernandez  
Sumiko Tan

# FOREWORD

In 1997, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Man And His Ideas* was published.

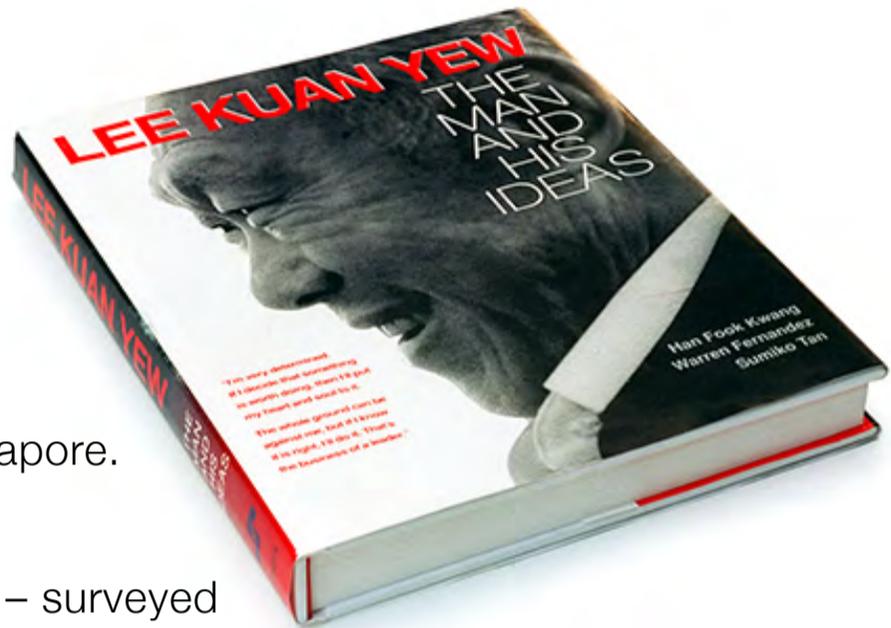
It was the first book that tried to capture the essence of Singapore's first prime minister and the ideas that shaped modern Singapore.

The authors – Han Fook Kwang, Warren Fernandez and Sumiko Tan – surveyed more than 2,000 speeches Lee made over almost a half century of his political life, beginning with his first political speech while a student in Britain in 1950. They then identified those which had made a difference to Singapore. Forty-six speeches were eventually selected.

Lee also gave the authors a series of interviews – 13 in all over about 30 hours, from August 1994 through to February 1995. In them, he elaborated on how he came round to his key ideas and whether experience later led him to modify them or strengthened his beliefs even more. These interviews were woven into the 11 chapters.

The best-selling 455-page book was published by Times Editions, part of the Times Publishing Group, and The Straits Times Press, part of Singapore Press Holdings. Times Editions is now part of Marshall Cavendish, which belongs to Fraser and Neave, Limited (“F&N”).

This e-book is published jointly by The Straits Times and Times Publishing Ltd as a public service to commemorate the



life and work of Lee. It is free for download.

It draws from the original book's contents and adds interactive elements and some new content.

It features an edited version of the original Introduction and reproduces three chapters, as well as 24 speeches and excerpts from the interviews which give a flavour of Lee's life, work and vision. This includes his views on leadership, democracy, the nature of societies, the role of the media as well as his thoughts on his family and friendships. Some of the speeches were made in the years after *The Man And His Ideas* was published.

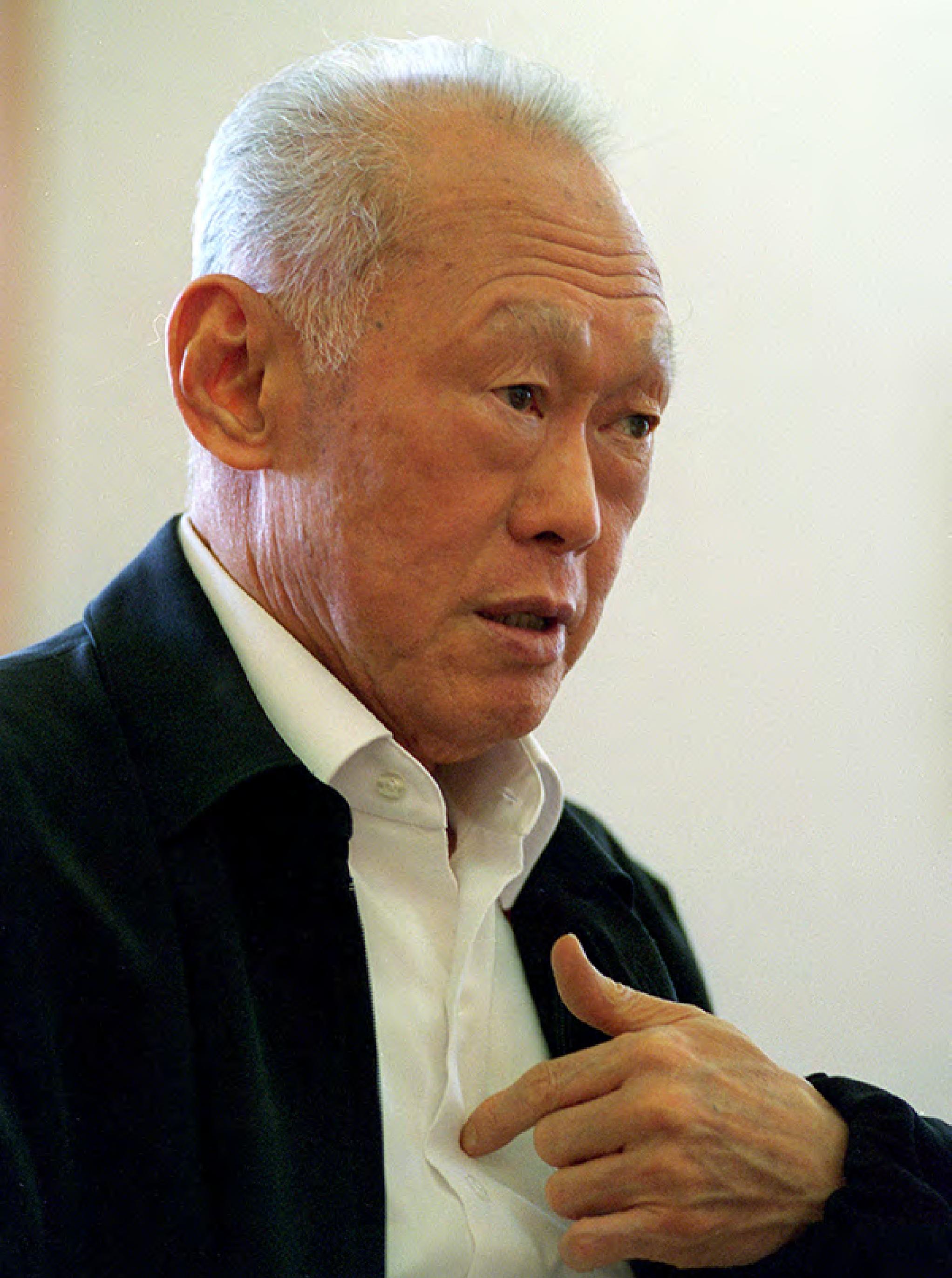
We have added audio clips from the 1994/1995 interviews held at Lee's Istana office. We have included more photographs of Lee taken for the book on Jan 17, 1995, when he autographed the books for sale for charity on Sept 16, 1997, and when the book was launched on Oct 10, 1997.

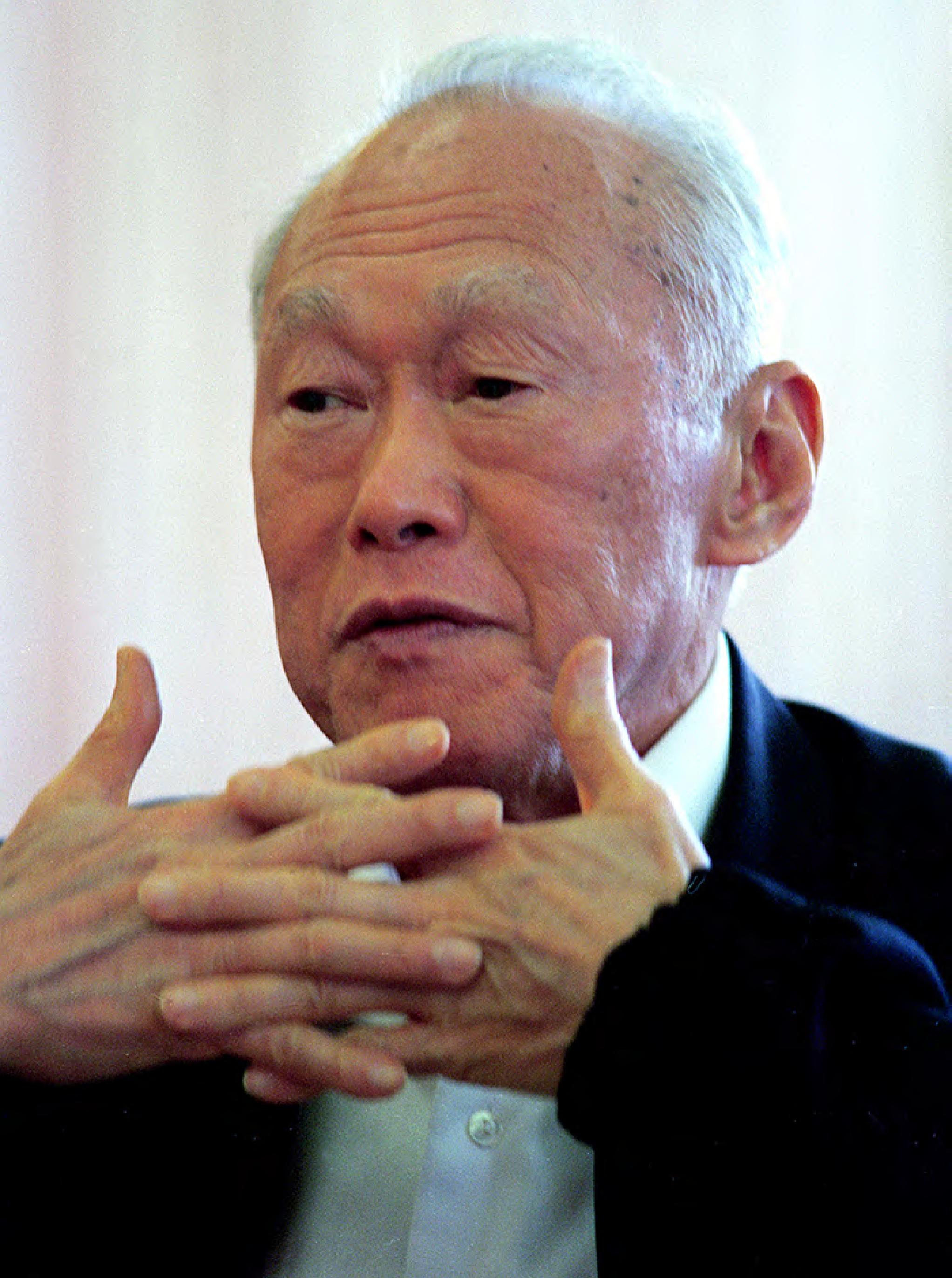
Lee died at the age of 91 on March 23, 2015, Singapore's Jubilee year of independence.

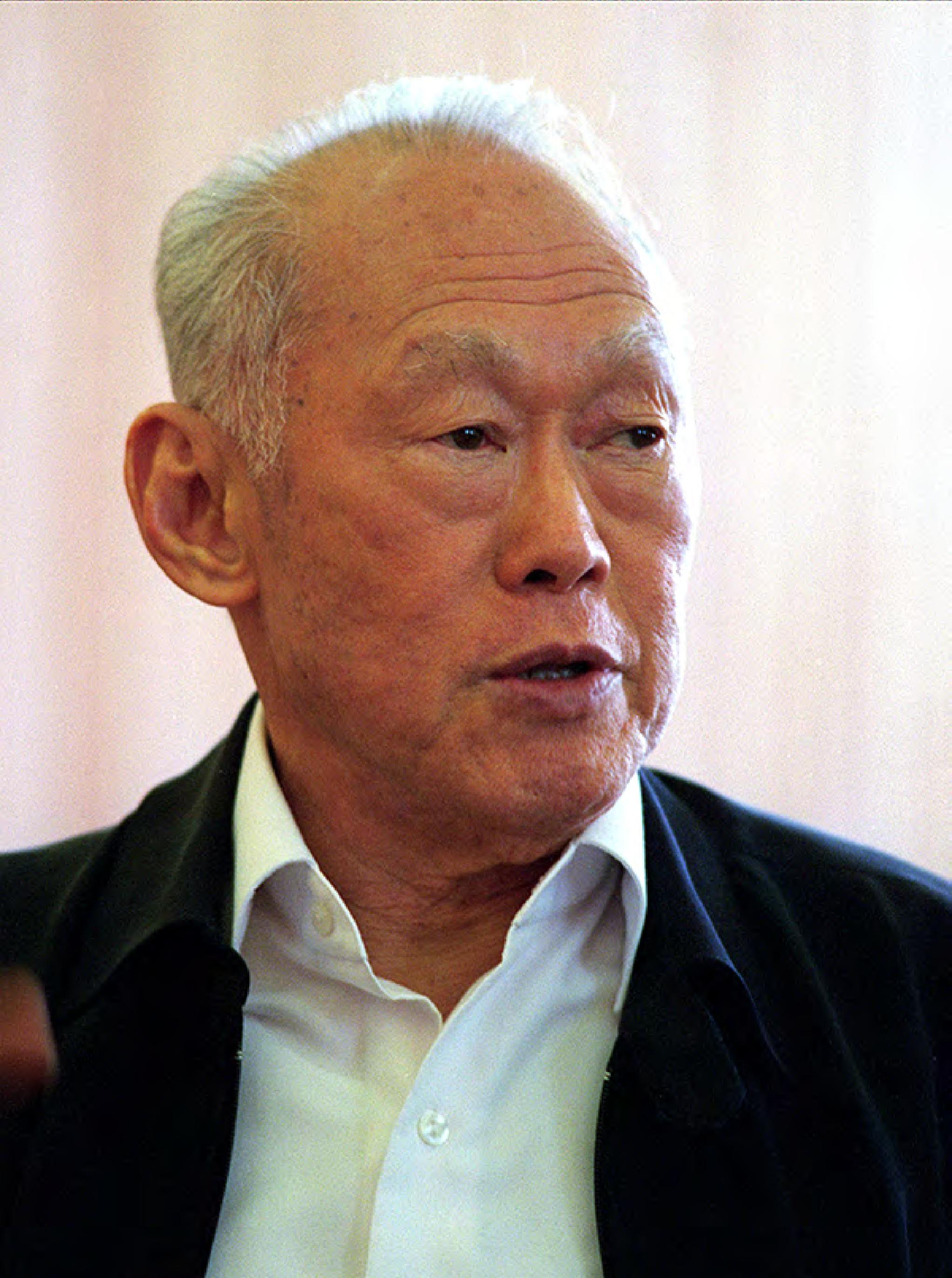
More than anyone else, Lee Kuan Yew made Singapore what it is today. For those interested in how his ideas transformed Singapore, this e-book should be a useful starting point. ●

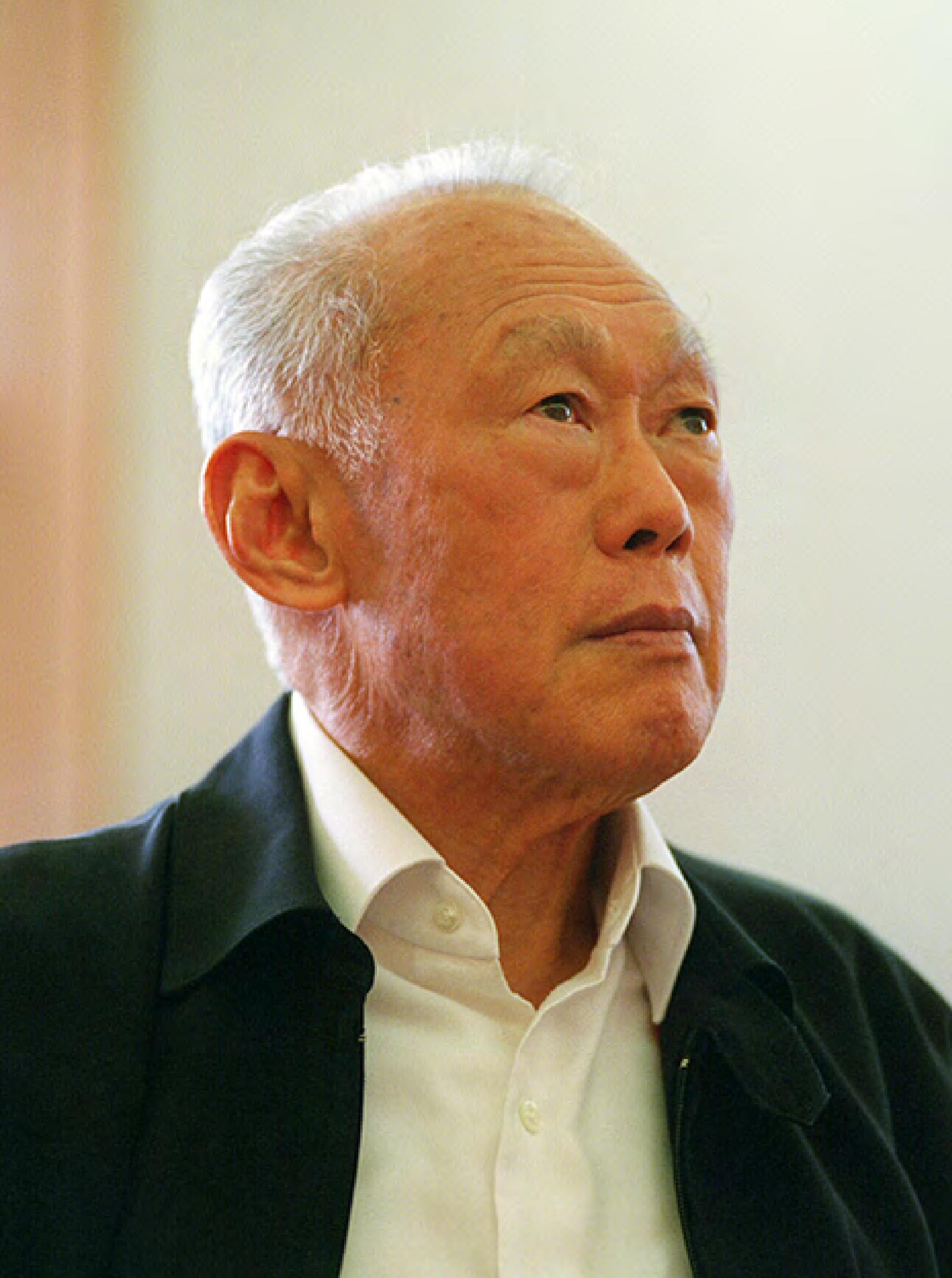
Warren Fernandez/Sumiko Tan  
*March 2015*

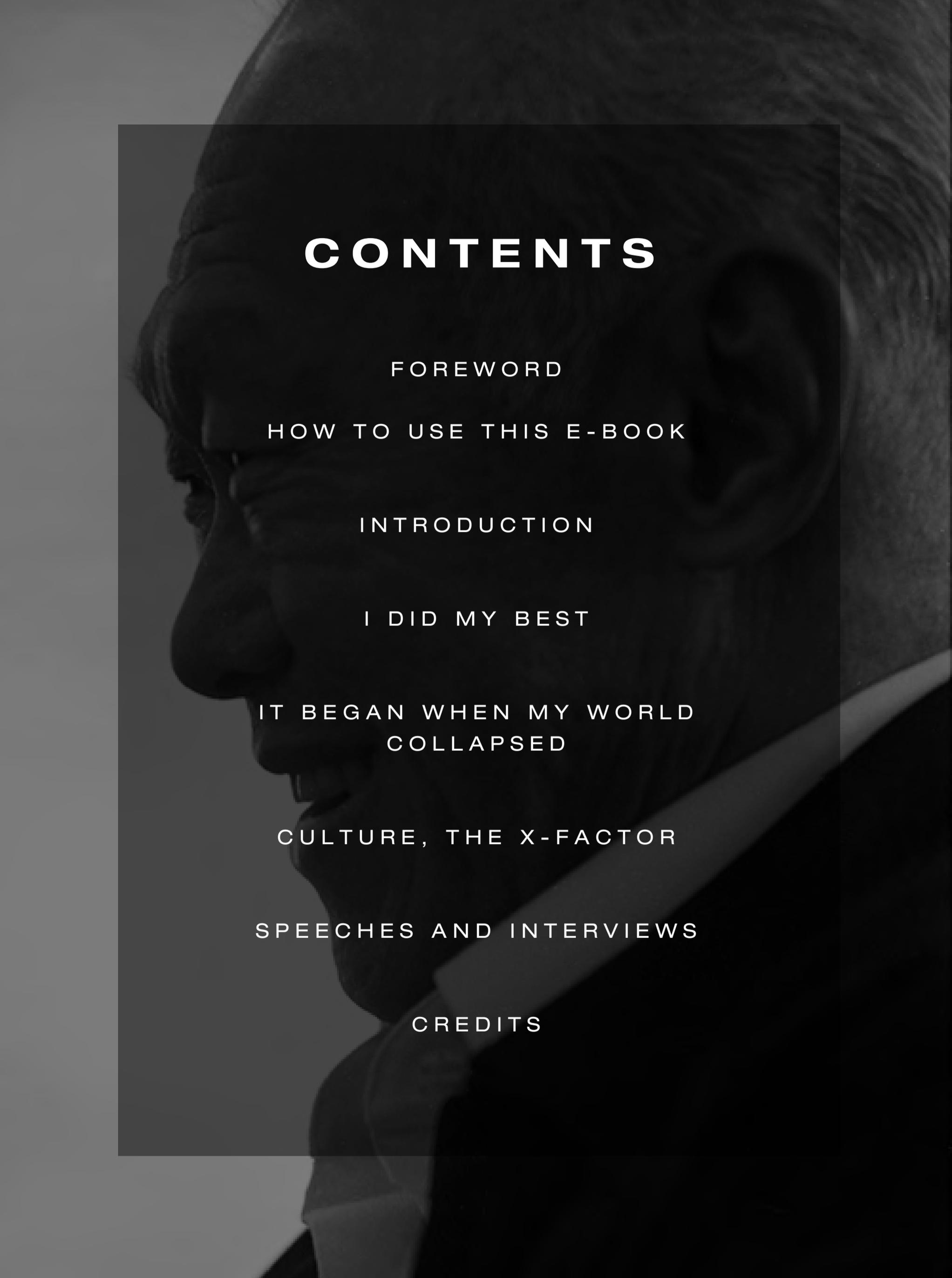












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# INTRODUCTION

When Lee Kuan Yew wanted Singapore to become a garden city, to soften the harshness of life in one of the world's most densely populated countries, he did not write a memorandum to the environment minister or to the head of the agency responsible for parks and trees. He did not form a committee nor seek outside help to hire the best landscapers money could buy. For one thing, in the 1960s, when he was thinking of these matters, money was in short supply. In fact, having been unceremoniously booted out of Malaysia, the country's economic survival was hanging in the balance.

For another, there was no environment minister to speak of then, so low down in the list of priorities were these matters. When jobs had to be created and communists fought in the streets, only the birds were interested in flowers and trees.

But Lee was interested. And he became personally involved in the project of transforming Singapore from just concrete and steel to concrete, steel, trees, shrubs, flowers and parks. He would become personally knowledgeable



**Singapore, Garden City:** On June 16, 1963, Mr Lee launched the first tree-planting campaign by planting a mempat tree (above) at what was then Farrer Circus. He started an annual Tree Planting Day in 1971 and has planted a tree in Tanjong Pagar every year since. He marked 50 years of the greening of Singapore by planting a rain tree at Holland Village Park on June 16, 2013. He attended his last tree-planting ceremony on Nov 2, 2014.

about soil and vegetation, trees and drainage, climate and fertilisers. And he surveyed the world for ideas, taking advantage of his travels abroad to look out for them. In France, for example, he discovered that the broad tree-lined boulevards were possible because a drainage system had been built below the pavements.



1976



1979



1982



1994



1999



2004



2007



2012



2013



**TAP TO PLAY**

(Available only  
on desktop and  
Apple devices)

Lee at a tree-planting event at Tanjong Pagar GRC on Nov 2, 2014. With him are the other GRC MPs (from left) Chia Shi Lu, Lily Neo, Indranee Rajah and Chan Chun Sing.

Around each tree was a metal grating through which surface water flowed into the underground system.

The problem of the grass in Singapore, which everyone could see in the bald, yellow football fields, needed a nationwide solution. When he saw beautiful rolling meadows in New Zealand he was moved to ask for the services of two experts from the country under the Colombo Plan technical assistance scheme. Lee was told that Singapore did not have a grassland climate in which rain fell gently from the skies. Instead, being part of an equatorial region, it experienced torrential rainfall that would wash off the topsoil and with it the vital nutrients necessary for strong plant growth. In an equatorial forest, with tall big trees forming a canopy, the rain water drips down. But in Singapore, where the trees had been chopped down, it would all come down in a big wash.

But Lee was not one to let climate get in the way. Fertilisers would replenish the soil, and so began the task of making compost from rubbish dumps, adding calcium, and lime where the ground was too acidic.

Years later, when economic survival was no longer an issue and Singapore's success was acknowledged worldwide, he was still working at it to make the garden city possible. When expressways and flyovers sprouted all over the island, he had officials look for plants which could survive below the flyovers where the sun seldom shone. And instead of having to water these plants regularly, which was costly, he got them to devise a way to channel water from the roads, after filtering it to get rid of the oil and grime from the traffic above.

The constant search for solutions would not end. When development intensified even further and the roads and flyovers became broader still, shutting out the light completely from the plants below, he did not give up. The road was split into two so there would be a gap in the middle with enough space for sunshine and rain to seep through and greenery and vegetation to thrive below. "I sent them on missions all along the Equator and the tropical, subtropical zones, looking for new types of trees, plants, creepers and so on. From Africa, the Caribbean, Latin, Middle, Central America, we've come back with new plants. It's a very small sum. But if you get the place greened up, if you get all those creepers up, you take away the heat, you'll have a different city," he said.

Making Singapore a different city! That has been Lee's constant obsession. Even when the difference had to do with trees and

flowers, subjects which one would not normally associate with the man who has been at Singapore's helm for 38 years, 31 of which he served as prime minister, his approach to the problem has been typical – hardheaded and pragmatic. For him, the object of the exercise was not all about smelling roses. In the end it was about keeping Singapore ahead of the competition. A well kept garden, he would say, is a daily effort, and would demonstrate to outsiders the people's ability to organise and to be systematic. "The grass



has got to be mown every other day, the trees have to be tended, the flowers in the gardens have to be looked after so they know this place gives attention to detail.”

The story of how Lee transformed Singapore is a fascinating one because no other leader in the modern world has had such a hand in influencing and directing his country's progress from independence to developed nation status the way he has. None has straddled the two worlds with as much success: the

revolutionary world in the first half of this century for independence from empire, and the development world in the second half for wealth and progress.

The great Asian revolutionaries – Mao Zedong, Pandit Nehru, Sukarno and Ho Chi Minh – earned their rightful place in history but failed to build on their revolutionary zeal. Lee's place is, of course, smaller. But he has been able to achieve what they could not, which was not only to destroy the old system but also to create a new and more successful one. That Singapore is a success today and the success is largely attributable to Lee, there can be few doubts, even among his most severe critics.

What were those ideas of his which made the critical difference in Singapore? How did he come round to those views? How were they made to work in Singapore?

One question which often comes up: was there one golden thread running through Lee's views? Did he believe in one central theme which has guided him through the years?

The answer is yes, and no.

No, because Lee was not an ideological or dogmatic person. In fact, he eschewed theory and fine argument. What mattered to him was whether a thing works or not, with practice providing the best test. If it had been tried out elsewhere, he would want to know what the experience had been. If it had not, he was willing to try it out if it was worthwhile doing so. This was a constant refrain in his speeches and interviews. There was no grand theory to explain the world according to Lee.

And yet we could not help noticing throughout the 2,000 speeches we read, and in the interviews, that there are several constants in his approach to problem-solving, which when taken together, provide as good a composite picture of the man as you can ever get.

First was his capacity to learn from experience, and, if necessary, to change his beliefs, even radically, when they do not conform to reality. One radical change happened very early in his political career when he parted company with the socialism of the British Labour Party because he could see that it was not working in Britain, and would not work in Singapore. He had started off as a student in England believing that wealth generation was a natural product of labour, and that the difference between a good society and a bad one was in how the fruits of that labour were distributed. But when he saw how costly such a system was to maintain, and the practical consequences of subsidising a man for the rest of his life, whether for health care or public housing, he made the switch in Singapore. If a man did not own his home but rented it from the state, why would he look after it properly? If medical service were free, would it not lead to an unsustainable system and a bottomless pit? Soon after assuming office, he made Singaporeans pay for medical prescriptions, even if it was a very small sum to begin with, and the government sold public flats to the people.

Whenever he was confronted with theory which did not work in practice, he chose the latter. "Practice decided for me, in the final implementation of policies. It was not the theory of capitalism, not Milton Friedman, that decided my policies. But in each instance, we calculated – if that doesn't work, this wouldn't work."

If there was one golden thread in Lee's approach, it was his constant striving to seek results, not in proving a theory right.

Second was his doggedness to achieve those results, never losing sight of his objectives, and relentlessly clearing all obstacles in the way. His determination to make Singapore a garden city, the personal effort and interest he put into the project, was typical of the man. More than any other trait of his, his determination was one which Singaporeans knew only too well. He put it this way in an interview with the authors:

*“I would say that I'm very determined when I set out to do something. First, I've got to decide whether something is worth doing. If it's not worth doing, well, I'm not prepared to spend the time over it, to make the effort. Then I just coast along, it doesn't matter whether it succeeds or doesn't succeed, it's of no consequence.*

*“But if I decide that something is worth doing, then I'll put my heart and soul into it. I'll give everything I've got to make it succeed. So I would put my strength, determination and willingness to see my objective to its conclusion. Whether I can succeed or not, that's another matter – but I will give everything I've got to make sure it succeeds. If I've got to get good people, I get good people. If I've got to change tack, I will change tack. If you have decided something is worth doing, you've got to remove all obstacles to get there.”*

Third was the fact that Lee formed many of his political beliefs very early in his political life, and he had been consistent about them once he had accepted their validity. For example, his misgivings about the workings of democracy in Asian societies which have just become independent date back to the early 1960s,

when he himself had just attained political power through the ballot box. His scepticism was hence not of a man who wanted to hang on to power and to change the rules midstream but of one who had himself seen, in the early years, how one after another of the newly independent countries had been ruined by the system of one-man-one-vote.

His tough-minded approach to the media also went back to the 1960s, when he first had problems with the local press. It was consistent with later observations of how the American media had debased public respect for their leaders and had played a key part in changing social customs and mores, not necessarily for the better.

His conversion from socialism to capitalism, perhaps his most radical U-turn, was complete in the early 1960s, so too his belief in the importance of culture in determining the dynamism of any society. Meritocracy, the belief that genes played a major role in deciding a man's ability, the high standards he set for political leaders in their public conduct – these are all issues he had made up his mind about early on.

Lee had the advantage of very many years of testing the validity of these views and of working them within the Singapore system. Was he always right? Of course not. But he had one not insignificant argument going for him with which to rebut his critics: Singapore. Whether an idea was worth pursuing must ultimately rest on whether it worked in real life, and Singapore has worked for 38 years.

This book is not entirely about serious ideas and life-and-death

issues. An important aim of the authors was to try to understand the man himself, his personal beliefs and philosophy. Some of the revelations might surprise readers. As often happens with public figures, a stereotype of Lee had formed over the last 30-odd years: the Western media especially saw him as ruthless, autocratic, power-hungry. But he was a much more complex person, and



there are interesting insights of him throughout the book which, when taken together, should give a better picture of the man. In interviews with the authors, for example, he talked about God and religion, why he chose to become a lawyer, where he got his ideas, and how he regarded money and wealth.

One final point: this book is not a critique of his views and there has been no attempt to be so, or to provide contrary arguments to many of Lee's controversial ideas. The aim of the authors is much more modest: to present his views in a systematic and organised way for those who want to understand him and the Singapore he transformed – never mind if they agree or disagree with him. ●











Lee is at work in his Istana office six days a week.

## **I DID MY BEST**

Four thirty on a Saturday afternoon and the Istana is quiet save the steady, sleepy sound of cicadas snuggled deep in the trees on the sloping lawns. The Istana, Malay for “palace”, stands on what was once part of a massive nutmeg estate belonging to a British merchant named Charles Robert Prinsep. In 1869, Governor Harry Ord, who was in charge of Singapore from 1867 to 1873,

acquired the land and built Government House on it. The stately white building, a mix of Ionic, Doric and Corinthian orders, was constructed by Indian convicts from Bencoolen in Sumatra.

Over the years, other structures were added to the grounds. One of them, Sri Temasek, is the official residence of the prime minister of Singapore, though no prime minister has ever lived in it. There is also the Istana Annexe, Istana Villa and Istana Lodge. The main Istana building houses the president's office, while the Istana Annexe serves as the prime minister's office.

On the second floor of the Annexe, all is busy on this humid afternoon. Plainclothes security officers tread the narrow carpeted corridors, buzzing each other periodically over their walkie-talkies. In a brightly lit room, a secretary works at her computer, one ear peeled to an intercom linking her to an adjoining office where Lee Kuan Yew works.

It is an L-shaped room with an attached bathroom. It is free of personal paraphernalia. No family photographs decorate his table, no personal mementoes line his walls.

He sits behind a desk, his back to a computer. A low cabinet next to it is stacked with books and files. A wood-panelled wall camouflages the door to the room where his two secretaries work. A teak table for eight stands four metres from his desk, a jade dragon jar in the middle.

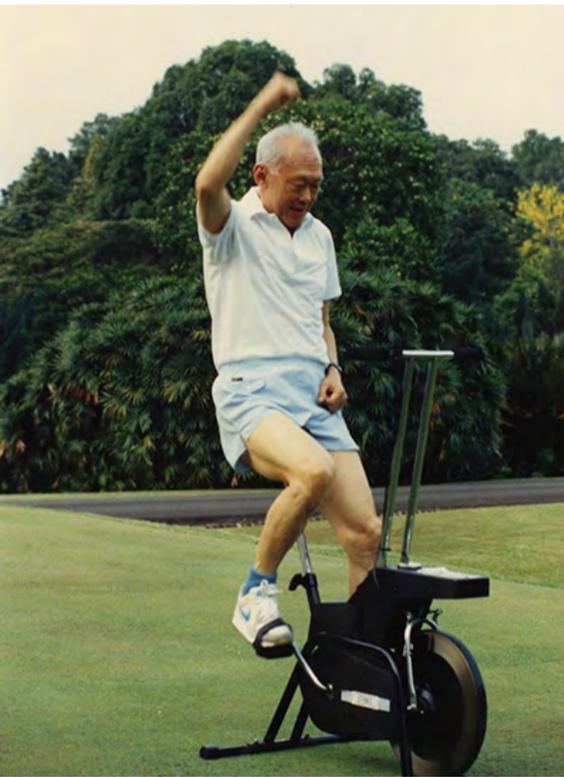
Lee works in this office six days a week, from about 10 in the morning to 6:30 in the evening, when he puts his work aside for his daily exercise in the Istana grounds. He has been known to come back to the office on Sundays and public holidays.

He is about 1.8 metres tall, and slim. His trousers, which are usually in light hues, are loose, and he tugs at the waistband frequently. He is at least 10 kilograms lighter than when he was in his forties. His shirts are well-pressed though well-worn, and

he wears a windbreaker, usually beige, when he is in the office.

At 74, his hair is white. The once wiry black mop has thinned considerably over the years, accentuating a broad, high forehead under which small, piercing eyes stare. His face is pink in tone, the skin mostly unlined, though tiny creases crisscross the skin on his eyelids. His nails are neatly trimmed.

Even in a private setting, he is a forceful personality. His facial expression changes quickly and his hands often chop the air to emphasise a point. His voice rises and falls according to his



Keeping fit has always been part and parcel of Lee's life. After his first operation to open up a narrowed artery, in 1996, he said that regular exercise had saved his life. If not for his healthy lifestyle, he might have been hit by heart problems years ago.

emotions. He is quick to show impatience, and slow to smile. He has never suffered fools lightly.

Who is this man who, more than anyone else, has shaped the history of modern Singapore? Who is the person behind the personality Singaporeans regard with awe, respect, love, fear or hate? How would he describe himself? How does he see his 40 years of political life? What is his role now? What is his family life like? And what are his dreams and fears? Lee revealed his personal life in these interviews with the authors, weaving in events that took place 40 years ago as if they had happened only yesterday.

## I HAVE TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY

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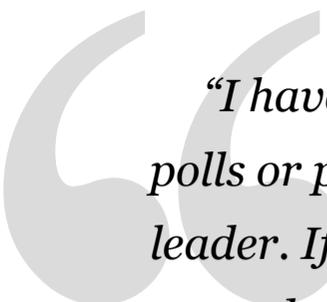
Asked to describe himself, Lee is careful and takes his time to answer the question.

Extracts from the interview with the authors are in italics.

*“I would say that I’m very determined when I set out to do something. First, I’ve got to decide whether something is worth doing. If it’s not worth doing, well, I’m not prepared to spend the time over it, to make the effort. Then I just coast along, it doesn’t matter whether it succeeds or doesn’t succeed, it’s of no consequence.*

*“But if I decide that something is worth doing, then I’ll put my heart and soul into it. I’ll give everything I’ve got to make it succeed. So I would put my strength, determination and willingness to see my objective to its conclusion. Whether I can succeed or not, that’s another matter – but I will give everything I’ve got to make sure it succeeds. If I’ve got to get good people, I get good people. If I’ve got to change tack, I will change tack. But the objective is the same. The presentation may change ... If you have decided something is worth doing, you’ve got to remove all obstacles to get there.”*

What others think of him – many commentators have had a field day writing about him, and coffeeshop gossip about his life constantly hovers in the air – is water off a duck’s back. He has always relished a fight with his critics for, as he noted in April 1975 in an interview with New Zealand journalists, “criticism or general debunking even stimulates me because I think it is foolish not to have your people read you being made fun of”. He also puts it this way:



*“I have never been overconcerned or obsessed with opinion polls or popularity polls. I think a leader who is, is a weak leader. If you are concerned with whether your rating will go up or down, then you are not a leader. You are just catching the wind ... you will go where the wind is blowing. And that’s not what I am in this for.*

*“Between being loved and being feared, I have always believed Machiavelli was right. If nobody is afraid of me, I’m meaningless. When I say something, to make it easier for me to govern, I have to be taken very seriously. So when I say ‘please don’t do that’, you do it, I have to punish you because I was not joking when I said that. And when I punish, it’s to punish publicly. And people will know the next time, if you want to do that when he said ‘no, don’t do it’, you must be prepared for a brutal encounter.*

*“... My job is to persuade my flock, my people, that that’s the right way. And sometimes it may be necessary not to tell them all the facts because you will scare them.*

*“What the crowd thinks of me from time to time, I consider totally irrelevant ...*

*“The whole ground can be against, but if I know this is right, I set out to do it, and I am quite sure, given time, as events unfold, I will win over the ground. ... My job as a leader is to make sure that before the next elections, enough has developed and disclosed itself to the people to make it possible for me to swing them around. That’s the business of a leader - not to follow the crowd. That’s a washout. The country will go down the drain!”*

### HOW I GET MY IDEAS



Drivers waiting in line for their cars to be inspected, after Lee implemented vehicle testing, an idea he got from one of his many trips abroad.

Lee has never shied from borrowing ideas from other countries if they could benefit Singapore. He believes it is important for leaders to read and be interested in how other societies function. He related this to the authors:

“Way back in the early '70s, when Japan had trouble with the Minamata disease and pollution was a problem in Tokyo, I decided that we, as a small country industrialising rapidly, had no choice but to tackle the environmental problem right from the beginning. Retrofitting would be a disaster because they (foreign companies here) are all multinationals. Having approved them, how do you get them retrofitted?”

Lee has strong views about what makes a good and effective leader, what qualities are important and will make a difference to the way a country is run.

*“You need, besides determination, all the other attributes that will push a project along. You must have application, you must be prepared to work hard, you must be prepared to get people to work with you. Especially for political leaders, you’ve got to have people work for you and work with you. You’ve got to enthuse them with the same fire and the same eagerness that pushes you along. I think that’s a very big factor in leadership:*

*“At the end of the day, you must also have idealism to succeed, to make people come with you. You must have that vision of what is at the bottom of the rainbow you want to reach. But you must have a sense of reality ... to feel when this vision is not practical, that it will ruin us.*

*“For example, people don’t live the same lives. I can eat caviar every day, or at least George Lien can or Robert Kuok can. The world cannot. We therefore are entitled to the same level of medical services? No way. There may be only one such surgeon in the world who can do it. That surgeon will be flown, or you will fly to meet that surgeon. For everybody?”*

“Anti-pollution came directly under me. It started off as a part of the Prime Minister’s Office. I created that unit. I discussed it with the officials, and I started reading up on it. Then in my travels, I watched what other countries were doing – the way they sited their factories away from inhabited or residential areas, their anti-pollution controls for traffic. For instance, I was in Boston in 1970. There, I saw cars all lining up at garages. I asked, ‘Why are they lining up at the garage?’ and they said, ‘Once a year, you must have a garage to certify that your car is up to certain standards, the emission, the brakes etc or you can’t renew your licence.’ I thought,

*No. So you’ve got to find something practical.*

*“Therefore, right from the word go, I decided, you are entitled to medical treatment such as we can afford as a society, basic medical treatment; all frills above that, if you can afford it, then you buy the frills.*

*“For heart transplant or liver transplant, you need a whole team of surgeons, anaesthetists, rejection experts. You can’t do that for everybody. There must be a practical streak in your judgement. I had that, or we would have failed.*

*“[But] a leader without the vision, the idea to strive to improve things, is no good. Then you’ll just stay put, you won’t progress.”*

He also saw the importance of reading and exchanging views with experts.

*“You must read. It’s one way of getting information. But you’ve got to read what’s relevant, not only what you’re interested in. My wife reads Jane Austen. She was a student of English language and literature so she likes to read books in which she had found joy as a student. I wouldn’t read Jane Austen, not because I don’t admire her style, but because I would not have the time.*

*“Novels? Very occasionally. I would read Tom Clancy. He imagined this kind of Third World War scenario, clash with the Soviets and so on, and the kind of battles that would take place. There was one particular novel which I’d read and enjoyed. But, of course, that was also related to my work because I have to approve all these high-tech defence equipment.*

*“I suppose there are times when I get so tired and browned-*

why don't we have such a rule? Ours, you just wait until the car breaks down. When I came back, I said, 'Look into this.' So we started Vicom [Singapore's first vehicle inspection company].

"Long before a problem became acute, because we were travelling along the same road that these more advanced countries had travelled, I pre-empted the problem before it got out of control. We started putting pressure on diesel taxis puffing away fumes. Buses, endless problems! We had seven or eight bus companies until 1974. The problem was not solved until the 1980s. We had already started monitoring the

*off with certain problems, I want to take my mind off them, so I'll read something totally different, about South American tribes or whatever. Occasionally, I would read little biographies or autobiographies. There's one about an English lady in Kashgar. My wife would have read it, she'd say, "Oh, this is interesting!" It's a totally different world. It transports me for one, two hours to a different world. Unless the book is riveting, I don't read it from cover to cover. I'll read it and if I see something else, I'll pick it up.*

*"You must not overlook the importance of discussions with knowledgeable people. I would say that is much more productive than absorbing or running through masses of documents. Because in a short exchange, you can abstract from somebody who has immense knowledge and experience the essence of what he had gained. In a one-hour exchange over dinner with some people who are knowledgeable in certain fields, you get the hang of a particular problem.*

*"Let's take a recent example. We had this Economic Development Board meeting with this international advisory group. I posed them this question. We are now using our knowledge and our capital and our expertise to help develop these countries - China, Vietnam, India, Myanmar - and help entrepreneurs from developed countries to go in with us, using our knowledge and our contacts to get these countries up. But after 20 years, 30 years, maybe less, they have caught up with us. And these MNCs, after five, 10 years, they get to know the place, they don't need us anymore. So what's our relevance?*

*"And George Fisher of Kodak was a very thoughtful man. He said, in the end, you have to own knowledge, property, like ... Kodak owns the technical knowhow and the name Kodak. Even if you can find out how to make films nearly as good as*

towns, in Jurong.

“But more than reading, it’s a frame of mind, it’s an interest in the things around you that matters, and taking note of the happenings in other countries when I travel.

When I travel, yes, I occasionally go to plays in London and New York or an exhibition.

But I’m watching how a society, an administration, is functioning. Why are they good?

... And the ideas come from not just reading. You can read about it, but it’s irrelevant if you don’t relate it to yourself or Singapore’s problems, which I constantly do.”

*Kodak, you don’t own Kodak. He said, ‘Perhaps you should buy into these companies and co-own them, then bring some of them over here and have R&D both here and in America or whatever.’*

*“You’ve got to start thinking ahead. You can’t just say, okay, let’s regionalise and we’ll make a lot of money 20 years up. I’d be dead, but my children will not be dead, my grandchildren will be there, they’ve got to find a role for themselves.*

*“Then the Shell man, van Wachem, he’s a retired CEO and now he’s just chairman. He said, ‘There are certain things where you cannot predict what is possible.’ And he said, nobody - not even he - would have believed that Singapore in the age after the oil crisis, after ’73 when oil-owning countries took over their own oil fields, could become a refining and a petrochemical centre. But we have, we are an entrepot in oil and in petrochemicals’...*

*“How do you extrapolate that? He has given me an idea of how something has developed in a way which he could not have predicted. He is in the oil business. He did not predict this. So we cannot be discouraged. In our way forward, things will happen which will offer us opportunities, which we will seize and can hold only if we remain alert, and on the ball, and competitive. In other words, finally, [what matters is] the quality of your manpower or quality of the teamwork behind the managers and your infrastructure.”*

## I CAN LIVE FRUGALLY

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When he decided to enter politics in 1955, Lee knew that he had to prepare himself for a life of uncertainty. He set about this in a characteristically practical manner.

*“When I went in, I had to be comfortable with my own self, that I can live with failure. And failure means it has failed, the communists have won and I’m in deep trouble. Either I have to flee, or they will brainwash me, break me. I don’t think they will just kill me because by that time, I would have become a*

*prominent fellow, they want to use me like they used Henry Pu Yi, the last emperor. They brainwash you and break you. And I knew all that! I prepared myself for the possibility of failure, for the possibility of being able to live with failure. In other words, if you want a soft life, better not get into this.*

*“So I led a pretty disciplined life; if the worst came to the worst, I could survive. I don’t need caviar for breakfast, or for*



Lee as a young man studying in England. He had given this photograph to his wife-to-be Kwa Geok Choo.

*dinner, or for supper. I can live on soya beans. I can live quite frugally if I need to. It became a way of remoulding my life in a direction or in a way which would withstand a sharp attack on it.*

*“Even today, I would still drive my car in the Istana grounds. If tomorrow I have no driver, I can just pick up my car and drive. Occasionally, on a Sunday, I drive myself outside the Istana. I carry my own bag as a matter of principle, because otherwise, for 30, 40 years, with everybody pushing chairs for you, your limbs will atrophy.*

*“And I was very keen that that shouldn’t happen to my children, that nobody pushed chairs for them. If a ball fell down and the Istana boy wanted to pick it up, I would stop him and say, ‘No, that’s his ball. Ignore him. He will go to the drain and pick it up.’ They had to learn that, and I think they have benefited from it.”*

Politics also meant he had to give up a potentially well-paying career as a lawyer, which one of his brothers went into.

*“When I decided to go into politics, Bashir Malall, the man who ran the Malayan Law Journal, came to see me. He wasn’t a lawyer, but he was a lawyer’s clerk and he knew a lot about law. Had there been night courses, he would have been a very good lawyer. His son and I were schoolmates, so he knew me as a teenager. He liked me.*

*“I was doing well then as a lawyer in Laycock & Ong - ’54, ’55 - but I was getting involved in politics, all those unions and clan associations. He said to me, ‘Make your name at the law first and make your fortune, then go into politics’, which was what people of his generation did. That was conventional*

*wisdom. You make a name at the law, you make your fortune, then you go into Congress politics, as in India.*

*“He didn’t understand that something dramatic had happened to my generation, that making a fortune, playing safe, doesn’t add up when the system is wrong. I was dead set against the system. But going into politics meant a hazardous, peril-fraught career. It’s not a career, it’s a vocation. You’re taking a plunge, no return. And if you fail, you pay for it with your life. The communists, if they fix you, they fix you good and proper.”*

But, he admits, he had the luxury of allowing his convictions to rule his decision as his wife, Kwa Geok Choo, was herself a successful lawyer.

*“My great advantage was I have a wife who could be a sole breadwinner and bring the children up. That was my insurance policy. Without such a wife, I would have been hard-pressed. To be fair, I was able to make these decisions because I had this fall-back position, I was insured.”*

In 1970, when the pay of other ministers was raised from \$2,500 a month to \$4,500, he chose not to raise his pay of \$3,500 as he wanted Singapore to first ride out the rough economic times caused by the British withdrawal. Explaining his move, he said then, “I am able to do this only because my wife is a practising solicitor with an adequate income. But it is unrealistic to expect the next prime minister, one qualified for the job, to discharge the functions of this office for the present salary.”

## MONEY IS NOT IMPORTANT

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He points out that money has not been a determining factor in his life.

*“Supposing I had been differently constituted and I had stuck to the law like my brother. At the end of the day, he has got millions of dollars worth of shares and houses. Maybe I could have the same, but where does that get me? I suppose he would be worth a hundred million dollars, I could be worth two hundred million because of our double income, my wife and I. But where does that get us?”*

*“It makes no difference really whether I’ve got one million or a hundred million or one billion dollars. What can I do with*

*it? I’m not going to change my way of life. So I could buy myself a big house and a big car and a yacht and a private aircraft.*

*“It’s a matter of what is enough. And I pitched what is enough at a very basic level - well, ‘basic’ for my class. If you ask me to live today in an HDB three-room flat, and I had to eat at*



Lee and his bride in 1950. “My great advantage,” said Lee, “was I have a wife who could be a sole breadwinner and bring the children up. And that was my insurance policy. I think without such a wife, I would have been hard-pressed.”

*a hawker centre every day, that would be a real problem. But at the time I started, in the '50s and '60s, I think if you tell me to live off the hawker centre, I could. Now probably with age, my digestion is no longer able to cope, and I have to be careful what I eat.”*

Lee believes that education, more than money, is important. That is what he grew up believing and he cannot understand why other politicians amass fortunes.

*“I can understand a person wanting to have, in today’s Singapore, a house, a car. Projecting myself back as a young man, I would probably need about \$10 million - \$5 million to buy a house, the things that would go with the house and education for the children. So if I have another three, four million in the bank and income from it, and three, four hundred thousand dollars annual income, that’s the kind of life that I as a non-politician would probably aspire to if I were in my 30s. That I can understand.*

*“But what I cannot understand to this day is why Marcos looted the place clean. What was the point of it? ... I find that not understandable. He ate very frugally. I’ve had meals with him. He had stomach problems and was very careful what he ate. So wherever he went, he would have his own white rice whenever possible and his own kind of food. And he would eat two bananas because they helped him sleep - two of a special kind of banana, Filipino bananas because they were good for his sleep. And he had a presidential car and a presidential plane, and Malacanang palace. His clothes were not \$20,000 clothes or \$10,000 clothes. So why?*

*“I suppose they needed money to buy and sell people, to get*

*things done. He probably wanted to set his children up, but they already had enough. So cleaning up the shop and leaving the Philippines with a \$27 billion debt is something I do not understand. What could he do with it? But obviously, he found something worthwhile ...*

*“And in the same way, I don’t understand why some of our neighbours do what they do. I can only believe that, as young people, they were deprived and hungry. And they imagined that if you have all this wealth, you will be very happy. And having got started, they believe that they can make their children and grandchildren happy, which is a fallacy. They are building up unhappiness.*

*“My philosophy, I’m not sure whether it is valid today, but it was valid in my generation - if you’ve got an education, if I give my children a good education, the rest is up to them. That’s the way I grew up because my father was the son of a very rich man. He lost everything. And my mother always told me, my father, he only passed his Junior Cambridge at SJI, then he stopped ... When the fortunes were lost, all he could do was to be a storekeeper with Shell company. Whereas his friends, who were also children of rich men, were lawyers or doctors. One of them is Richard Chuan Ho Lim, whose children are William Lim and Arthur Lim. They were family friends. They always used to tell me, ‘Get yourself a profession. Be educated. Then even if you are poor, you’ll make your way up.’*

*“And that influenced my thinking, I suppose. So my responsibility for the three children, which I’d placed with my wife, was to get them educated. As it turned out, they won their own scholarships, so good luck to them. That’s enough.”*

Lee's determination to do what he considers the right thing and the strength of his convictions has meant that he has had to make many unpopular decisions. He approaches this philosophically.

*"In many cases, it cannot be helped. I don't consciously go out to make enemies of people. But when we are on opposing sides, we have to fight. You fight for your cause, I fight for mine, it cannot be helped. But you shouldn't extend that beyond the person involved.*

*"For instance, the Plen. A few years ago, Eu Chooi Yip approached Goh Keng Swee in Beijing and said, would we help the Plen's son? His son was born when he was on the run in Indonesia, and was brought up in Changsha with the whole lot of other children of communist cadres from the Malayan Communist Party. The son is a bright fellow and he won a scholarship to Qinghua University, and was working in a research institute. He wanted to get out because he didn't belong.*

*"I don't know whether it's the society or the system, or maybe both. If you are not a China Chinese, you are separate, different. They treated him as a foreigner. They gave him special privileges, but he was never one of them. His girlfriend was a fellow Malayan. He wanted to come here. Goh Keng Swee spoke to me, I looked at it ... I had the Internal Security Department check on him, whether he is a communist. If he's a plant, then we're looking for trouble. They were convinced that he was not, so we let him in. Now, he's working for one of our research organisations. That's all right. So the Plen wrote to me and thanked me from Haadyai."*

Eu Chooi Yip—  
Former Malayan  
Communist  
Party leader.  
Barred from  
entering  
Singapore  
in 1967, he  
was allowed  
to return  
in 1991 on  
compassionate  
grounds, after  
agreeing not to  
engage in any  
political activity  
here. He was  
a consultant  
on China  
affairs in the  
Institute of East  
Asian Political  
Economy  
before he died  
in 1996.

Being a politician has also made him more wary of people, especially those who might use their relationship with him for their own gain.

*“I’ve got used to that and I think I’m pretty sensitive in discerning who’s on the level and who’s wanting to get something out of me. One of the qualities that you need to have to last as a leader is you must be good at that, otherwise you get taken for a ride. You must be able to smell people out.*

*“It’s a difficult thing to describe. I think it’s being sensitive. I discussed this with the people who did our Shell system of appraisal for recruitment and promotions. And I asked them whether some people are naturally good at it, at interviewing and appraising. They said, yes, some people are better than others.*

*“It’s got to do with being able to interpret body language. Watch the chap, his voice, whether he is dissimulating, what’s his real position, the tone of voice, the tic in his face, his body position or whatever. You can see into a person and through a person.*

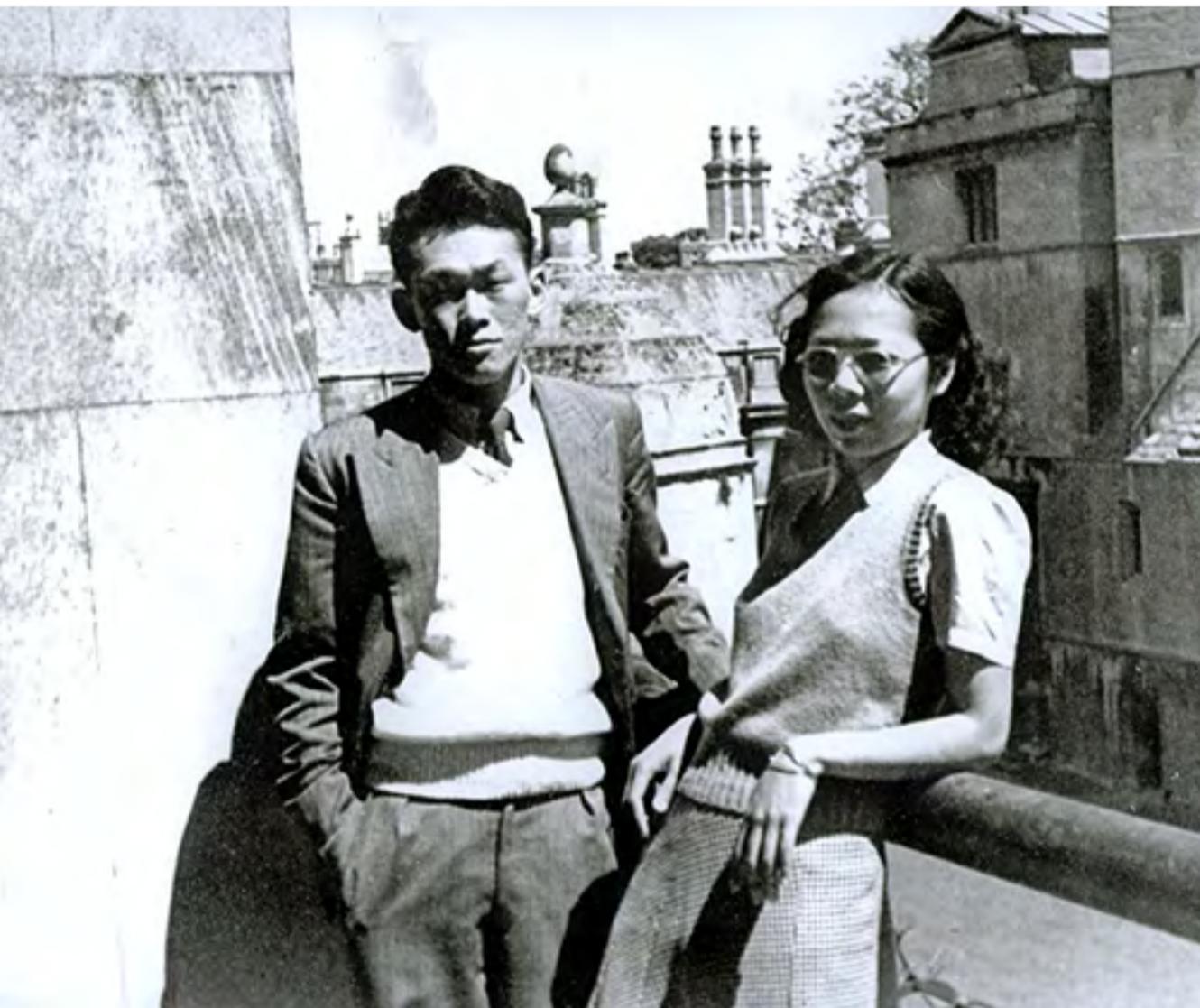
*“And the best two persons I have met with very high sensitivities will be Tan Teck Chwee who was chairman of the Public Service Commission ... he’s very sharp ... and Lim Kim San. I’m not sure if he’s as good now because, as you get old, your faculties, your sharpness of eye and ear, like your sensory capabilities, diminish. But he would shake hands with a person and recoil from that man. He once said to me, of Khaw Khai Boh, who was the head of our Special Branch and who became a minister in the Malaysian government, ‘When I shake his hand, I feel I want to wash it.’ You know, the oiliness of the man and the viciousness of the man he just sensed it. It’s a gift.*

*“And I think I may not be as sharp as Tan Teck Chwee, maybe not even like Lim Kim San. But I’m not far behind. I can tell a person who’s on the level and whom I can trust and whom I cannot and won’t.*

*“Dr Goh Keng Swee cannot do that, he’s always making mistakes. He’s very brainy, very thorough, very methodical, but lacking here. And I don’t know why. He doesn’t see through people. The person has got to work with him, then after he’s thoroughly disappointed, he gets rid of the man.”*

## **I WOULD DO A LOT FOR A FRIEND, BUT ...**

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Lee was already courting Kwa Geok Choo before they left for studies in Cambridge, England.

As prime minister, he has had to take tough action against friends. When President Devan Nair, a long-time ally, was found misbehaving because of alcoholism in 1985, for example, he had to be removed from office. Then, in 1986, he let the law take its course when National Development Minister Teh Cheang Wan was discovered to be accepting bribes.

*“Let me put it in a simple way. I would do a lot personally for a friend, provided what we set out together to do is not sacrificed. We set out to get this place up. If I sacrifice that now, we are doing harm to what we’ve been trying to do; that cannot be done.*

*“But if you need a hundred thousand dollars, I’ll sign it out of my own resources or raise the money. Good luck to you. And that’s a different matter, that’s a personal relationship. But that personal relationship cannot be transmuted into a concession that will jeopardise state interests. That cannot be done because that’s what we’re trying to establish - a system where people act in accordance with certain principles.*

*“The purpose is not just to be righteous. The purpose is to create a system which will carry on because it has not been compromised. I didn’t do that just to be righteous about Teh Cheang Wan. But if I had compromised, that is the end of the system.”*

Lee acknowledges that if Singapore had been under another person, the manner in which the country was run would probably have been quite different.

*“The best example of what actually could happen is when I had to discuss with Goh Keng Swee what happened if I got knocked down by a bus and he took over. And he told me, ‘Frankly, I can’t run it your way. I’ve got to change the method, but I will go in the same direction. I will get there, but a different way.’*

*“He could not do it my way. He didn’t have my temperament. He is as determined as I am - but he could not*

*do the things my way because he's not so good at interpersonal skills. So he would have to do it through another route."*

Although politics has been a way of life for Lee for more than 40 years, he is not so sure that he would walk the same path if he had been born later. Needs and motivations are changing, he says, and the young who might have gone into politics in his time today see little need to enter public life.

## ON MRS LEE AND THE CHILDREN

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Mrs Lee Kuan Yew is often by Lee's side at official functions and trips. What influence does she have on him? He revealed this to the authors:

*"Not in political matters. In political matters she would not know enough to tell me whether this is right or wrong. But she would tell me whether she would trust that man or*



The Lee family relaxing with their black labrador Nikki on the verandah of their home at 38 Oxley Road dated May 1965.

*not. That's a gut feeling. And often she is right because she has got an intuitive sense of whether the chap is trustworthy and friendly or unfriendly.*

*"She did tell me that she didn't think Malaysia would work ... She didn't think it would work because, she said, 'You know the way they do things and we'll never change them.' So I said, 'Well, that doesn't mean we need to be like them. And we'll have to work with them because somebody must represent the Malays. And we will not be able to represent the Malays for a very long time, so we would have to find a way of working with them.'"*

Lee is also known to be close to his sons - Deputy Prime Minister Hsien Loong and Singapore Telecom chief executive officer Hsien Yang - and only daughter, Wei Ling, a doctor. He told the authors that he took pains to ensure that they grew up living normal lives.

*"When I took office, they were very young-. They were seven, five and two years old in '59. So first thing my wife and I decided was we should not move into Sri Temasek, which was the official residence, because that would be a*

*very bad thing for them. You'd get an inflated idea of who you are, what you are, with all the servants around and the gardeners. So we decided to stay put [at their Oxley Rise house].*

*"And all the time we've tried to make them have a sort of a normal environment which was equal to the kind of life I led before I was prime minister. And I believe that's been to their advantage."*

He said they got used to being the children of the prime minister after a while. "I don't think it went to their heads. They were treated in school just as another student. And they were not difficult students. So, there was no reason for them to throw their weight around.

*"I suppose in her [Wei Ling's] case, it was more difficult because young men would shy off her. But that's not the only reason, that she's my daughter. She's also a bright student and it didn't help that she became the Honours student of her year, as a doctor. The doctors just stayed away, so she has had to pay a price for it. But the boys didn't have the same problem. I suppose being a prime minister's son did not make them less marriageable."*

*“Supposing I had been born in a different era, in ’73 or ’74 in Singapore, and I’m now 21, 22, what would I do? I would have got a scholarship, judging from what I did the last time, I think I would have got a scholarship and gone off to study abroad.*

*“I’d come back. The environment is different, the future is different, I would not be so absorbed in wanting to change life in Singapore. I’m not responsible for Singapore ... I’ve done my National Service, I’m willing to do my reservist training. Why should I go and undertake this job and spend my whole life pushing this for a lot of people for whom nothing is good enough? I would seriously think of other jobs.*

*“Given this kind of a Singapore, I’d ask myself: What they need is a real bad setback and then they’ll understand how damn fortunate they are. Then they will learn. Let the setback take place first, then I’ll enter politics. And in case we don’t recover from the setback, I will have a fall-back position, which many are doing - have a house in Perth or Vancouver or Sydney, or an apartment in London, in case I need some place suddenly, and think about whether I go on to America.*

*“I had lunch with Lim Kim San. And he said, ‘No, no, you won’t enjoy life. There’s no meaning.’ I said, ‘Don’t say that, Kim San. If I ask you now, and you were 40 years old, to enter politics, would you do so?’ And he said, ‘No, I don’t think so.’ I said, ‘That answers my point.’ Whereas in 1963 he gave up his business - pawnshop business, sago business, director of UOB, to take on this job after working for HDB from ’60 to ’63. If he were 40 years old, would he do it now? I don’t think so.*

*“... I was the product of the times. That Japanese Occupation brought the whole world crashing down. I understood what power was about. From that, it all happened. If I am back again aged 21 or 22 in today’s Singapore, I don’t think I will*

*undertake this work voluntarily. At that time I felt such a compelling need to do something.*

*“... I don't think my younger son feels any compelling need to change Singapore. He's quite happy, he has done his job. He took his SAF scholarship, he did his job. Now he's joined Singapore Telecom - do a good job of it. Go into politics? Lose all weekends going around meeting people. He sees his brother, he sees no reason why he should do it. The brother, I believe, may be different, because he is older by about five and a half years. He went through the race riots in 1964 and 1969. At the time of the riots - '64 - he was already 12, 13, in Catholic High School. He remembers the separation. So he has a different outlook. For him, Singapore was in peril and life was perilous. He got drawn into it because I took him around when I went on my constituency tours ... He followed me in the afternoons and early evenings. As dinner time approached, I would send him home. Singapore is a small island, it takes just half an hour to go home. So he got drawn into it.”*

## **STEPPING ASIDE**

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On November 28, 1990 Lee handed over the reins of government to Goh Chok Tong. The event was televised, and many observed that he looked emotional. Since then there has also been talk about whether he has really relinquished power and whether his influence behind the scenes has diminished. To him, all this misses the mark completely. Those who indulge

in such idle speculation, he said, do not understand what his stepping aside as prime minister meant to him and the country.

*“I had prepared for it for a long time, so I was impatient for it to take place ... The Western press, they write up these things projecting their reactions into me, that to give up power was a disastrous loss of authority and so on. Whereas my approach was totally different.*

*“I had a job to do. I had come to the conclusion by about '76 that my most important job was to get a team that could carry on the work, otherwise we would fail. We'd been trying since '68 to get capable successors. We fielded Chiang Hai Ding, Wong Lin Ken in '68. In '70, Augustine Tan. All bright PhDs. They couldn't do it. You need more than a capacity to write treatises or argue logically. You need practical minds, tough characters who will push a policy through.*

*“By '76, I was getting very anxious. Hon Sui Sen had a profound influence on me. We were close friends from Japanese days. ... One day, he told me that he wanted to retire after the next elections. I said, 'How can you do that? You're still young.' He said, 'No, I'm not.' He said, 'You know, when these chairmen and CEOs come to see me, they are not just looking at me, they are looking for who will be taking my place. Because their investments are going to go on a long time - 10, 15, 20 years, and I won't be here. The Americans have a succession system in place. At 65 you're out, and you've got to find a successor before then for the Board to confirm. So they were looking around and watching the younger team. They're watching you too,' he said to me. 'You are still okay,' he said, 'but, you know, they are looking beyond your lifetime.'*

*“So I spent a long time hunting for good men, working out*

*a system that will produce a team of good men, comparable, at least as competent as what I had in place. They may not be as tough and tough-minded, or as imaginative or creative because that's in the luck of the draw. But they must be able to run the place. They must first know the problems. So we set out head-hunting.*

*"I set the target at 1988, when I would be 65, believing that the sooner I give up, the younger I will be and the more active I can be to make sure that the team succeeds. I'll be around to make sure that the team can succeed. The later I give up, the older and slower I will be, the more risky its success.*

*"When '88 came, Chok Tong wasn't confident of taking over from me and dealing with our immediate neighbours, Suharto and Mahathir. He felt he would be at a disadvantage. So he said, 'Better give me two years; meanwhile I can get a feel of the job.' Meanwhile, I had been passing over more and more of the work to him. And I said, 'What do you think? What's your view?' - pushing him to make decisions and then supporting him. Or if I disagreed, I would explain the reasons.*

*"So when 1990 came, he wanted me to stay on for the 25th anniversary of Singapore's independence, for a sentimental reason, 1965 to 1990. So I finished my term in August and he was ready to take over by November, after I'd tidied up some odds and ends.*

*"My job after that was to make sure that an error which is avoidable because of my experience should not be committed if I can help it. I think the team in place is functioning. And I believe, without me, it can function as well. That is a triumph!*

*"The Western correspondents don't understand that this is a completely different approach to the problem of succession. For him and his team to fail, it's my failure. I brought this team*



On Nov 28, 1990, Lee relinquished the reins of government to Goh Chok Tong.

“I had prepared for it for a long time, so I was impatient for it to take place.... For him and his team to fail, it’s my failure. I brought this team together. If they succeed, it is I who brought about the success.”

*together. If they succeed, it is I who brought about the success. It’s a very serious business, of ensuring the continuation of good government.”*

It was for this reason, he says, that he went public in 1988 to give an assessment of whom he thought could best take over from him. He had rated Tony Tan his first choice, even though Goh Chok Tong was then First Deputy Prime Minister.

*“When I went public to say, ‘Look, this is my assessment,’ I did that deliberately to make sure people understood that this was an open exercise, that they, Goh’s peers, had chosen him. In other words, having chosen him, they have to support him. I had not appointed him. If I appointed him and they disagreed,*

*they could withhold support and he would not succeed ...*

*“Having seen what went wrong, particularly in the communist countries, and even in Britain, where Churchill handed over to Anthony Eden, Eden failed and Macmillan picked it up - I did not believe that if I appointed the leader, they would give him the same wholehearted support. So I forced them to decide amongst themselves. I had said to them, ‘Look, my assessment is as follows.’*

*“This was after the 1984 elections. I watched them run the elections and I watched their press conferences. I said the most decisive leader was Tony Tan. He would say yes or no and he would stick to it. Goh Chok Tong would try to please you. You can see him in a press conference, even today. If he sits back and talks to his Cabinet, then he comes out with a firm position, after long discussion. But if you engage him in a press conference, you might get him to make some concessions.*

*“You will never get Tony Tan to do that. You won’t get me to do that. You can talk to me till the cows come home; if I have decided that this is no go, it is no go. You may be unhappy, but I am quite convinced, after six months, maybe after six years, you will know that I was right. But he [Goh] has one advantage - he has their support. They’ve got to support him because they elected him. And I think that that was a wise move. I made it public to let people know that the choice was that of his colleagues.*

*“There was a reason and method behind what people thought was a casual passing of judgement. I was seriously placing the weight on the shoulders of his colleagues. They have worked with me, I have pointed out this is right, that is wrong.*

*“I thought at that time that Deng Xiaoping made a mistake*

Zhao Ziyang— Chinese premier and party chief handpicked by Deng Xiaoping to be his successor. His star fell swiftly and he was sacked in 1989 for sympathising with pro-democracy student demonstrators in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. He was barred from attending Deng's funeral in February 1997.

*getting rid of Zhao Ziyang. Maybe he had compelling reasons, I don't know - must have been powerful reasons. After working with a man for 30, 40 years, why knock him down like that?"*

Does he miss being the prime minister?

*"Frankly no. Supposing I'm prime minister, I have to attend to all the day-to-day problems, I've got to go to all these conferences, Asean summit, Apec, visit so many countries. I have done all that for so long. What's the point of it? I have outgrown it. I don't hanker to go to an Asean summit or an Apec summit, or to have a state visit to America or Britain.*

*"I've been through all that. I have been the guest of honour at formal dinners, state visits - from President Johnson to Nixon, to Ford to Reagan and Bush. Well, that's enough!*

*"The prime minister has to work with Clinton. It's not my job. He's a younger man. Supposing I were the prime minister and I had to deal with Clinton, I would find it quite an effort dealing with a Vietnam War generation, a man who was against the Vietnam War. I was for the Vietnam War and had encouraged the president of the United States, both Johnson and then Nixon."*

On his role as senior minister and his life now, Lee sees himself as a guardian to the younger team running Singapore.

*"At 70-plus, what do I need? Time to reflect. I need enough to keep me engaged and interested in life. What is it I want to do? What can I best do with the balance of my time? I don't know how much time I've got left. If, let's say, I have another five or 10 years - if I am lucky, and am like my father more than like*

*my mother, who died when she was 74. But it's 10 years in which my energy levels will be declining, year by year.*

*“What I'd like to do now is to give this government the benefit of my experience in avoiding mistakes. I can't tell them what to do as their great achievements, their great breakthroughs. That's for them to work out with younger Singaporeans. But I know that certain things are sure paths to trouble, so avoid them.*

*“It's not by accident that we got here. Every possible thing that could have gone wrong, we had tried to pre-empt. That's how we got here, that's why we have substantial reserves. Because if we don't have reserves, the moment we run into trouble, who will lend you money when you've got no gold mines or oil fields? We've got nothing. All we have is this functioning organism which requires brains, specialised skills put together in a very intricate form, with inputs from many nations and their experts in financial services, manufacturing, tourism, all sorts of economic activities put together. It's not easy to replicate.*

*“I consider this as the best contribution I can make, the most worthwhile thing to do.”*

## **I'VE BEEN A LUCKY MAN**

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Lee describes himself as an agnostic, but he appreciates that there are those who regard religion as a main pillar of life. Others, like himself, are guided by certain personal beliefs.

*“I was brought up as an ancestor worshipper, Taoist, Buddhist - the traditional Chinese family. If I visited a funeral wake of a Chinese family, I would perform the necessary rituals with joss-sticks in respect. At home, after some years, around the 1960s, we stopped the rituals in memory of my grandfather on certain days like Qing Ming, with the offerings,*



Lee with his extended family at a Chinese New Year's Eve reunion on Jan 22, 1993. The family network and the traditions they uphold have always been important to Lee.

*candles, joss-sticks.*

*“If you ask me, ‘Is there a God?’ my answer is ‘I don’t know.’ But I do know that those who believe in God - like Hon Sui Sen and his wife - they derive great strength and comfort from their religion. They do not believe that this is the end of the world. Their behaviour and their hopes do not end with this life. That gives them enormous reserves of stamina and*

*serenity of mind.*

*“I would not dismiss religion as so much superstition. The communists have failed in stamping out religion because it is part of human nature.*

*“I don’t think I have ever, in times of great danger or peril, gone down on my knees to pray, or gone to the temple and hoped for some miracle. I do not believe strength comes, necessarily, from a belief in God. You must have some belief in a philosophy, in an idea, in a concept.*

*“It is a question of faith which, in the case of the communists, had nothing to do with God. It is a question of faith, the belief that something is right and they’re going to do it. So if you ask me, what is my faith, I’ll say, well, I believe certain things are worth doing and let’s do it ... People are made that way.”*

Would he describe himself as a happy man?

*“Ask a man in his 70s like me what is happiness, and I would say a certain serenity of mind, a certain satisfaction with having done things which were worth doing and in not having more than one’s normal share of tragedies.*

*“Everybody goes through the vagaries of life. I am fortunate that I escaped death at the hands of the Japanese and death and injury in a nasty accident when my car turned over at Thomson Road, at Caldecott Hill, near Radio Singapore. It was a bad turn. It’s no longer there now. There was a deep ravine on the side with iron waterpipes. And on a very rainy day, this was in ’51 - I was going to play golf at the Island Club. The car just skidded and then rolled over two times, but landed on soft grass and soft earth! If I had hit that pipe, that would have been the end of both of us, and*

*my wife was expecting her first child then. So I think it was deliverance.*

*Taking everything into account, I've been a lucky man. My son is not so lucky, he lost his wife. Quite inexplicable. She was a doctor, should have known that she was having heart trouble because she was feeling pains in her neck. But too late. And by the time the attack took place, doctors could do nothing ... And he got lymphoma. That's the luck of the draw and he has to live with it. So if you compare my fate with his, I am luckier. But in the end, he will have to be the stronger person.*

*"Life has an unfair, unpredictable quality about it and you must take it as it comes. But then, that's not what I would have thought if you had asked me when I was 30 years old. Now it's a different perspective. How many of my generation are alive, never mind being fit and mobile and still compos mentis?"*

Lee said his greatest personal achievement is his family.

*"I'm very happy that I've got a good, happy family. I've got a happy marriage, I've got three children I'm very proud of, I can't ask for more. That's my personal achievement."*

Of his political achievements, he pointed to a thriving Singapore.

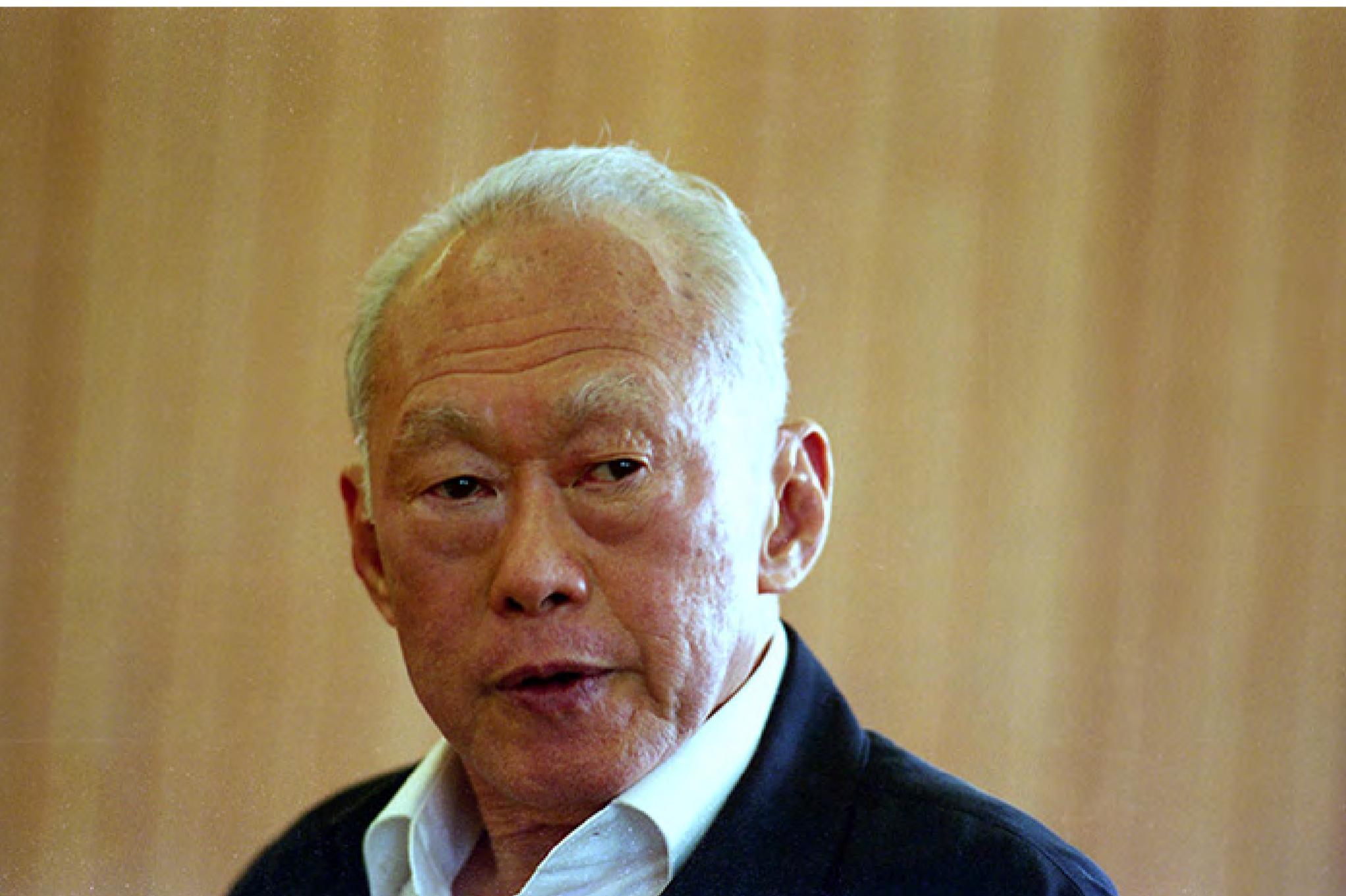
*"What I have to show for all my work is Singapore, and Singapore is still working. It would have been better if we had Singapore as part of a successful Malaysia. I still believe that, but it wasn't possible, so that's that."*

Would he live life differently if he had to do it all over?

*“Among those of my generation, very few are alive, very few have been as fortunate as I have been, very few have taken the risks I have taken and survived. Why do I want to live my life all over again?”*

*“A golf pro once demonstrated a trick shot. He took an egg, put it on a tee and he took a sand wedge. And he said, ‘I’ll hit that tee, snap it and the egg will drop on the grass unbroken.’ And he did it. He snapped a tall wooden tee and the egg dropped down unbroken. I wanted to see how actually it was done. I thought he turned the blade, so the blade snapped the tee, and did not touch the egg. So I said, ‘Do that again.’ He said, ‘No, I may not be as lucky the second time.’*

*“I think I will give you that answer. I may not be as lucky a second time in so many things. ... All I can say is, I did my best. This was the job I undertook, I did my best and I could not have done more in the circumstances. What people think of it, I have to leave to them. It is of no great consequence. What is of consequence is, I did my best.” ●*







Japanese troops  
landed in Singapore  
on Feb 8, 1945.

## **IT BEGAN WHEN MY WORLD COLLAPSED**

The world as Lee Kuan Yew knew it came to an end on the morning of December 8, 1941. Another brave new world was about to begin. But at that very moment when the old one crumbled and its replacement burst from the sky bearing the

emblem of the Japanese air force, there was only terror and destruction. Japanese war planes struck with impunity on an unsuspecting city that quiet morning to shatter 123 years of unchallenged British rule.

*“On December 8, early in the morning, when the bombs dropped, I was in Raffles College in the hostel and we were in the middle of it. Then a few days later, the two battleships, Prince of Wales and Repulse, were sunk. That was a disaster. That jolted us.*

*“Then they kept on advancing and advancing. And we were recruited into the MAS, Medical Auxiliary Services, the students in Raffles College, and we volunteered. We ran around with an ambulance, collected injured people after air raids; towards the end we collected injured people after shelling. And they were, I think from the beginning of February or late January, filing into Singapore. Next thing, they were in Singapore.”*

That air attack on Singapore, which was launched simultaneously with the main Japanese landings at Singora and Patani in southern Thailand, and at Kota Bharu on the east coast of Malaya, was the first of the Pacific War. One hour and ten minutes later, on the other side of the ocean, Japanese forces in the Pacific would devastate the American fleet at Pearl Harbor. It was followed by the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong, and attacks on Clark airbase in the Philippines, Guam and Wake Island. Within 12 hours the might of Japan would be felt all over the Pacific Ocean. By February 1942 the triumphant Imperial Army was in Singapore. Lee ran into his first Japanese soldier at his maternal grandfather's home in Telok Kurau. “I looked at

this strange person with flaps on his cap. It took me a moment to realise he was a Japanese. That's that." For the first year undergraduate from Raffles College, it was the biggest shock of his life. His world had turned upside down and from this unexpected perspective he would receive what he now regards as the political education of his life.

*"The dark ages had descended on us. It was brutal, cruel. In looking back, I think it was the biggest single political education of my life because, for three and a half years, I saw the meaning of power and how power and politics and government went together, and I also understood how people trapped in a power situation responded because they had to live. One day, the British were there, immovable, complete masters; next day, the Japanese, whom we derided, mocked as short, stunted people with shortsighted squint eyes."*

The Japanese were especially brutal towards the Chinese population. In one particularly infamous incident, known as Sook Ching, every male Chinese between the ages of 18 and 50 was rounded up for registration and identification. Aimed at flushing out anti-Japanese elements among the Chinese volunteers who had fought so tenaciously against the invading Japanese army, it resulted in 6,000 Chinese being massacred, according to estimates from the Japanese secret police, the Kempeitai. Other estimates put the figure at five times as high.

Tumultuous changes were taking place everywhere as the old order on which the British Empire was firmly rooted collapsed. The German and Japanese armies were on the move throughout Europe and Asia.

For the people of Singapore, as it was for those of Malaya,

Indo-China and Indonesia, the unthinkable had happened. The great white colonial masters of Great Britain, France and the Netherlands were being overrun by the bow-legged, squat and squint-eyed yellow terror from the Land of the Rising Sun. English would be replaced by Nippon-go, God Save the King by Kimigayo and the civil orderly ways of the Anglo-Saxon world by the raw brutality and stoicism of the samurai.

Lee Kuan Yew saw all this close up. But he was no mere spectator. It was raw politics itself, and he was right in the middle of it. To understand Lee today, what he is, what he believes in, why he does certain things and what he stands for, it is necessary to understand the temper of those tumultuous years and how they seized and shaped him. Those earthshaking events would also mould Lee's generation and the generation before them in Singapore and all over Asia.

If there is one point in Lee's life when his political education began, when the idea that things could change and would be changed for better or for worse - which is the very essence of politics - this was it. For the story of Lee Kuan Yew and modern Singapore, this beginning was as brutal as it was unexpected. But it did not take place in a vacuum. It burst out of the old world with an impatience that Lee would epitomise later. To understand why it happened, it is necessary, too, to understand the old world, a world which Lee inhabited for 18 years before those Japanese fighter planes put an end to it.



Lee's roots can be traced to his great-grandfather Lee Bok Boon, who left Guangdong, China, at 16 to eke out a living in Singapore. This watercolour painting was commissioned after he returned, a much wealthier man, to his ancestral village in Taipu. A similar painting can be found at the manor house he built there.

## BEGINNINGS

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When Lee's great grandfather Lee Bok Boon left Guangdong province for Singapore in 1863 at the age of 16, he was following the footsteps of thousands of Chinese emigrants who had left their ancestral villages, many with just the shirts on their backs, to seek a new life in Southeast Asia. Their numbers fluctuated depending on the state of the economy in the receiving countries and whether it had been a good or bad harvest in their own villages. In 1907, 227,000 Chinese immigrants landed in Singapore. The number dropped to 152,000 in 1909, but rose dramatically to 270,000 in 1911, which was a year of flood and famine in southern China.



Lee's grandfather, Lee Hoon Leong, rose to riches but saw his fortunes decline with the Great Depression in the 1930s. He died during the Japanese Occupation. "My grandfather was very fond of me and I used to visit him and live with him on weekends and school holidays," Lee recalled in an interview with the authors."

Bok Boon married a Chinese shopkeeper's daughter, Seow Huan Nio, in Singapore. Like many of his contemporaries his heart was still in the Middle Kingdom, and so, after making some money here, he decided to go back in 1882. But Huan Nio, who was born in Singapore and had never been to China, and was by then a mother of three children, refused to go along. Bok Boon



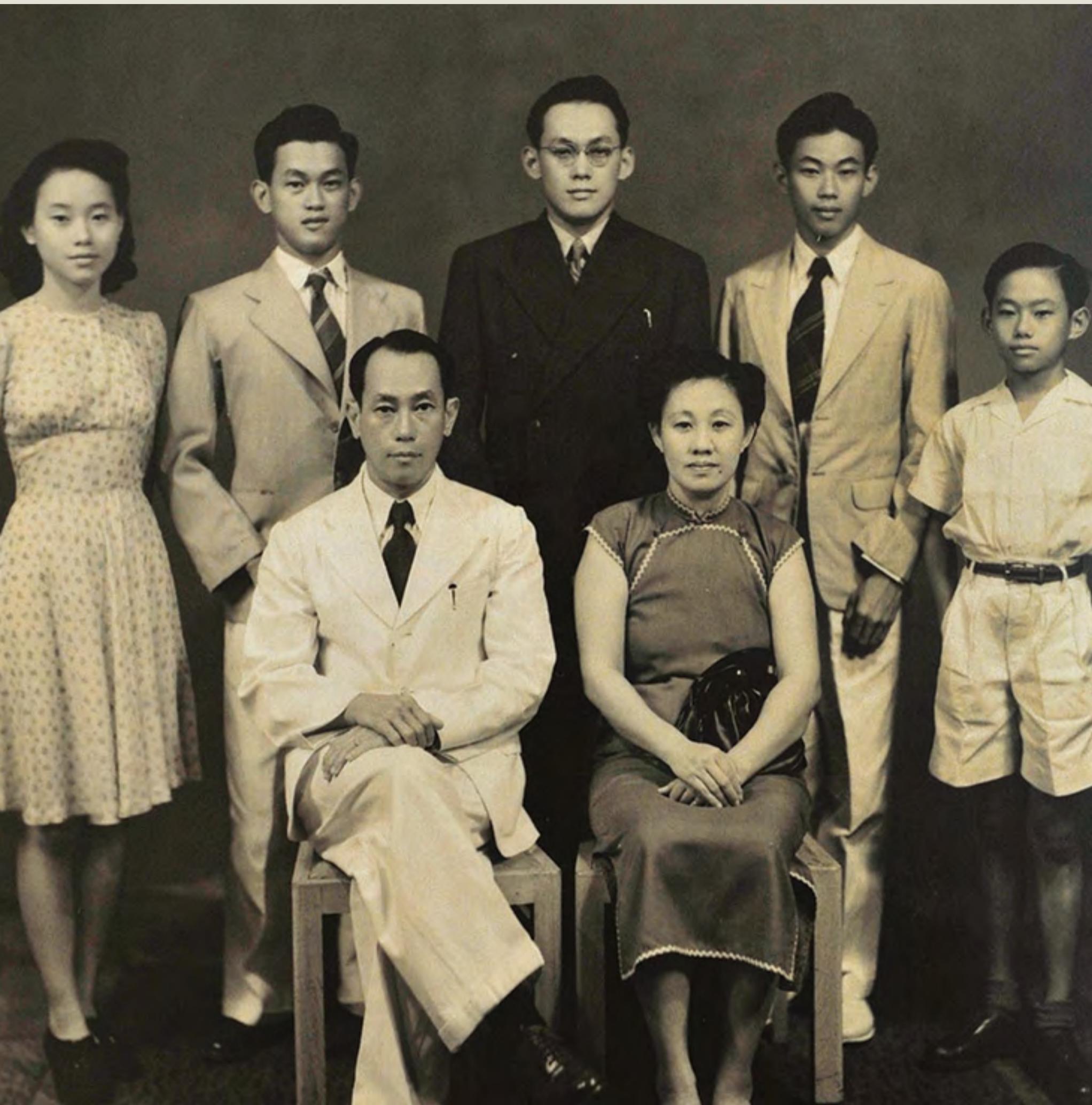
**Left: Lee as a baby with his father, Lee Chin Koon.**

**Below: 147 Neil Road. Lee lived in his paternal grandfather's two-storey terrace house as a boy. Bought in 1920 for \$25,000, the building stands restored today in the colourful and bustling business district of Tanjong Pagar, where Lee has served as Member of Parliament since 1955.**



**Right: A capable woman, tremendously resourceful, possessing great energy and drive, said Lee of his mother, Chua Jim Neo. She was the one who effectively ran the household, managed the finances and even had small businesses to keep the family going. "Without her, the family would have failed," Lee told the authors.**





Lee (standing centre) was the eldest child in his family. "I would not classify myself as wealthy, but we were not in want of food or clothes or other things in life," he said of his family.

returned to his home village to start a new life there. He died just two years later. But he could not have done too badly as the family in Singapore received a picture of a little manor house he had built and news that he had become, or rather bought for himself, a mandarin of sorts.

The family that Bok Boon left behind in Singapore did not need a mandarin to do well. They did what most people who wanted to get ahead in life here did; they made sure their children received an English education.

Lee's grandfather, Hoon Leong, went to an English school and began a career as a pharmacist. His fortunes improved markedly when he joined a Chinese shipping company, Heap Eng Mo Shipping Company, as a purser, making regular trips between Singapore and Indonesia. On one of these voyages he met Ko Liem Nio in Semarang. They married and he brought her to Singapore. He moved up the company and eventually possessed power of attorney over the concerns of Sugar King Oei Tiong Ham. His fortunes rose with Oei's. By the time Kuan Yew was born on September 16, 1923, Hoon Leong was head of a wealthy family, though its fortunes suffered somewhat during the Depression of 1929-32.

As was the practice in those days, the marriage between Lee's parents, Lee Chin Koon and Chua Jim Neo, was an arranged one. Both came from successful middle-class families and were educated in English schools. Lee's maternal grandfather owned the former Katong market, rubber estates at Chai Chee and a row of houses next to the present Thai embassy at Orchard Road. Those were the days when successful Chinese businessmen working within the colonial system in Singapore were able to make vast fortunes mainly in trading and property development.

The Depression took its toll and both Lee's grandfathers' wealth declined considerably. Lee's father worked first as a

storekeeper at Shell, the Anglo-Dutch oil giant, and was later put in charge of various depots in Johor Bahru, Stulang and Batu Pahat. But it was his mother Jim Neo to whom Lee attributes much of the family's success in overcoming the financial difficulties. By then the family had a house in Telok Kurau. For Lee and his three brothers and a sister, these were carefree days. But even though, by his own admission, he did not work very hard in school, he was always there at the top of the class.

The pace quickened somewhat after he enrolled at Raffles Institution; Lee emerged top Malayan boy in the Senior Cambridge examinations. His decision to become a lawyer, which would have a profound effect on his political activities later, came about from purely pragmatic considerations.

*“My father and mother had friends from their wealthier days who after the slump were still wealthy because they had professions, either doctors or lawyers. The doctors were people like Dr Loh Poon Lip, the father of Robert Loh. The lawyer was Richard Lim Chuan Ho, who was the father of Arthur Lim, the eye surgeon. And then there was a chap called Philip Hoalim Senior. They did not become poor because they had professions. My father didn't have a profession, so he became poor and he became a storekeeper. Their message, or their moral for me, was, I'd better take a profession or I'd run the risk of a very precarious life.*

*“There were three choices for a profession - medicine, law, engineering. We had a medical school; we had no law school or engineering. I didn't like medicine. Engineering, if you take, you've got to work for a company. Law, you can be on your own, you're self-employed. So I decided, all right, in that case, I would be a lawyer.”*

## RAW POWER

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Those plans were shattered when Japanese forces landed at Kota Bharu on the northeast coast of Malaya in the early hours of December 8, 1941- But the political education which followed would leave a lasting impression and change Lee's life forever.

*“They [the Japanese] were the masters. They swaggered around with big swords, they occupied all the big offices and the houses and the big cars and they gave the orders. So that determines who is the authority. Then because they had the authority, they printed the money, they controlled the wealth of the country, the banks, they made the Chinese pay a \$50 million tribute. You need a job, you need a permit, you need to*



Lee met his wife, Kwa Geok Choo, at Raffles College. He is in the last row, sixth from the right, while his wife-to-be sits in the front row, third from the left.

*import and distribute rice - they controlled everything.*

*“So people adjusted and they bowed, they ingratiated themselves, they had to live. Quietly, they cursed away behind the backs of the Japanese. But in the face of the Japanese, you submit, you appear docile, you're obedient and you try to be*

*ingratiating. I understood how power operated on people.*

*“As time went on, food became short and medicine became short. Whisky, brandy, all the luxuries which could be kept in either bottles or tins - cigarettes, 555s in tins - became valuables. The people who traded with the Japanese, who pandered to their wishes, provided them with supplies, clothes, uniforms, whatever, bought these things and gave them to the officers. And some ran gambling farms in the New World and Great World. And millions of Japanese dollars were won and lost each night. They collected the money, shared it with, I suppose, whoever were in charge: the Japanese Kempeitai and the government or generals or whatever. Then they bought properties. In that way they became very wealthy at the end of the war because the property transactions were recognised. But the notes were not.*

*“Because people had to live, you’ve got to submit. I started off hating them and not wanting to learn Japanese. I spent my time learning Chinese to read their notices. After six months, I learnt how to read Chinese, but I couldn’t read Japanese. I couldn’t read the Katakana and the Hiragana. Finally, I registered at a Japanese school in Queen Street. Three months passed. I got a job with my grandfather’s old friend ... a textile importer and exporter called Shimoda. He came, opened his office ... Before that, it was in Middle Road. Now it’s a big office in Raffles Place. I worked there as a clerk, copy typist, copied the Japanese Kanji and so on, it’s clerical work.*

*“But you saw how people had to live, they had to get rice, food, they had to feed their children, therefore they had to submit. So it was my first lesson on power and government and system and how human beings reacted.*

*“Some were heroic, maybe misguided. They listened to the*

*radio, against the Japanese, they spread news, got captured by the Kempeitai, tortured. Some were just collaborators, did everything the Japanese wanted. And it was an education on human beings, human nature and human systems of government.”*

## THE SCALES FELL

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Thanks to W.S. Thatcher, a censor of Fitzwilliam House, (top photo, centre), Lee got himself moved to Cambridge University. Kwa Geok Choo is on the right. Mr Lee in Cambridge (above).

When the war ended Lee had to decide between returning to Raffles College to work for the scholarship which would fund his law studies in England or going there on his own steam. Britain, land of his colonial masters and the epicentre of the vast if fast declining Empire, might have elicited from a subservient subject of a distant outpost, 11,000 kilometers away, the reverence it once undoubtedly deserved. But war-torn England of 1946 was a different proposition altogether. For Lee, the first few months were disorienting, hectic and miserable. Arriving in October, he was already late for college admission. But being first boy in the Senior Cambridge examinations for all

Malaya helped. The dean of the law faculty at the London School of Economics was suitably impressed and Lee found himself thrown into the rough and tumble of undergraduate life in the imperial capital, an experience he found thoroughly unpleasant. With the help of some friends in Cambridge and a sympathetic censor of Fitzwilliam House, he got himself admitted and moved to the university town.

Lee went on to distinguish himself in Cambridge, obtaining a rare double first. But though his top priority was his studies, something else much more intense was stirring in him. It was in England that he began to seriously question the continued right of the British to govern Singapore. The Japanese Occupation had demonstrated in a way nothing else could have done that the English were not a superior people with a God-given right to govern. What he saw of them during those four years in England convinced him even more of this. They were in it for their own benefit, and he read all about this in their own newspapers.

*“Why should they run this place for your benefit? And when it comes tumbling down, I’m the chap who suffers. That, I think, was the start of it all. At that time, it was also the year following my stay in England and insurgency had started (in Malaya) and I had also seen the communist Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) marching on the streets.*

*“I would say Japanese Occupation, one year here seeing MPAJA and seeing the British trying to re-establish their administration, not very adept ... I mean the old mechanisms had gone and the old habits of obedience and respect had also gone because people had seen them run away. They packed up. Women and children, those who could get away. We were*

*supposed, the local population was supposed, to panic when the bombs fell, but we found they panicked more than we did. So it was no longer the old relationship.*

*“I saw Britain and I saw the British people as they were. And whilst I met nothing but consideration and a certain benevolence from people at the top, at the bottom, when I had to deal with landladies and the shopkeepers and so on, it was pretty rough. They treated you as colonials and I resented that. Here in Singapore, you didn’t come across the white man so much. He was in a superior position. But there you are in a superior position meeting white men and white women in an inferior position, socially, I mean. They have to serve you and so on in the shops. And I saw no reason why they should be governing me; they’re not superior. I decided, when I got back, I was going to put an end to this.”*

His own political inclinations then were naturally left-wing and sympathetic to the British Labour Party, mainly because of its position on the future of the Empire. The Conservatives, as Lee saw it, were mainly interested in retaining power and furthering British interests in their colonies. He even campaigned for a Labour Party friend, David Widdicombe, in Totnes, Devon, driving him in a lorry and making a dozen campaign speeches on his behalf.

*“One particular Union Society debate I remember, one young Tory student standing up for King and the Empire and so on - it was still King George VI, I think, before he died. And I said, ‘Oh, we’ll have trouble with this chap, we’re going to have a tough time.’ So when I went to the toilet, I was standing up against the wall. Two Africans were also standing up against the wall,*

*peeing. And one African said to the other, he said, 'When we get back, we'll show them what we mean by Empire, the Imperial Raj and so on, we'll show them.' So I thought to myself, 'Well, this is big trouble for the whites.'"*

Trouble for the British was also brewing in Malaya, which had its own particular set of problems because of the special position of the main Malay population vis-a-vis the Chinese. After the war ended, in 1946, the Colonial Office announced a plan to create, under the Malayan Union scheme, a unitary state consisting of the Federated Malay States, the Unfederated Malay States and the Straits Settlements excluding Singapore. The plan would confer fairly liberal citizenship based on the principle of jus soli (by birth) and equal rights for all citizens. This broke with the past practice of preserving Malay political rights and provoked a spontaneous and widespread protest by the Malay community, which resulted in a Malay nationalist movement under the auspices of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO).

In an effort to appease the Malay ground, secret talks between the British and Malay leaders were held, which resulted in the Malayan Union scheme being revoked and replaced by the Federation of Malaya Agreement in 1948. Sovereignty of the sultans and the special position of the Malays were preserved, and citizenship criteria were tightened.

As news of the secret talks leaked that Malay objections would prevail, a hastily convened coalition of non-Malay interests was galvanised into action, a coalition of the Malayan Democratic Union (MDU), the first political party formed in Singapore by English-educated intellectuals fighting for an independent Malaya, and the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM), which had

its roots in the anti-Japanese struggle. This front, calling itself the Pan-Malayan Council for Joint Action (PMCJA), produced a People's Constitution which represented the first attempt to create a Malayan nationality beyond the traditional Malay/non-Malay divide. The effort collapsed for lack of support and interest within the Chinese community, especially from businessmen and traders who feared that agitation would jeopardise their interests. More importantly, the British refused to negotiate with an organisation so obviously anti-colonial and supported by the CPM. In 1948, the CPM gave up the constitutional struggle and took up armed insurrection against the British. The MDU was voluntarily dissolved soon after.

Against this backdrop, a discussion group called the Malayan Forum was formed in 1949 in London. Its members, students in British universities, included Lee, Tun Abdul Razak (who would succeed Tunku Abdul Rahman as prime minister of Malaysia), Goh Keng Swee (founder and first chairman of the Malayan Forum) and Toh Chin Chye. They believed the time had come to organise a broad-based pan-Malayan movement, led by English-educated intellectuals fired by a desire to end British rule and to further the socialist ideals of achieving a more equal society. Lee argued in a speech, his first political speech for which a written text is available, that if they did not take action, the changeover would be a violent one involving the CPM.

## BACK HOME

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Lee returned to Singapore in August 1950, joined the law firm Laycock & Ong at a salary of \$500 a month, and quickly established himself as a formidable lawyer. But it was his legal work with various trade unions that thrust him in the public eye.



The first PAP team to lead Singapore, in 1959.

These were busy years for unionists as they fought for better pay and rights against policies that discriminated against locals. As legal adviser to several unions, Lee cut his political teeth.

*“At the beginning of January or February ’52, A.P. Rajah sent the postmen over.*

*They were politicians, Progressive Party. The postmen had a grievance against the government and had been to see them. They didn’t have the time or they couldn’t do it so they sent him a representative over to Laycock & Ong. I asked Laycock whether I should take it on; he said, go ahead. I took it on. And they went on strike. I handled the strike, that was how it began.*

*“And from then, I went from one union to another because I received considerable publicity out of it. I handled all the press statements, I handled the negotiations. It came to a successful*

*conclusion, so I established my competence.*

*“Then there were a series of other unions, Singapore Harbour Board, Naval Base, and so it went on. Of course, I suppose Laycock must have believed that all this was capital for the Progressive Party, but actually, it was capital for the PAP, although it wasn’t formed yet.*

*“In all this work, we were meeting regularly - Goh Keng Swee, K.M. Byrne, myself, Rajaratnam. So we took on all this other union work. I alone couldn’t do all the salary scales, so I had K.M. Byrne, an establishment officer who knows all about salary scales; he helped me so I had the end product just to present.*

*“They also started the Council of Joint Action, government unions, because the expats gave themselves a big salary. And in order to fight expat pay, just with the local officers, there was no weight. So we built it into a big issue, pay for everybody, including the lowest paid, so that organised the whole government service, from daily-rated upwards. That became another powerful mass base, workers in government service. So in that way, we built up.”*

By the time of the first general election, which the People’s Action Party contested in 1955, its mass appeal was such that it was able to win three of the four seats it contested. Lee won his seat at Tanjong Pagar. The years 1955 to 1959 were eventful ones for the PAP and Singapore. For the party, they were years when its mass base, especially with the Chinese educated ground, expanded considerably. In opposition in the Assembly, the PAP was able to exploit the weakness of the Labour Front government, led first by David Marshall and later by Lim Yew Hock.

The PAP was not alone in courting the hearts and minds of

Singaporeans. The Malayan Communist Party had infiltrated the trade unions and had set out to capture the PAP itself. A dramatic battle to control the party began in earnest during the PAP's third annual conference in August 1957, when left-wing elements succeeded in winning half the seats in the central executive committee. Their success was short-lived. In a security sweep, the Lim Yew Hock government detained 35 communists including five members of the newly elected PAP central executive committee and 11 PAP branch officials. Lee and his colleagues took the opportunity to consolidate their strength by creating a cadre system within the party. Only cadres were allowed to vote for the CEC. In turn, only the CEC could approve cadre membership. Thus Lee and his largely English educated colleagues were able to retain leadership of the party even though most of its ordinary members were Chinese educated.

By the time of the 1959 election, the PAP was the strongest party around. This time there was no question of it being prepared to govern Singapore.

*“We campaigned to win. We had a great deal of anxiety about what would happen after we won because we knew the problems were there. Winning was not the problem. The other side had been destroyed. Labour Front had been destroyed. Progressive Party and the Democratic Party had joined up and joined the Labour Front. You know, all the various groups had been destroyed. It was as we analysed it, our perception of them was right, that they were not serious players. So it was really the communists versus us.”*

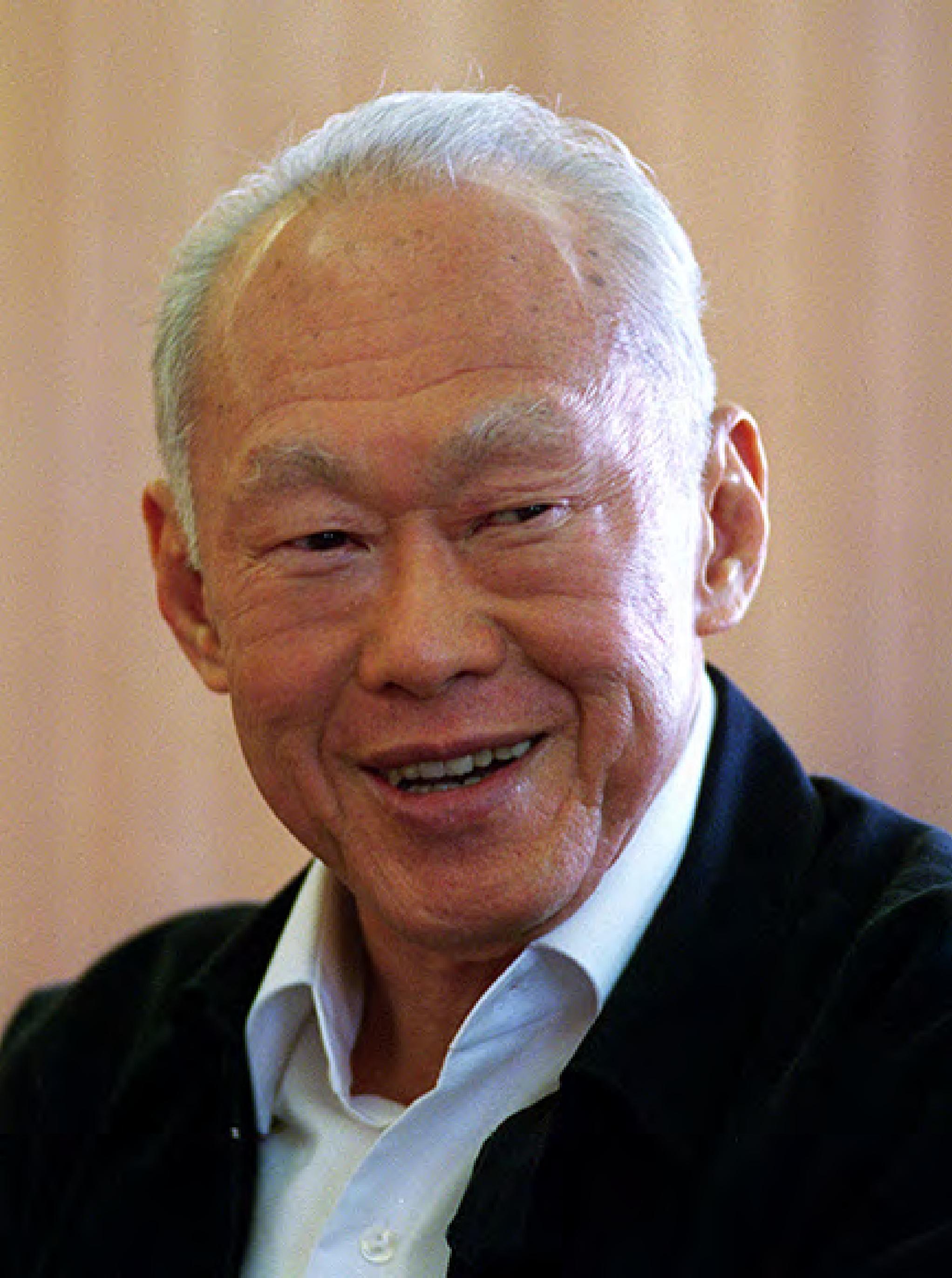
In the event, the PAP won a landslide victory, capturing 43 of the 51 seats. But for Lee personally, there was no exhilaration on

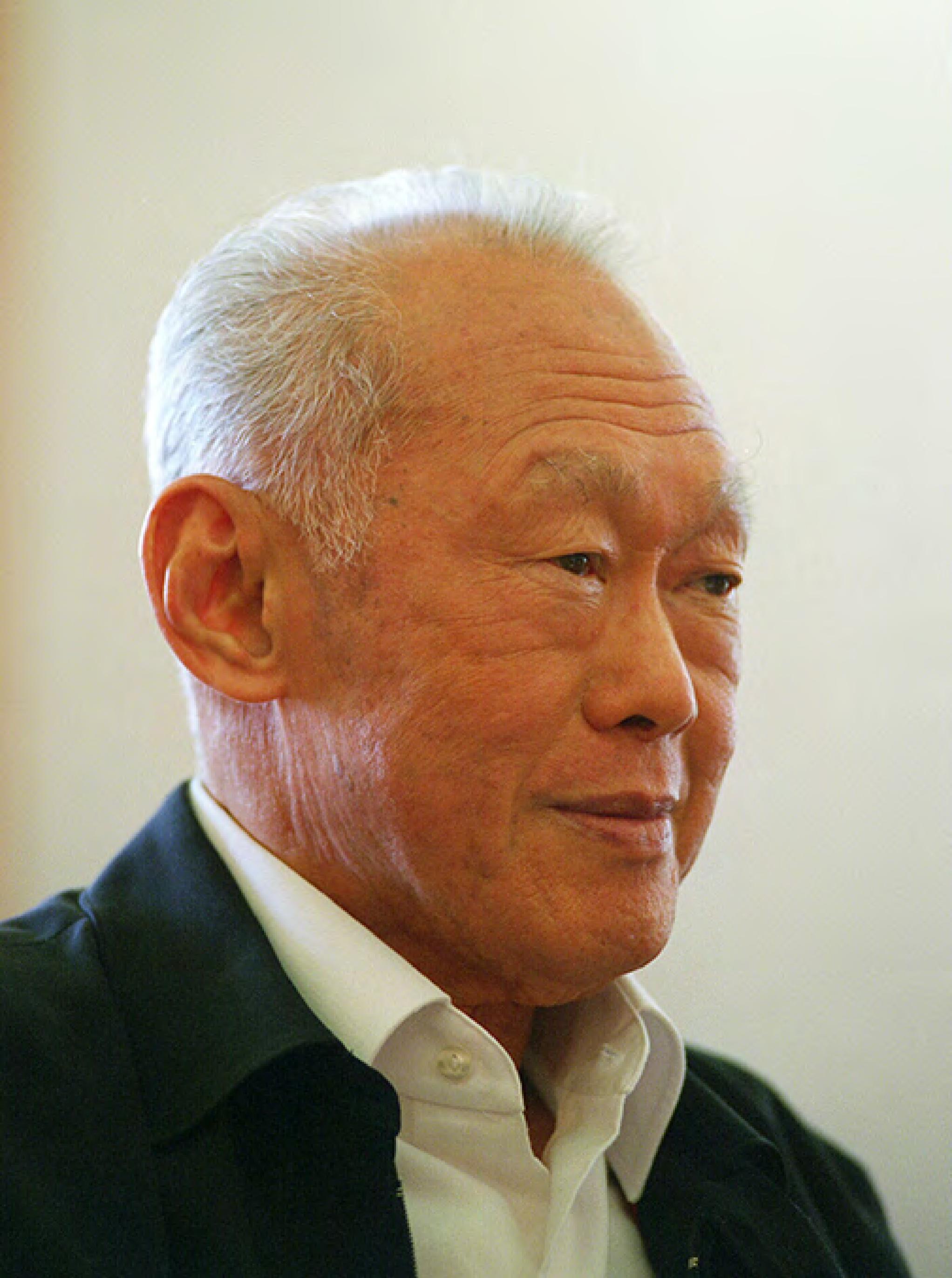
becoming Singapore's first prime minister.

*“We knew this wasn't going up for first prize, we're going to be hammered, we are in the firing zone. I believe that very few colonial territories' leaders ever took power with greater forebodings of problems to come. Because we had seen them [the communists] and we knew their strength and we knew their intensity and we knew their capabilities.”*

The battle lines were thus drawn. As Lee had predicted in his speech at the Malayan Forum nine years before, the returned students from Britain stood the best chance of achieving a smooth transfer of power from the British. But as he had also outlined in that speech, their most formidable rival for power was the communist united front, and they had not thrown their hat in the ring yet, having stayed away from the elections.

The forthcoming battles with the communists would shape Lee the politician in a way nothing else could have done. They would be the defining political battles of his life, and Singapore's, in its struggle towards nationhood. ●







Japanese shoe shiner Kin-chan was singled out for high praise by Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

## **CULTURE, THE X-FACTOR**

At the basement of the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo is a shoe polishing station manned by two elderly Japanese who, for 700 yen, will give you the shiniest pair of shoes you have ever seen. Their prowess with wax and brush was chanced upon by Lee

Kuan Yew while on a visit to the city in 1994. He paid them this glowing tribute.



Kin-chan, 65, the shoe shiner at Tokyo's Imperial Hotel, who was praised by Lee Kuan Yew in a column in the Nihon Keizai Shimbun newspaper in January 1999.



Yasu-san, 46, is the partner of Kin-chan at the shoe-shine corner of Tokyo's Imperial Hotel.

*“I have never seen such a shine on a pair of shoes. No army shoes or pair of boots shone like the two that I saw there. What they did, including polishing shoes, they did well. That’s the first thing I learnt about the Japanese. If you want to succeed, that is the kind of society you have to be. Whatever you can do, do to the best of your ability. They have succeeded!”*

*“Another anecdote. I was in Takamatsu, which is on Shikoku island, after a Tokyo visit in the 1970s. This was a very small little hotel in Shikoku, the capital of the province. The governor gave me dinner. When it came to fruit time, the cook came out... it was persimmon time because it was October. And he demonstrated his skills and peeled the persimmon in our presence and formed beautiful shapes on a plate and served the persimmon. He was an ordinary chef, but he did his job to perfection. It became an art. So I asked, ‘How many years?’ Three to five years as an apprentice to learn how to cut and do simple things. And he has become the chief chef after 15 years, but the pride with which he did his job!”*

*“It’s not just the person who can paint a beautiful picture who’s an artist. In his way, as a chef, he was an artist and he gave pleasure. Well, there is something in the culture that makes the Japanese admire people who do their job well. ... If that’s what you can do, okay, let’s see how well you do it. And that has created a successful Japan.”*

Lee had long pondered why some people, or societies, were better - more skilled, hard-driving, predisposed to success - than others. Why indeed were some communities able to

progress faster? How is it certain ethnic groups were more driven in the pursuit of material wealth? What explained the dominance of some races in the upper echelons in societies, or in certain professions? Why did they emerge ahead of other ethnic groups in multiracial settings? Was it in the genes, a product of history, or both?

These were not just the philosophical musings of a curious intellect. They were practical matters Lee believed had to be addressed if a society was to succeed and stay ahead. The answers to these questions were crucial if one were to understand the forces working with, or against, a people in their effort to improve their lot. He had to know. And he believed that any government that was interested in achieving better standards of living for its people would also have to face these issues squarely, touchy and thorny though they may be.

He grappled with these questions for many years. What was it, for example, that made the Jews renowned for their shrewdness and intellectual prowess? Why were Jews from some backgrounds more successful than others? One answer was suggested to him by an American Jew he met.

*“I’ve always wondered: why are the Jews so extraordinarily smart and why are the European Jews smarter than the Arab Jews? If you look at the Nobel Prize winners, they tend to be Ashkenazi Jews, not Sephardi Jews. (I was reading a book called *The Jewish Mystique*. It was recommended to me by a Jewish banker, an American Jew, a top American banker.) Its explanation, I did not know this, was that from the 10th to 11th century in Europe, in Ashkenazim, the practice developed of the rabbi becoming the most desirable son-in-law because he is usually the brightest*

*in the flock. He can master Hebrew, he can master the local language and he can teach it. So he becomes the son-in-law of the richest and the wealthiest. He marries young, is successful, probably bright. He has large numbers of children and the brightest of his children will become the rabbi and so it goes on. It's been going on for nine, ten centuries. The same thing did not happen among the Sephardis, they did not have this practice. So one had a different pattern of procreation from the other, and so we have today's difference. That was his explanation.*

*“The Catholic Church had a different philosophy. All the bright young men became Catholic priests and did not marry. Bright priests, celibate, produce no children. And the result of several generations of bright Fathers producing no children? Less bright children in the Catholic world.*

*“In the older generations, the pattern of procreation was settled by economics and culture. The richer you are, the more successful you are, the more wives you have, the more children you have. That's the way it was settled.”*

Closer to home, Lee noted similarly striking differences between the various ethnic groups in multiracial Singapore, as well as among various subgroups within each race. Looking around him in the Singapore Cabinet, he found a disproportionate number of Teochew Chinese, whose ancestors hailed from villages in southern China, as well as Hakkas, Lee's own dialect group. He did not believe this was pure chance.

*“Look at the number of smart Teochews there are ... just count them. Teo Chee Hean, Lim Hng Kiang, George Yeo,*

**Teochew —  
The second  
most prevalent  
Chinese  
dialect group  
in Singapore,  
with 212,600  
speakers.  
Top on the  
list is Hokkien  
(465,500)  
and third is  
Cantonese  
(203,400).**

*Lim Boon Heng. Is it a coincidence? In a Cabinet of 15, how do you explain that? For that matter, the Hakkas consider themselves very special too. They are tough, resourceful, they were latecomers who got squeezed to the mountainous areas of the south when they came from the north. They were the only Chinese group that did not bind their women's feet, because they lived on hilly terrain, had to make a living and couldn't afford to have women with feet bound. You also have more Hakkas in the Cabinet than are represented in the population. They are supposed to be harder-working, tougher and therefore higher-achievers. So there are these differences even within the races."*

## **WHAT THE PORTERS TOLD LEE**

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Lee's observations of ethnic and cultural differences began as early as his student days in Cambridge and were to continue throughout his life during his many travels abroad.

*"I visited Europe during my vacation (as a student) and then saw India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Indonesia, Japan, Germany ... You look for societies which have been more successful and you ask yourself why. On my first visit to Germany, in 1956, we had to stop in Frankfurt on our way to London. We had [earlier] stopped in Rome. This languid Italian voice over the loudspeaker said something ... And there were Italian workers trundling trolleys at the airport. It was so relaxed, the atmosphere and the pace of work.*

*“Then the next stop was Frankfurt. And immediately, the climate was a bit cooler and chillier. And a voice came across the loudspeaker: ‘Achtung! Achtung!’ The chaps were the same, porters, but bigger-sized and trundling away. These were people who were defeated and completely destroyed and they were rebuilding. I could sense the goal, the dynamism.*

*“Then Britain - well, they were languid, gentlemanly. With welfare, the British workers were no longer striving. They were getting West Indians to do the dirty jobs as garbage collectors, dustmen, conductors. They were still drivers because that was highly paid, the conductors were paid less.*

*“So one was looking for a soft life, the other was rebuilding and pushing. That made a vivid impression, a very deep impression on me.*

*“I also visited Switzerland when I was a student in ’47, ’48, on holiday. I came down by train from Paris to Geneva. Paris was black bread, dirty, after the war. I arrived at Geneva that morning, sleeping overnight. It was marvellous. Clean, beautiful, swept streets, nice buildings, marvellous white pillowcases and sheets, white bread after dark dirty bread and abundant food and so on. But hardworking, punctilious, the way they did your bed and cleaned up your rooms. It told me something about why some people succeed and some people don’t. Switzerland has a small population. If they didn’t have those qualities, they would have been overrun and Germany would have taken one part and the French another, the Italians would have taken another part. And that’s the end of them.*

*“... the Japanese. Yes, I disliked their bullying and their hitting people and torturing people [during the Japanese Occupation], a brutal way of dealing with people. But they have admirable qualities. And in defeat, I admired them. For*



Japanese PoWs being put to work in Singapore, following the end of World War II.

*weeks, months, they were made, as prisoners, to clean the streets in Orchard Road, Esplanade and I used to watch them. Shirtless, in their dirty trousers but doing a good job. You want me to clean up? Okay, I clean up, that's my job. None of this reluctance, you know, and humiliated shame. My job is to clean up; all right, I clean up. I think that spirit rebuilt Japan. It was a certain attitude to life. That assured their success."*

These impressions had a lasting impact on Lee. They confirmed in his mind the idea that there were profound forces which shaped, and continue to influence, the qualities of peoples. To understand these, he believed one had to delve deep into history, as well as the collective memories of a community.

*"If you read the history of East Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia, you will find that a different culture developed in East Asia, primarily from China, that slowly spread over the whole of East Asia - Korea, Japan and Vietnam. Up to 800, 900 years ago, Vietnam and Korea were part of China. And even when they were not part of China, they were vassals or tributary states that acknowledged China as supreme. They all used the Chinese script. Vietnam used the Chinese script. The Vietnamese have Chinese names. You can render their names*

*into Chinese ... an Italian priest came along and romanised it. And the Koreans too, they still use Chinese script. And the Japanese.*

*“Buddhism was an overlay. When Buddhism got imported from India into China, and into Japan from China, from Dunhuang where the Buddhist caves were, Buddhism was transformed. It is not the difference between Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism. The difference was there in East Asian culture, already in being, when Buddhism was imported slightly more than 2,000 years ago. So Buddhism underwent a change and it became Mahayana Buddhism to fit in with a different culture. Even in their meditation techniques, between the Chinese and the Japanese, there’s a slight difference. Because when Buddhism reached Japan, it underwent another transformation, it got ‘Japanised’. I have been to these Buddhist temples. Zen Buddhists, theirs is a stricter discipline. There is a certain Japaneseness about it.*

*“But throughout East Asia, because they were influenced by China and probably not just by culture alone, there must have been a lot of similar genes, similar stock, probably the physical makeup was not very different, so they were very intense types, hard-driving, hard- striving people. Whereas if you go to India, you’ll find sadhus, holy men, people who abjure the world, who go around giving land away or begging from the rich to give to the poor. It’s a totally different culture. There’s the sort of Gandhi saintliness. It’s not the model in China. In China, the model is either Three Kingdoms or Shui Hu Zhuan, Water Margin, the kind of hero who forms a robber band and kills off wealthy people. You don’t go begging from the wealthy to give to the poor. You just kill the wealthy and take from them.*

*“So it is a completely different philosophy to guide a man in*

*life. The Indians have a more tolerant and forgiving approach to life. More next-worldly. If you do good, then in the next world you'll get rewarded."*

These observations led Lee to conclude that nature and nurture had combined to produce distinct "tribes" or ethnic groups which were different in their genetic and cultural makeup. Some of these were more predisposed to success. At one time, he contended that as much as 80 per cent of this was due to nature. Later, rather than become embroiled in the ongoing nature versus nurture debate, he would assert that whatever the relative importance of the two factors, there was no denying one central fact: that, willy-nilly, culture was a key determinant of the success of certain groups over the years. In this regard, not all men or cultures were equal, Lee believed, contrary to the politically correct cultural relativism of the day.

*"I started off believing all men were equal ... I now know that's the most unlikely thing ever to have been, because millions of years have passed over evolution, people have scattered across the face of this earth, been isolated from each other, developed independently, had different intermixtures between races, peoples, climates, soils.*

*"You take the American Red Indian. He is genetically a Mongolian or Mongoloid, the same as the Chinese and the Koreans. But they crossed over, according to the anthropologists and the geologists, when the Bering Straits was a bridge between America and Asia. But for a few thousand years, in Asia, they had invading armies to-ing and fro-ing, huge infusions of different kinds of genes into the population from Genghis Khan, from the Mongols, from the Manchus, God*

*knows how many invasions. And in the other, isolation, with only the buffaloes, until the white men came and they were weak and defenceless against white men's diseases and were eliminated. So whilst they were identical in stock, origin, they ended up different.*

*"I didn't start off with that knowledge. But by observation, reading, watching, arguing, asking, that is the conclusion I've come to.*

*"This is something which I have read and I tested against my observations. We read many things. The fact that it's in print and repeated by three, four authors does not make it true. They may all be wrong. But through my own experience, meeting people, talking to them, watching them, I concluded: yes, there is this difference. Then it becomes part of the accepted facts of life for me."*

## **THE CULTURAL X-FACTOR**

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But being "part of the accepted facts of life", as Lee put it, did not mean that these observations were only to shape his intellectual map of the world about him. More importantly, they were to influence profoundly his thinking on the best approach to economic and social development. Understanding the cultural forces at work in the region where Singapore was situated was a significant part of the process of transforming it into the economic dynamo it is today. Without such an awareness of the cultural ethos at work, government policies were doomed to either failure or raising false hopes, Lee believed. In other words, to succeed, a society's leaders would

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## IF WE GET SWINE FEVER, WE'LL TELL THE WORLD

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The remarkable thing about Lee's belief in culture as an important factor for success is his willingness to bring it out into the open even though he knew it might cause offence in multi-racial Singapore. To a large extent, few others could have done it - be so brutally frank and yet cause no violent reaction among the population. Singaporeans have come to accept his style and indeed expect no less from him.

"We must have a tightly knit society, less exposed and more secure. To survive and keep standards up requires constant effort and organisation. If you slacken, if you give up, then the drains will clog up, traffic will snarl up, there will be flies, plague and pestilence.

"In other parts of the world, when their pigs suffer from swine fever, they hush it up. They pretend they do not have it. Net result: all pigs get infected, the position becomes permanently chronic.

have to know the nature of the people they were charged with.

Lee identified culture as a key factor in the success of societies in a speech in 1967. He added then that, fortunately for him and for Singapore, culture was in its favour.

*"I think you must have something in you to be a 'have' nation. You must want. That is the crucial thing. Before you have, you must want to have. And to want to have means to be able first, to perceive what it is you want; secondly, to discipline and organise yourself in order to possess the things you want - the industrial sinews of our modern economic base; and thirdly, the grit and the stamina, which means cultural mutations in the way of life in large parts of the tropical areas of the world where the human being has never found it necessary to work in the summer, harvest before the autumn, and save it up for the winter.*

*"In large areas of the world, a cultural pattern is determined by many things, including climatic conditions. As long as that persists, nothing will ever emerge. And for it to emerge, there must be this desire between contending factions of the 'have' nations to try and mould the 'have-not' nations after their own selves. If they want that strongly enough, competition must act as an accelerator, and no more than an accelerator to the creation of*

We can do likewise. But we will become permanently a chronic society: sick. So when we get swine fever, we announce it, alert everyone so that we can arrest the spread of the disease and bring back normalcy. This is what is required of this community: all the time, that push, that thrust to counter the natural sluggishness which this climate tends to build into our physical system, and, all that while, we must have an awareness of the realities of life.

“We can build the industries. We have what sociologists call a highly ‘achievement-orientated’ type of society. For every boy, every girl here tonight, there are fathers and mothers egging them on to perform better than the other pupils in school. Not all societies have this. In many societies, they are quite happy just to sit down under the banyan tree and contemplate their navel. So when there is famine they just die quietly. Here, they will not die quietly. If there is no food they will do something, look for somebody, break open stores, do something, plant something, and if they have to die, they die fighting for the right

*modern, industrial, technological societies in the primitive agricultural regions of the world.*

*“I think Asia can be very clearly demarcated into several distinct parts - East Asia is one: it has got a different tempo of its own. So have South Asia and Southeast Asia. I think this is crucial to an understanding of the possibilities of either development for the good or development which is not in the interest of peace and human happiness in the region.*

*“I like to demarcate - I mean not in political terms - demarcate them half in jest, but I think half with some reality on the basis of difference in the tempo according to the people who know what these things are. I mean East Asia: Korea, Japan and mainland China and including the Republic of China in Taiwan and Vietnam. They are supposed to be Mahayana Buddhists. And then there is Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, Ceylon, which are supposed to be Hinayana Buddhists. According to the Hinayana Buddhists, if the bedbug disturbs you then you take your mattress and shake it off; there is that compassion not only for the human being but for the bedbug, and you give it another chance and you let it off. Either it finds its way on to some other creature or it finds its way back to your bed. But watching the Japanese over the years, I have not the slightest doubt that is not what they do. And I think this makes some difference. I am not talking now -isms or*

to live.

“We have done well for two years, better than I have dared to expect two years ago. But, let us have a sober appraisal of the problems ahead. ... there is nothing which we cannot solve, given a little time.

“A good, striving, hardy people cannot be kept down.”

(Speech at joint Alexandra and Queenstown community centres' National Day celebrations, August 15, 1967)

*ideologies. It is something deeper. It is part of the tempo, the way of life.”*

*(Speech to Foreign Correspondents Association, March 21, 1967)*

Lee believed it was precisely the underlying culture and values of the East Asian societies that had prevented them from being kept down. These cultural traits were the secret X-factor behind the so-called East Asian economic miracles.

Could other societies repeat their experience by emulating the economic policies they had adopted, as had been suggested by a 1994 World Bank report on the East Asian economies? Lee thought not. Unless the necessary values - hard work, thrift, an emphasis on education - were present, simply emulating the economic policies would not suffice to take others down the East Asian road to material progress, he contended.

In an interview with Foreign Affairs in 1994, he noted that the World Bank report had shied away from giving the cultural factor its full weight as a necessary condition for economic development.

*“If you have a culture that doesn't place much value in learning and scholarship and hard work and thrift and deferment of present enjoyment for future gain, the going will be*

*much slower. But the World Bank report's conclusions are part of the culture of American and, by extension, of international institutions. It had to present its findings in a bland and universalisable way, which I find unsatisfying because it doesn't grapple with the real problems. It makes the hopeful assumption that all men are equal, that people all over the world are the same. They are not. Groups of people develop different characteristics when they have evolved for thousands of years separately. Genetics and history interact ...*

*“Now if you gloss over these kinds of issues because it is politically incorrect to study them, then you have laid a land mine for yourself. This is what leads to the disappointments with social policies embarked upon in America with great enthusiasm and expectations, but which yield such meagre results. There isn't a willingness to see things in their stark reality. But then I am not being politically correct.”*

## **IS CULTURE DESTINY?**

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Having identified culture as a key determinant in the success of the society, Lee believed that governments had a role to play in creating the right cultural ethos which would help it get ahead materially.

Although he stressed the importance of culture and values he did not believe a society's rate of progress was predetermined. Culture, while a factor in success, did not fix its destiny. Nor was culture immutable. Ebbs and flows were found in the story of almost all societies, when underlying cultural tendencies gave way to other influences. Societies could also be shaped and



Lee was not one to accept that societies could not be changed. He would launch a myriad of campaigns to “Keep Singapore Clean”, stop spitting in the streets, encourage tree planting, and boost workers’ productivity. If the effort required him to take to sweeping the streets to set an example, he was quite game.

imbued with traits which improved their chances of success. This, he believed, was the task of its leaders.

Governments could not change the peoples they were charged with. Nor should it pretend that it could by promising to make good the unequal endowments that nature had bestowed on them - what it could do, however, was foster the environment and tenor of society to help the people achieve their best.

*“Genes cannot be created, right? Unless you start tinkering with it as they may be able to do one day. But the culture you can tinker with. It’s slow to change, but it can be changed - by experience - otherwise human beings will not survive. If a certain habit does not help survival, well, you must quickly unlearn that habit.”*

*“So I’ve got to try and get Singaporeans to emulate or to adopt certain habits and practices which will make Singapore succeed. If you go and act like the Italians and wander around gradually, take your own sweet time, trundling luggage, you are not going to have a good airport that can compete with other people in the world. You’ve got to hustle and bustle, now, get on with it! Clear the baggage quickly!”*

*“But I would say that if you had come to Singapore airport in the 1960s and you come to Singapore airport today, you would know that something has happened in the meantime and the place and the people are different, they are more effective.”*

*“Today, supposing your last stop was Bombay and you land in Singapore, I would think you’d be a bit grateful that your bags are handled so rapidly. There you are, here, take it. You are through customs in a shot.”*

# CHINESE OR SINGAPOREAN? THE PING-PONG TEST

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While the majority of Singaporeans were Chinese, Lee was ever mindful of the need to fashion a multiracial community in his fledgling state. The Chinese, while proud of their cultural heritage and keen to preserve the traditions which had helped them succeed, would have to be ever-mindful of the sentiments of the ethnic minorities in Singapore, as well as the Muslim communities that surrounded it.

“The past week of ping-pong was an interesting and important experience for Singapore. The question is: has the majority of our young people learnt that, although nearly 80 per cent of them are ethnic Chinese, they are Singaporeans? Or are they bemused enough to think that, being ethnic Chinese, they can identify themselves as members of a potential superpower? It is tempting to indulge in a sensation of greatness, without having to undergo the hardships and sacrifices of the people of China and, at the same time, as Singaporeans, enjoy the freer and better life here.

“When I watched the ping-pong on television the first night, I was slightly bewildered and angered. Instead of giving support and encouragement to our players, who were up against world-class opponents, a part of the crowd booed whenever our players played badly. I was also told that about 40 persons shouted slogans, wishing Chairman Mao long life. But there was no response to this from the bulk of the audience.

“However, from the second night on, there was no more booing. Instead, there were cheers whenever the visitors or our players acquitted



**Lee launched the Speak Mandarin campaign in 1979 to help Chinese Singaporeans preserve their mother tongue and to counter the erosion of traditional values.**

themselves well in any rally.

“No one can ask of Singapore Chinese not to be ethnic Chinese. And it would be unnatural not to feel pleasantly reassured that, as Chinese, we are not unequal to other major ethnic and cultural groups in the world; that the Chinese, either because of ethnic or cultural attributes or both, are not inadequate and can make the grade, whatever the political system. But there are many people who are interested to know whether this ethnic, cultural and linguistic affinity will make us susceptible to manipulation through tugging at the heartstrings of our people and making them more Chinese-orientated and less Singaporean.

“After the past week, my assessment is that a portion can still be manipulated. But, unlike 10 years ago, the majority are now Singaporean. The situation should get better with each passing year. The orientation in our schools and the experience of the last 20 years have brought about this change.

“I believe a definite majority in Singapore are aware that our future, our destiny, depends on our ability to discern our collective interests and to protect these interests. For neither China nor any other country or government will protect us or our interests, just because we happen to be ethnic Chinese.”

*(Speech at the Hong Lim PAP branch 15th anniversary celebration dinner, July 14, 1972)*

## WHEN DIFFERENT CULTURES MIX

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But identifying culture as the hidden X-factor that had helped certain societies do better than others raised a very thorny issue. These societies, such as Japan or Germany, were homogenous ones. How then would this cultural factor manifest itself in racially mixed societies? Lee was candid about his assessment of multiracial Singapore. He told the authors, “I have said openly that if we were 100 per cent Chinese, we would do better. But we are not and never will be, so we live with what we have.”

But what happens when people from differing cultures are mixed in a multiracial context? Would not the more hard-driving group streak ahead of those which placed less emphasis on the pursuit of material wealth? And how would the government of a nascent multiracial state deal with such a tricky problem?

Lee’s Malaysian experience in the early 1960s made clear to him the explosive nature of ethnic grievances, especially when there was a twinning of the ethnic and economic divides.

*“One of the problems which has worried me is the uneven rate of development within the community, because the Chinese, Indians, Ceylonese and Eurasians progress at a faster rate than our Malays. If we do not correct this imbalance, then, in another 10 to 20 years, we will have a Harlem, something not to be proud of. So from politics I have had to go to anthropology and sociology to seek the reasons for this.”*

*(Speech to Southeast Asia Business Committee, May 12, 1968)*

As with many other questions that Lee turned his mind to,

he would look up authorities, either through his reading or in face-to-face meetings, for possible answers. These he would ponder to help him make up his mind. In the case of the crucial question of why some ethnic groups performed less well than others, he was to cite, in a speech in May 1968, the work of sociologist Judith Djamour, who did research on the Malays in Singapore in the 1940s and 1950s.

She argued that Singapore Malays and Chinese “certainly appear to have different cultural values. Singapore Chinese on the whole considered the acquisition of wealth to be one of the most important aims in life, and almost an end in itself; they are indefatigable workers and keen businessmen. Singapore Malays, on the other hand, attached great importance to easy and graceful living.”

This view, Lee found, appeared to be supported by that of Bryan Parkinson, a Fellow at the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Hull. In the January 1968 issue of *Modern Asian Studies*, he attributed the cultural differences between the Malays and Chinese to their having different “maximising postulates”, or in other words, different ideas of what success meant, although neither view might be considered superior to the other. Parkinson wrote:

“This desire to succeed is no more absent from rural Malay society than it is from any other, but to the Malay success means something different from what it does, for example, to the Malaysian Chinese. The Chinese seem to regard success as being the improvement of their economic position even if this requires fundamental change or innovation. The Malays seem to regard success as doing what their forebears have approved and practised, but doing it as well as they can. Wealth and economic advancement are desired by the Malays, but not at the expense

of renouncing utterly the traditions and traditional occupations of their forebears to which they have grown accustomed. ...”

The upshot of this was of crucial significance. As Parkinson argued, “There is nothing irrational about Malay values, and to criticise them in terms of other values is reprehensible. But if the values of the Malays remain basically unaltered, and there is no reason in Malay terms to explain why they should alter, then it is likely that economic advance for them will remain relatively low.”

This was the worrisome conclusion that Lee was to reach. Given this background, he recognised that while efforts could be made to alleviate the situation and narrow the economic gaps between the races, the innate differences in aptitude and ability could not be wished away. Nor were the gaps likely to be bridged easily, or any time soon.

*“This poses an extremely delicate problem. We tried over the last nine years systematically to provide free education from primary school right up to university for any Singapore citizen who is a Malay. This is something we don’t give to the majority ethnic group - the Chinese. They pay fees from secondary school onwards. We don’t find it necessary to do it for the other ethnic minorities, because broadly speaking, they are making similar progress as the Chinese. All are achievement-orientated, striving, acquisitive communities.*

*“The reluctant conclusion that we have come to after a decade of the free education policy is that learning does not begin in school. It starts in the home with the parents and the other members of the family. Certainly the adoption of values comes more from the home, the mother, than the teacher. This means change will be a slow process. It can be accelerated in*

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## SINGAPORE'S MALAY DILEMMA

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Lee believed that government efforts could help communities improve their lot and help narrow the inequalities between various ethnic groups. But he was never under any illusion that the economic or ethnic divide would soon be bridged.

“I think we are foolish if we believe that these things can be wished away. There are deep and abiding differences between groups. And whatever we do, we must remember that in Singapore, the Malays feel they are being asked to compete unfairly, that they are not ready for the competition against the Chinese and the Indians and the Eurasians. They will not admit or they cannot admit to themselves that, in fact, as a result of history, they are a different gene pool and they do not have these qualities that can enable them to enter the same race.

“So there is a sense of being imperilled, endangered, running in a race in which they are bound never to win, or very few can win. You have this sense of being a

*some cases by our judicious intermingling of the communities so that, thrown into the more multiracial milieu we have in our new housing estates, Malay children are becoming more competitive and more striving.”*

*(Speech to Southeast Asia Business Committee, May 12, 1968)*

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## I DID THE EXACT OPPOSITE

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Having arrived reluctantly at the conclusion that the gap in performance between races would not be eliminated simply by providing the less well off with a head start through better educational and life opportunities, Lee did what would have been unthinkable to most politicians elsewhere - he went public, airing his observations and concerns before the whole country.

Not for him the race-blind approach, which sought to gloss over ethnic differences, whether out of political expedience or ethnic guilt. For Lee, that was an exercise in self-deception, or worse, raising false expectations. Nor would he brook programmes such as affirmative action schemes which he saw as misguided attempts to hobble the more adept in society so that others might catch up. This, he felt, would only hold the whole society back.

*“I did the exact opposite. Once I discovered that special tuition, special food and all this*

deprived, a sat-upon minority. That has been handled sensitively and I think more than fairly. We have made concessions, given them free education when everybody else has to pay, given them land for mosques when everybody else has to buy their land for the temples or churches.

“I do not believe that that solves the problem. We have diminished the problem by making them live together, scattered in the estates and at least they know that their neighbour is not a demon. You know, a Chinese neighbour can be just as friendly, although you will not borrow their kitchen utensils because there’s pork in the kitchen, but otherwise they are quite normal human beings. So it helps. But you will never dispel that sense of distinctiveness.

“At the very beginning, the Malays were not hardworking, nor were a lot of the Indians. We encouraged them to keep up. I’m not sure whether they will not feel a little resentful, but I mean this is part of history. I know that it took a long time before the Malays accepted that they had to work hard because it was not in their culture.

“Well, let me give you my expe-

*did not produce the necessary result, I looked up the prewar records and I found the same weaknesses in mathematics and so on. So I decided: first, inform the leaders and the elders and inform the teachers, then publish it. So please, let there be no misunderstanding. This has nothing to do with discrimination or lack of support or whatever. It’s a profound problem.*

*“The reasons why I did this are simple ones. This way, we are going to get results. The other way, we are going to confuse people and you’re going to get wrong results. Now, I suppose maybe it’s too touchy a problem to say this openly, but to pretend that we are all equal and therefore I am not in it because you have discriminated against my caste, so I need a quota - it’s going to lead to very unhappy consequences ...*

*“I do not believe that the American system of solving the problem stands any chance. First, they deny that there is a difference between the blacks and the whites. Once you deny that, then you’re caught in a bind. All right, if we are equal, then why am I now worse off? You have fixed me. The system has fixed me. So they say, right, let’s go for affirmative action. Lower marks to go to university, and you must have a quota for number of sales-persons or announcers on radio or TV. And so you get caught in a thousand and one different ways. And you say, since the army is now 30, 40 per cent blacks, you must have so many generals,*

rience. I was making a visit last week to some families who have upgraded, people with children who are in either late primary or early secondary school. And I moved from one flat to another flat, upgraded. One of the three families was a Malay family. And he's bought an executive flat, beautiful marble floor. All he had was 'O' levels in Malay language in Maju School, and his wife too. But he has learnt English. His wife is now working as a receptionist in some big firm of accountants. This chap had been working for an American firm making computer parts and selling them. Now, he's decided to branch out on his own and he's selling them in Malaysia and he's formed a company with a Bumiputra partner. And he is acting just like a Chinese. You know, he's bouncing, running around, to-ing and fro-ing. In the old culture, he would not be doing that.

"I'm not saying all of them have become like that. But here is one who has moved, shifted gears and has made his life a success."

*so many colonels, and so on.*

*"I don't know how they have got into this bind, but I think that is not realistic. You don't have to offend people because they are not as good as you. I mean I'm not as smart as an Israeli or many Chinese for that matter. But that doesn't mean that I'm not to be treated as equal in my rights as a human being.*

*"The only way we can all really be physiologically equal in brain power and everything else is to have a melange. All go into a melting pot and you stir it. In other words, force mixed marriages, which is what the people in Zanzibar tried. The blacks wanted to marry all the Arab girls so that the next generation, their children, will be half-Arab. But I don't think that's a practical way nor will it solve the problem. And you can't do that worldwide, you can - maybe you can do that in Zanzibar. In the process, you diminish Zanzibar.*

*'Because whereas before you had some outstanding people who can do things for Zanzibar, now you have brought them down to a lower level.*

*"So my attitude now would be a very practical one of saying that we are equal human beings. Whether you can run 100 yards in 20 minutes, 20 seconds or 10 seconds, you've got a right to be here. But that doesn't mean that because you run at 20 seconds, I must run at 20 seconds. Then we'll all get nowhere."*

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## SINGAPORE TOO WESTERNISED?

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Young people at a disco, a scene repeated in many nightspots. But more important than their “Western” exterior, Lee felt, was whether they retain the Asian core values.

When a group of Hongkong professionals, who met Lee in 1984 to discuss the Hongkong problem, told him that, in their eyes, Singapore was a very Westernised country, his antennae immediately shot up. Hongkong, by comparison, they said, was a very Oriental society. Of all Singapore’s long-term problems, this question about how its values would change with affluence and modernisation is perhaps the most vexing for Lee. He knows that the nature of Singapore society will change in time, that change is inevitable. But will it be for the better? He shared his concern with Singaporeans in

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## WHEN CULTURES EBB

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But if culture and values could change over time, what was there to stop them from retrogressing instead of altering for the better? Could societies lose sight of their values? Might those traits which built a society be superseded by others which were less favourable to its continued success?

In this regard, Lee was to worry often that rising affluence among Singaporeans was producing a generation which was increasingly “soft”. Parents were indulging their children with their newfound wealth. Lee worried that the hard-driving virtues of the coolies and labourers who had built up the country might become displaced by the more languorous ways of their children, spoilt, ironically, by the fruits of their parents’ efforts.

*“The danger is very real and very present because parents who have got through a hard life give their children what they’d missed - comfort, all the sweets, all the toys, all the jeans and fancy shoes which they wish they had had when they were young. That breeds a certain attitude of mind in the young which is not very good for them.*

*“They ought to begin to learn to do things. When I was a little boy, I changed the screw,*

this speech to students at the two local universities in 1988.

“I met a group of Hongkong professionals who were extremely uneasy, and we discussed a scheme that would make it possible for them to consider using Singapore as a perch in case of need, and continuing to work in Hongkong. At the end of their stay, when I met them, they said, ‘You are a very Western society, we are very Chinese.’ I said, what’s the difference? They said, ‘Your people, right down to ordinary workers, they look so Westernised, their behaviour is extremely Western. We are very Oriental.’

“... As I met friends, looked up their data, I discovered that this casual remark had profound significance. This was ’84. It’s the software in the younger generation which will determine whether Singapore continues to thrive, to prosper, to be a dynamo as it used to be, as it has been, or whether it will plateau like so many Western societies, like Europe or Britain, where they’ve just lost steam. They don’t see the point of striving and achieving any more. They’re just comfortable and they’re happy. And the Europeans in particular,

*the pin of my top. You buy a top, a wooden sphere, pear-shaped. And you change it [the pin] from a nail to a screw and you sharpen your screw and you put thumbtacks on the back of the top to armour-plate it, then you fight other people’s tops. So it was a game but in which you contributed something into what you were doing.*

*“Or I caught fighting fish, went into monsoon drains. Along Changi Road, there were rubber estates in what is now Kampong Kembangan. In those ditches, you could get fighting fish. You went home and bred them. Some became fierce. Some were washouts, they ran away. But you were doing something.*

*“Now, they are sitting down, watching television and given teddy bears and little toys. Of course, because of that danger, we keep on physical activities in school, discipline, we try to counteract that. But you see the obesity, it’s great. It’s born out of ignorance. Parents think they’re doing their children good. But in fact they’re harming their children.”*

But the community’s traditional values faced a threat not only from within. Being a highly open society, Singapore was constantly exposed to other cultures. Lee feared that Singaporeans, subject to a barrage of Western values, through the media and travel, could lose the cultural traits that had underpinned the country’s success. Socioeconomic changes, unleashed

more than the Americans, they feel comfortable with an enlarged community in 1992. They can afford some protectionism. It does not matter if world trade becomes too fierce and too competitive for them. Life could go on, for at least some time. ...

“What is it that we should consider core values? I don’t think how you dress, whether you wear shorts or ties or open-neck shirts, or wear your hair short or long, makes the slightest difference. Unless it’s a manifestation of an inner urge. But these core values, I believe, are basic. Do you consider your basic relationships to be fundamental? The human relationships. What Confucius described as the five critical relationships. Mencius epigrammatised it in this way ... ‘Love between father and son, one; two, duty between ruler and subject; three, distinction between husband and wife; four, precedence of the old over the young; and five, faith between friends.’ Father and son, ruler and subject, husband and wife, old over young, faith between friends. In other words, the family is absolutely the fundamental unit in society. From family, to extended family, to clan, to nation.”

when more Singapore women were drawn into the workforce, had also left them with less time to nurture their children and pass on traditional values as had been done in the past.

Lee would lament this development time and again. He believed that efforts would have to be redoubled to help Singaporeans maintain their traditions and values if the society here was to keep the cultural “X-factor” that enabled it to thrive. Nothing, in this regard, was more important than preserving the family as the most basic and fundamental unit of society. A society able to do so would find half its problems solved, and would not require government, with its unwieldy bureaucracy and its tendency to succumb to corruption and lobby groups, to intervene. Indeed, he would place blame for much of the social ills of the West on the break-up of the family unit.

Lee therefore moved to enshrine the family as the “basic building block in society” and as one of Singapore’s Shared Values. These cultural signposts had helped the country along its way in the past and would be vital guides in the tumultuous times of cultural confusion ahead as it became more international and cosmopolitan.

*“... to succeed, we must decide, yes, this is a problem, we are under assault, what is it we want to keep? ... Have we changed? Let’s go through some of the basic core values.*

*“Strong family ties? Yes, but only the*

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## RELIGIOUS HARMONY ACT: “WE WERE HEADED FOR TROUBLE!”

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Freedom of worship is enshrined in the Singapore constitution. By and large there have been few problems keeping the religious peace since independence in 1965 despite the multi-religious composition of the people. But a new law passed in 1991, to pre-empt future problems from overzealous groups out to convert others to their faith, makes it an offence to proselytise in a way that would cause disharmony among the religious groups. Lee explains why it was necessary.

“Religion is at the core of any culture and Islam and Catholicism are two of the most exacting religions which command your way of life. Just like Judaism does. If you read the Talmud, what you should do, what you can eat, what you can't eat, who you can marry, who you can't marry, when you have sex, when you should not have sex and so on, it's all laid down in the book. It's an injunction...

“So I would say that if we had a

*immediate family, the nuclear family, father, mother, children. It does not include grandfather, uncles, cousins. They're remote. They live somewhere else, in some other flat, perhaps near by and they can leave the baby with them. But the links are not as close as when I grew up.*

*“I grew up in a big extended family home. A rambling house in Siglap, Katong. I grew up with a wealth of cousins ... There were five households - grandparents and four married sons and daughters and their children. So the relationship was a close one until, just before the war, we set up home on our own. But because the years of childhood were years of living in an extended family, the bonds are close.*

*“Marriage pattern? Altered beyond recognition. The arranged marriages are gone. Children are better educated than their parents. They decide the parents' ways and tastes and choices are not acceptable. The result, you all know.*

*“Relationship with authority? Ruler and subject by and large still abiding. But the older generation is more deferential, respectful of ministers, of officials, than the younger generation. I'm not saying it's good or bad. It's just an observation. .*

*“Thrift, hard work, faith between friends? Hard work, yes; thrift, with CPF, less so.*

majority who were either Catholics or Muslims, then Singapore would never have developed in this way because the majority would demand that the minority comply, or at least do not publicly show a different way of life ... But the majority happen to be Chinese Taoists, Buddhists. And Buddhism is a very mild sort of, not an exacting religion. Ancestor worshippers, Confucianists. So it was a very relaxed situation, so long as we live and let live. Now don't go and force him into your religion. If you want to convert, don't do it in an aggressive way. And don't convert a chap who already belongs to a religion that's fiercely against conversion. Avoid that. So we have succeeded.

“But when the Christians became very active and evangelical,... wanting to convert the Muslims, and the Catholics decided to go in for social action, we were heading for trouble! So the Buddhists reacted. And this Japanese group, Nichiren Soshu, very active group - huge Buddhist groups were growing rapidly in our polytechnics and universities and in reaction to all these Christians - they were being threatened. We

*Faith between friends - I have not noticed deterioration, but with time, with mobility, we may get what Alvin Toffler once described as 'the disposable society'. As you move up, you dispose of your furniture, your old wives, your old clothes and you acquire new ones and you dispose of your friends too. ...*

*“By and large, it's a problem still at the top. Only the highly educated have that degree of bi-culturism where they are more Western than Eastern. At the middle and in the lower ranges, it's still very much an Asian society. The Western habits, songs, dances, whether it's a disco or Swing Singapore, their dress styles or their fast foods, that's just a veneer. But if it seeps down, if we are not conscious of what is happening and we allow this process to go on unchecked, and it seeps down, then I believe we have a bigger problem to deal with, where the middle ranges will also be more Western than Asian.*

*“I would hate to believe that the poor, ragged, undernourished Chinese coolie and the equally ragged Malay peon and driver and Indian labourer had the inner strength to build today's Singapore, and their children with all the nice mod clothes, well-fed, all the vitamins, all the calories, protein, careful dental care, careful medical checks, PT, well-ventilated homes, they lost that inner drive.”*

*(Speech to NUS/NTI students Aug 22, 1998)*

would have headed for trouble quite unnecessarily. We've just got out of one trouble - communism and Chinese chauvinism and Malay chauvinism - and you want to land into another? Religious intolerance? It's just stupid. Stay out of politics. The Religious Harmony Act was passed; after that, it subsided.

"You cannot begin converting others and taking a tough line and expect others not to react, because they are losing their followers. You use the church for political purposes, the other religions will also enter the political arena, or they will lose out. So, as I told the Catholics and the Christians, 'The Muslims must react. The Buddhists are reacting. And I will help the majority because the Buddhists are in the majority. And do you want that?' So they stopped and agreed.

"Well, it's part of the law, and it will be enforced if anybody breaches it. But if you ask the human rights groups, that's a violation of human rights, we should allow everybody to do what they like. Free speech and free conversions, then you'll have an enlightened society. I do not accept that as the happy conclusion or outcome."

Preserving the society's cultural ethos was not just a matter of culture. For Lee, it was a question of survival. Singapore society succeeded because it was quintessentially Singaporean. Lose that, and all would be lost.

*"We could not remain what we were, but we cannot change totally or we will be destroyed. If we change so thoroughly that we lose the qualities that have ensured our survival as a community or as different communities, what will guarantee us that American or British culture will see our survival with their atomistic approach to life? I don't think we'll survive." ●*

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# **SPEECHES & INTERVIEWS**

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The following are key speeches  
Lee Kuan Yew made during his political  
career, and extracts of interviews he gave  
the authors in 1994 and 1995

## My childhood catching fish, flying kites

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I didn't do any work. I was too keen on running around, catching fighting fish in the drains along Changi Road, Joo Chiat Road. They were all rubber estates and they had these open drains. At the open drains ... you can catch good fighting fish and you keep them in bottles and you bury them in the earth and then you feed them with worms and you put a bit of green plants to oxygenate the water. There was great fun also flying kites and putting the thread on two poles, pounding the glue and the glass, fixing the line so you can cut the other fellow's line. And then playing tops: you armour your top, you get a top and you put thumbtacks, polish it up and then you hit the other fellow's and make a scar on his. It was a more do-it-yourself, amuse yourself childhood than what children now have, where toys are just given to them to be amused. But here, you've got to amuse yourself," which I think in retrospect was a better way.

"In primary school, I had no trouble doing well. Probably because my fellow students were poor and they were not very bright and advantaged ... I had no trouble staying ahead of the class, so I did not try at all. I had to try later on in RI because then I met the top 150 from all over Singapore. When I got to RI, the first year, we were divided into five classes - A, B, C, D, E ... We came from different schools. The segregation, the streaming, started in standard seven. So I had to make an effort in standard

six to make sure that I got to the top class in standard seven and got the better teachers and was with the faster students. So when I got to standard six in 1936, I began to make some effort.

“It was a leisurely life. They were the best and the brightest; I had to work harder than in Telok Kurau, but there was a lot of time. I played cricket. Later, in the Junior Cambridge class, I played tennis. I also took up chess, swimming. I joined the Scouts for two or three years. I don’t think I liked football. I don’t know why I preferred cricket. I do not remember it as an intense period. I made some effort in standard six, then I got into 7A. I think I came second in the school, and the chap who came first was a fellow called Teo Kah Leong, who later got into the admin service.

“Then in Junior Cambridge, there was a scholarship going - awarded on standard seven results, about two or three hundred dollars a year for the first student and the second student. ... Sol put in an effort and I got the scholarship and I bought myself a Meister bicycle - German bicycle, sold by a shop in Victoria Street ... So that was my first purchase in life. I earned it. I bought it.

“Then the next year, based on Junior Cambridge results, I came first, so I got another big scholarship, the Tan Jiak Kim scholarship. This time, \$350, vast sum at that time, and I bought myself a Raleigh bicycle. I upgraded from a Meister to a Raleigh. By that time, I was hoping to go up to the special class and sit for the Queen’s scholarship. Because I came top in the School Certificate ... the John Anderson scholarship was open that year, tenable in Raffles College, so I got this scholarship to Raffles College. It was the best-going scholarship then, roughly \$900 a year, which paid for all my fees and my stay at the hostel too and left me with a bit extra.” ●

# The returned student

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This is probably the most important political speech Lee Kuan Yew made in his early years as a student in Cambridge. He was speaking at the Malayan Forum, a political grouping of Singapore and Malayan students formed by Goh Keng Swee, Tun Razak and Maurice Baker. In this speech, in January 1950, he analysed the political situation in Malaya, the race problem there, and the coming battle with the communists. His message: the English-educated, especially those like him, studying in England, were the best placed to assume power from the British. But ultimately the battle would be with the communists, in a struggle which he predicted would be a violent one.



## **Platitudes and controversy**

This is not a learned paper with carefully garnered and marshalled facts, buttressed by an impressive mass of statistics. Rather it is a personal evaluation of the political problems facing us, and a personal interpretation of the lines along which we should act if we are to rise up to the situation instead of waiting passively for events to overtake and overwhelm us. Its purpose is to stimulate rather than to inform. Many of my propositions may be controversial, but where it is a choice between platitudes and personal convictions, I feel it is my duty to state my convictions vigorously, for one great obstacle to a rapid and orderly political development of Malaya has been and still is the Malayan habit of ignoring unpalatable facts and avoiding unpleasant controversy.

## **Crumbs from the table, British and Japanese**

The superior social and economic position of the returned student is a fact in Malayan society. Whether this privileged position enjoyed as a class is justifiable is quite another matter. But it is the inevitable accompaniment of the supremacy of the British in the country. The English in Malaya forms the ruling caste. He has superimposed on the people his language, institutions and way of life. His is the model of perfection, and the closer an approximation to his standards the individual Asiatic attains the better his social and economic position. That is beyond controversy. In the few years the Japanese were the ruling caste, there were already signs that the nearer one was to being a Japanese, the better off one was going to be in a Japanese-dominated Malaya. Had they stayed long enough, I have no doubt that those of us who could speak Japanese, who behaved like the Japs and who had been educated in Japan would have been the most favoured class of Malaysians. For they would have been the most acceptable to the rulers, who because of their economic and military hold on the country, could dispense extra privileges. Many of us will remember the unhappy spectacle of English-speaking, Western-educated colleagues suddenly changing in their manner of speech, dress and behaviour, making blatant attempts at being good imitation Japs. Indeed some were sent to Japan so as to be better educated, to enlighten their ignorant countrymen in Malaya and doubtless also to become the privileged class, second only to the genuine Japanese himself. It is pertinent to note that the Malayan student returned from Britain ceased under Japanese domination to occupy that second-class status, except in so far as it was impracticable to dispense with his services for the time being.

It is four years now since the British have returned. For them, nothing could be better than to revert to the pleasant orderly society of 1939. Once again the English-educated are given their old privileges; and of this English-educated class, the returned student forms the uppermost crust.

### **Our eminent neighbours**

It is relevant to observe the part this class (the returned student) has played in British-dominated India, Dutch-dominated Indonesia, and American-dominated Philippines. In the brief space of four years, we have seen the emergence of six Asiatic countries to national independence: India, Pakistan, Burma, Ceylon, Indonesia, Philippines. Malaya now finds herself the only remnant of colonial imperialism left in Southeast Asia surrounded by these new Asiatic national states. The only other fragment of colonialism left in Asia is French Indo-China, and at this very moment, we are watching the last desperate French attempts to salvage what little they can from that unhappy country for the French national income.

In all these new Asiatic states, it is the returned students who have led the fight for independence. The Indians, Pakistanis, Ceylonese and Burmese returned from England, the Indonesians returned from Holland, the Philippines returned from America - they have formed the spearhead of national movements. We now see as prime minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, educated at Harrow and Cambridge; as premier of Pakistan, Mohamed Liaquat Ali Khan, educated at Oxford; as premier of Burma, Thakin Nu, educated at Cambridge; as premier of Indonesia, Dr

Hatta, educated at Leyden University, Holland; and last but not least, as leader of Viet Minh, Dr Ho Chi Minh, educated at Paris, where he first joined the Communist Party.

### **What might have been**

If this should conjure visions of future greatness in any of us, I hasten to add that the pattern of events never quite repeats itself, and there are cogent reasons for believing that this pattern will not do so in Malaya. Had there not been the difficult racial problem in Malaya, had there not been a Chinese community almost as large as Malays, had the population been six million, all Malays, I venture to suggest that British imperialism in Malaya would be well on its way out. But the facts being what they are, we must accept British rule for some time, time during which we can attain a sufficient degree of social cohesion, and acquire a sufficient degree of civic and political consciousness among the various races of Malaya. This time is vital if we are to avoid a political vacuum that may otherwise follow British withdrawal from Malaya.

### **And what is**

Returned students in any British colony fall broadly into two classes:

- (1) the rich man's son
- (2) the impecunious government scholar

The first, on returning home, finds himself better equipped to be a bigger and more efficient capitalist entrepreneur. The second finds himself linked up with the colonial administrative system, given positions second only to the Englishman, who

must necessarily in a colonial system always be at the top. But they will be better off than their fellow Asiatics who have not been to England. Hence both groups, on returning to Malaya, find themselves a part of the vested interests of the country, both somewhat reluctant to dislodge the system under which they enjoy these advantages.

### **British dilemma**

It is significant that Colonial Office policy since the war has been to increase the number of scholars sent to England. This is no doubt, in part, a sincere attempt to carry out Labour's election programme of 1945, when they promised that the colonial peoples should be helped to self-government. But I think there is equally no doubt that this policy is also intended, to a large extent, to ally the potential leaders of a potential Malayan nationalist movement with the existence of British rule in Malaya. These men and women, if left frustrated and underprivileged in Malaya, would turn their energies to the overthrow of a system where they are not given the opportunity to attain what they feel is their rightful due from society. So it is that empires exist, that one nation by economic and military supremacy is able to dominate another and to continue to keep it subject for a long time afterwards, although there is no intrinsic superiority in individuals of the master over individuals of the subject race. But no matter how enlightened a colonial policy, it must finally end. That is the British dilemma. To quote from a learned treatise by a professor of anthropology at London University who was in Malaya before the war, and whose book *Malay Fisherman* was published before the British re-occupation, at page 306:

“Quite apart from any disorganisation resulting from the war, and from any conservatism, apathy and suspicion that may be met, there are two major political and economic issues that have to be faced. One is the question of the kind of relations which should exist between Chinese and Malays in Malaya; the other is the question of the place which the British wish to occupy. With postwar reconstruction should certainly come a more positive policy for Chinese-Malay relations in the Malay States, giving more definite political opportunities to the Chinese and more enlarged economic assistance to the Malays. It does seem evident that the old Colonial system, with a comparatively small group of Europeans as the dominant power, is a temporary historical phase; that with the advance of modern technology and education there is almost bound to be ultimately a transfer of responsibility to the major groups resident in the country.”

### **The sun must set**

Empires never last for ever. Either the master and subject races finally merge into one unified society as in Britain, where the Welsh and Scots, once English-dominated, now form part of one political society, enjoying equal rights with the English. Or the empire ends with the subject races violently resisting and finally emerging as a separate national and political entity as in the case of the Irish Republic, India, Pakistan and Indonesia. The indefinite continuance of the subjugation of one race over another is only possible where the subject race is inherently, both mentally and physically, inferior. Anthropologists are unable to prove any innate superiority of one race over another. This scientific fact and the historical fact that no empire has been able to last more than a thousand years is, I think, no mere coincidence.

We in Malaya are now seeing British domination after over a hundred years enter its last phase. Colonial imperialism in Southeast Asia is dead except in Malaya, and our generation will see it out. No sane man, whether he be English, Malay, Indian, Eurasian, or Chinese, can honestly study the situation in that part of the world and not come to the conclusion that either with or without the opposition of the Western-educated intelligentsia in Malaya, British imperialism will end. The two things we the returned students can help to decide are: firstly, how soon and orderly the change will be, and secondly, whether we shall find a place at all in the new Malaya. At the moment it is clear that the only party organised to force the British to leave, and to run the country, is the Communist Party. They are not merely so many bandits, shooting and being shot at in the jungle, and creating terror for the sake of terror. Theirs is a tightly knit organisation making their bid for power.

### **A greater evil**

It is this element of international communism which I fear will make the pattern of development that has unfolded in India, Burma, Ceylon, etc. unlikely in Malaya. In all these countries the leaders from the educated classes, the returned students, had time to organise and were already organised, like the Indian Congress Party, before international communism became a force in the political life of these countries. But this does not mean that communism is not a force in these countries. It is, right now, the biggest threat to the newly established national governments of Asia.

How far these governments can counter the appeal and force of communism will depend on how far they are bold enough to carry out social reforms in the teeth of their own vested interests. That is another feature in the political development of our neighbours: the active support of native capitalists in the national aspirations of their fellow countrymen.

But it is abundantly clear to Malayan vested interests, and that would include Chinese and Indian commercial interests, the Malay royal families, and the professional classes, that with the disappearance of the British Raj must also disappear the great inequality in wealth of the peoples of Malaya. For any independent Malayan government to exist, it must win popular support, and to gain any popular support it must promise and do social justice. Indeed, and this is a fact important enough to warrant repetition, the continued existence of the new Asiatic states depends upon whether they are able to carry out long overdue reforms; whether they can, without the communist religion, do all that a communist state can do for the masses.

### **The lesser evil**

We, the returned students, would be the type of leaders that the British would find relatively the more acceptable. For if the choice lies, as in fact it does, between a communist republic of Malaya, and a Malaya within the British Commonwealth, led by the people who despite their opposition to imperialism still share certain ideals in common with the Commonwealth, there is little doubt which alternative the British will find the lesser evil.

Despite the general political apathy that exists in Malaya there

are many who are awakening to the critical position Malaya is in, both internally and in relation to the rest of Southeast Asia. If we, who can become the most privileged part of the local population under British rule, openly declare that British imperialism must go, the effect would be immediate.

But if we do not give leadership, it will come from the other ranks of society, and if these leaders attain power, as they will with the support of the masses, we shall find that we, as a class, have merely changed masters. The difference between the British, Japs and the new masters who will arise if we remain unorganised will be a difference only of degree and not of kind.

### **What we must do**

The first problem we face is that of racial harmony between Chinese and Malays. The second is the development of a united political front that will be strong enough without resorting to armed force, to demand a transfer of power. To both these problems, we the Malayan students in England, whatever our race and creed, can make a substantial contribution. If we who are thought of as the intelligentsia of Malaya cannot make a sincere start right now towards a solution of these problems, the future is grim. No class in Malaya is better equipped to lead a Malayan nationalist movement. The common man in Malaya rightly or wrongly associates intelligence and ability with an education in England, perhaps for the reason that such an education makes possible a greater and more rapid acquisition of wealth in a British Malaya.

We have already seen the birth of Malay nationalism, we are seeing the first movements of a Malayan Chinese nationalism.

There is no doubt that the other racial groups will also organise themselves. This may be a prelude to a pan-Malayan movement, or it may be the beginning of serious dissensions and communalism that may end in another Palestine. The prerequisite of Malayan independence is the existence of a Malayan society, not Malay, not Malayan Chinese, not Malayan Indian, not Malayan Eurasian, but Malayan - one that embraces the various races already in the country. Were it possible to eliminate the non-Malay population by deporting them to their country of origin, there would be no danger of another Palestine. But even the most extreme Malay nationalist will concede that the Chinese, Indian and Eurasian population already in the country cannot be excluded by this simple process. Irresponsible communal leadership will bring disaster. Since, therefore, the non-Malay communities must be accepted as part of the present and future Malaya, it follows that unity must be attained.

We can study with profit the solution Switzerland has found for her racial problems. Here is a national state with three large racial groups - French, German and Italian - and a fourth small group, the Romansch, able to maintain its unity and independence through all the strain and stress of two world wars, when French, Germans and Italians were fighting on different sides. Whether we have the Palestinian or Swiss pattern emerging in Malaya is still in the balance.

### **A challenge**

The present political situation is rapidly changing. Colonialism with its fantastic discrepancies in wealth and power will end whether or not we do anything. It is not a question of our fighting

for independence in the way the Indian Congress Party fought for theirs. It is whether we are to play any part at all in the political life of the country. There is still time for us to organise ourselves into a force in the country. But the final question is what each individual returned student will do when he goes back to Malaya, for in the last eventuality, any party, any society, any body politic, consists of individuals.

There can be no leaders without a body to lead. There can be no body to lead if there is no cohesion. As single individuals, any Malayan nationalist who attempts to propagate ideas that would lead to the end of British Malaya would be considered undesirable by the British authorities. Their main interest is to prolong British control of our country. For them Malaya means dollars. Losing Malaya would mean a big widening of the dollar gap with consequent loss of essential imports to Britain and resulting unemployment. We must be prepared to see that whatever the political label of the British government in Britain, be it Conservative, Labour, or even Communist, British colonial policy in Malaya may remain unchanged in its fundamentals. A British Labour government may sincerely believe in socialist, egalitarian principles, but no British government can of its own free will give independence to Malaya and face the British electorate unabashed when the British cost of living index has gone up by some twenty points.

### **Our opportunity**

But our trump card is that responsible British leaders realise that independence must and will come to Malaya and that, therefore, it will be better to hand Malaya to leaders sympathetic

to the British mode of life, willing to be a member of the British Commonwealth, and what is most important, willing to remain in the sterling area. For the alternative is military suppression, a policy which another imperialist power has found impossible in Indonesia. We may take heart in the knowledge that no one can concede more graciously an already untenable position than the English. Our duty is clear: to help to bring about social cohesion, and to bring home to even the most diehard imperialist that his is an untenable position.

What actual steps we take when we get back will depend on the political temper at that time. Whether we can openly advocate and propagate our views or whether we should be more discreet and less vociferous is something that can be answered only when the time comes. Only if a spirit of cooperation and political independence is infused among our fellow Malaysians can pan-Malayan political parties really exist, and Malayan leadership emerge. We must break the soporific Malayan atmosphere and bring home the urgency of the problems facing us. We must break down the belief that we are inferior and will always remain inferior to the Europeans. If every returned student makes known his convictions to his own immediate circle, the cumulative effect will be tremendous. A small pebble dropped in a pond can cause extensive ripples. Without the countless unnamed Indian patriots who did their share in awakening a sense of national pride and dignity and independence, there could have been no Congress Party, no Gandhi, no Nehru and no Indian Republic.

### **Order or chaos?**

If we fail to fulfil our duty, the change that still will come must be

a violent one, for whatever the rights and wrongs of communism, no one can deny its tremendous appeal to the masses. Whatever our political complexion, from deep blue Tory to bright red communist, we must all remember that we are not indispensable in this struggle for freedom. But we can affect the speed and orderliness of the change. What the individual returning home chooses to do is a question of personal inclination, economic circumstances, and political convictions. But if the majority of us choose to do nothing, choose to believe that Malaya can be insulated from the nationalist revolts that have swept the European powers from Asia, then we may find that there is no place for us in the Malaya that is to be after the British have departed. ●

# If I were an Englishman

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Lee Kuan Yew's first election campaign was not in Singapore, for the People's Action Party, but in England, for the Labour Party during the 1950 British general election. To help his friend, David Widdicombe, the Labour candidate for Totnes, Devon, he drove a lorry, making the rounds in the constituency and stopping by the gates of factories, delivering speeches on the back of the vehicle. This speech, in early February 1950, focussed on how he saw the electoral fight between Labour and the Conservatives.

“If I were an Englishman, I would not have to explain my presence on this platform for it is the right and indeed the duty of every Englishman to take sides in a general election. You may well wonder what a Chinaman should be doing here. You have important domestic issues to discuss that should not concern any foreigner. Let me say at once that I am not a foreigner. I am a British subject from British Malaya. And I am here because your vote on February 23 will affect me and 7 million other Malaysians some 8,000 miles away. It is your Colonial Office here which decides our fate. It may be that some of you could not care less what happens to a lot of ignorant and illiterate natives. But, unfortunately, what happens to my ignorant fellow countrymen, and what they do, is going to affect you in England.

From Malaya, Britain gets more dollars every year than she gets from Marshall Aid. It is the country that produces the world's rubber and more than one-third the world's tin - two raw materials

which America does not have and must import. Malaya's dollar earnings are so important to Britain that Sir Stafford Cripps obtained a promise from President Truman to keep down the American production of synthetic rubber in order that America will buy more Malayan natural rubber. If Britain loses Malaya her dollar gap will rip open. That would mean a heavy cut in your imports of food and raw materials, consequent unemployment and a steep rise in the cost of living.

Since Labour came into power four years ago I have often criticised their colonial policy and administration; and your Labour candidate, whom I have known since I came to this country three years ago, has received his full measure of what I thought were the faults of Britain's colonial programme. But when it is a choice between Labour, a party with a social conscience, and Conservative, a party without one, we in the colonies have no difficulty in deciding which is the better. To the Tories, the colonies are just areas for very profitable investment. Every other week you will notice in the Times the 50-60 per cent dividends, such dividends as you never see anywhere else in the world. To them, we are just a lot of natives providing their younger and less able sons with a decent career and a comfortable pension on retirement. They had and still have no plans for helping the less fortunate peoples in the Empire to a better standard of living and a greater degree of self-government. Indeed they say quite openly that they do not intend to liquidate the Empire. And to them the giving of self-government to the non-European peoples would be the liquidating of the Empire. What they refuse to see is the fact that the Asiatics and African peoples in the Empire have grown up politically and are no longer content to be governed from Whitehall, no longer happy about being developed by big

capitalist interests. There was no socialist government in Holland after the war. They wanted to go back to the glory of their prewar empire. They refused to face the facts of postwar nationalism in Asia. So they engaged in a bitter and costly war in Indonesia. Now, after three years of it, they have had to admit defeat.

I searched through the Conservative Party manifesto for some statement of policy on the Empire. All I found was a vague generalisation about “promoting the welfare of the Empire”. And here is where they give a hint of their true colours: “Both Britain and America will gain to the advantage of all.” All, that is, except the colonial peoples themselves.

Nationalism has come to stay in Asia, and we believe it is only the Labour Party that is honest enough to face the facts. Labour has a colonial policy. It had one in 1945 and its four years’ record in Malaya is impressive. Reforms long overdue have been carried out in the midst of postwar difficulties and shortages. The Tories talked for years about the need for a university in Malaya. The Labour government last year founded the University. The Tories had long groaned about the white man’s burden to the coloured peoples - but they did little to help these coloured peoples to help themselves. Under a Labour government the first social surveys have been carried out in Malaya and the first social welfare services started. The Tories gave four scholarships a year to students to study in England. The Labour government has now more than 200 Malayan students on scholarship in English universities, studying medicine, law, the sciences and social welfare. The Tories squashed trade unions in colonies, before the war just as they have squashed them here before the war. I myself am not a state or government scholar and I have nothing to gain by speaking for

the Labour government. I say these things because they are the truth and because they are not so generally known in this country.

We have confidence in Labour because we have seen Labour carry out its last election promises. We have no confidence in the Tories. They have not promises at all. They merely string out general phrases. Remember Lord Woolton's broadcast last Saturday: "Stand by the British Empire and Commonwealth." But he did not say what he proposed to do in specific terms and I have grave suspicions of what he might have meant when he went on to say that he was going to "develop the vast untapped resources of the Empire". Mr Churchill said at Sevenoaks, "And all that great Empire must be raised, and roused, to a sense of its grandeur and its strength." Does anyone here really believe that the British Empire is asleep? This Empire needs no rousing. Have we all not heard of the recent troubles and riots in West Africa, of the terrorists in Malaya, and have we so quickly forgotten the civil disobedience in India when the Tories were in power before the war? This Empire, far from wanting to be roused, needs tact and a good deal of understanding. And we in the colonies know that it is only Labour that is fully alive to our difficulties and our aspirations to self-government. If you want to keep Malaya in the Empire, and keep the dollars that Malayan tin and rubber earn within the sterling area, more dollars than Britain gets from her export drive, then keep Labour in office.

There are some of my fellow countrymen who would like to see a Tory government back in office - not because they have any faith in a Tory government, but because they know that with a Tory government which thinks in terms of the world of yesterday, with a government determined to repress and suppress the

nationalist spirit of colonial peoples, a government determined to bring back the grandeur and might of the 19th century empire, unrest will mount and disorder will break out. And in the mood of discontent and violence more will go over to the extremists and the communists. Then the Malayan Communist Party will be strong enough to drive the British Army out of the country. You all know about the bandits and terrorists in Malaya. But let me tell you that behind these virulent outrages there lies a tightly-knit communist organisation. How far their bid for power succeeds or fails will depend on how far they can get the genuine nationalist aspirations of the people behind them. A Tory government determined, like the French government in Indo-China, to thwart the nationalist aspirations of the people will send all moderate nationalists over to the communists - and this indeed is what has happened in Indo-China.

With a Labour government in Britain these extremists have so far failed to get any appreciable support from the people, for we believe that from Labour Britain we can get what we want by constitutional and orderly methods.

I have met many students in this country from India, Pakistan and Ceylon. I have not met one of them who believes in the sincerity of Tory proclamations of equal Asiatic partnership and cooperation within the Commonwealth.

There are over 300 of my fellow countrymen studying in this country. We are all unanimously agreed that a Tory government back in office would mean more trouble out in the East. My hope and our hope of a peaceful solution of this pressing colonial problem is in Labour.

To those who are still open to reason and argument I say that if you value fairness and social justice not only to the people of Britain but also to the millions of British subjects in the colonies, return another Labour government. But even if you care nothing for fairness or social justice to the colonial peoples, then for the sake of your own self-interest, your own economic well-being, for the sake of the dollars you get out of Malaya and your other colonies, return a government that has the confidence of these peoples, who will then gladly cooperate with and be happy to grow up within the British Commonwealth and Empire. ●

# I chose Tanjong Pagar because...

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Lee held the Tanjong Pagar seat for 60 years and 11 elections. In one of his earliest campaign speeches, in 1955, he tells the voters why he chose their constituency.

“I had 25 divisions to choose from when the PAP nominated me to stand for elections. I chose Tanjong Pagar. The people of Tanjong Pagar have a right to know why.

“Tanjong Pagar is a working class area. No other division has such a high proportion of workers - wage earners, small traders - and such a low proportion of wealthy merchants and landlords living in it. I wanted to represent workers, wage earners and small traders, not wealthy merchants or landlords. So I chose Tanjong Pagar, not Tanglin.

“Mr Peter Lim Seek Tiong and Mr Lam Thian have also chosen Tanjong Pagar. But up till now they have done nothing for the people. Both of them say they have lived in Tanjong Pagar for nearly 30 years. Why then have they done nothing for the people all these years? It is only now, before the elections, that they say they want to serve you.

“I have not lived in Tanjong Pagar. But I do not have to live

here to know the hardships and problems of the people. When the printing workers of The Straits Times who live in Anson Road in the Tanjong Pagar division were on strike two years ago, I fought for them. When the postmen who live in Maxwell Road in the Tanjong Pagar division were on strike three years ago, I fought with them.

“No one heard of Mr Peter Lim Seek Tiong or Mr Lam Thian coming out from their homes nearby to help these people. I can predict that no one will hear of Mr Lim or Mr Lam fighting for the people after these elections, especially if Mr Lim or Mr Lam are not elected. But win or lose, I shall fight on for what is right, for a better life for the people in an independent democratic Malaya.”

From those modest claims to fight for the right of the people in Tanjong Pagar for a better life, made during his first general election rally on March 17, 1955 at the East Reclamation Road ground, Lee has gone on to fight for a better life for Singaporeans.

In the 1955 election, the PAP had three other candidates in the 25-seat contest, the first to be held under the Rendell Constitution which gave limited powers to the legislative assembly: Lim Chin Siong, Goh Chew Chua and Devan Nair. Of the four, only Nair failed to win a seat. The Labour Front polled the most number of seats, 10 out of the 17 it contested, and its leader David Marshall became Singapore's first chief minister. ●

**SPEECH: JUNE 3, 1959**

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# A moment of great change in history

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On the night of June 3, 1959, Mr Lee, then prime minister-designate, made the following speech at a historic rally at Padang to celebrate the start of self-government. His People's Action Party won a landslide victory in the general elections on May 30, 1959.

“Once in a long while in the history of a people there comes a moment of great change. Tonight is such a moment in our lives. Last Saturday saw the end of an era. This morning the new Constitution was promulgated. We begin a new chapter in the history of Singapore. The powers of the people through their elected government is limited to our internal affairs. It is not what we really want. It is but a step forward towards merger and Merdeka.

But even so tonight marks a significant break with the past. For 14 years, since British colonial rule was restored after the 2nd world war, a series of colonial administrators have ruled and ordered our lives. True in the last 4 years some of the trappings of power were transferred to local Ministers. But the reality of power was never in their hands. And any way they were weak and feeble hands, incapable of wielding power effectively on our behalf.

This rally tonight is symbolic of the nature of your government, a people's government. Unlike the previous rulers we have no compensation for abolition terms. Unlike the previous local Ministers, we have no iron mines in Ipoh to provide for a rainy day.

We have no personal future apart from your future. Your joys and your sorrows are ours. We share the same future be it good, indifferent, or bad. And so it is our duty to see that it is a bright and cheerful future.

We held no private celebrations to rejoice in victory. Instead we come tonight to rejoice with you. We the people of Singapore have decided to run Singapore affair. We have come to celebrate here on this Padang, and we use the steps of this building as our stage. Do you know, we wanted to use this Padang for our election rallies at night. But a small group of Europeans who were given this field by the former Colonial Government, refused it, although they only use it in the day time for a few people to play games. Well times have changed, and will stay changed.

There are many easy changes like this which we can effect. But there are other changes which are not so quick and easy to effect. All of us want a better and a fuller life. But a rise in the standard of living of our people cannot be created overnight. The good things of life do not fall down from the skies. They can only come by hard work over a long time.

We have in our party men whose integrity and ability have been proved over the years in the struggle to build up the mass movement of the PAP. Their dedication to the cause of an

independent democratic non communist socialist Malaya gives them the drive that will make the machinery of Government work efficiently on your behalf. My party has asked me to lead the Government and we shall take office formally on Friday.

But all the planning and effort on the part of your Government will not produce the desired results unless you the people support and sustain the work of your government. We shall do our duty to the people. The people must do their duty to themselves and their fellow citizens.

Lastly let it not be forgotten that we have been elected to govern on behalf of all the people of Singapore. The paramount interest is that of the people as a whole. There may be times when in the interests of the whole community we may have to take steps which are unpopular with a section of the community. On such occasions remember that the principle which guides our actions is that the paramount interest of the whole community must prevail.

Let us work together as a more united people towards a brighter and better future. May the next 5 years be happy, peaceful and prosperous years for all of us. ●

# What Lim Chin Siong told Lee about communism

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Lee is one of the few leaders in the free world to have worked so closely with the communists, first as comrade-in-arms, and later as mortal enemy. He told the authors what drew some of those he knew into the communist world.

“First, they believed that they had seen the light. It’s like blinding faith, that this is the way to bring about a happy, fair society. It’s a very, very simple, a simplistic assessment, of the world. I don’t want to belittle the impact of how they became communists ... But I will explain how they became what they did.

“Lim Chin Siong comes from a poor family, from Kulai, Pontian, some place in Johor. And I think the father must have made great efforts, sacrifices, to send him down to Chinese High School here. And from there, he got involved with communist activities, so he became a cadre and got sent to the Bus Workers’ Union.

“At our first constitutional conference in London in 1956, he went to Colletts bookshop, a left-wing bookshop in London; they sell communist books - Karl Marx, Lenin and all the rest of it. And he bought a book and gave it to me. The Story of Zoya and Shura (by L. Kosmodemyanskaya) - I’ve still got the book. It’s a book about a young boy and a girl, a Russian book translated into English, but he must have read it in Chinese, you see. He said,

‘Lee, read this, this is a good book. I read it when I was in school. It will tell you why you must do these things.’

“It’s an idealistic sort of... the Dutch boy with his finger in the dike, you know what I mean? It’s an appeal to youthful idealism. But I was past that stage! I’m questioning fundamentals. So really, there was no meeting of minds. ...

“It is not possible to have lengthy discussions with them because to them, you read this book and everything is in this book. They were not profound thinkers ... You cannot carry on a philosophical discussion with an active communist cadre. He thinks you’re a buffoon, you’re wasting time.” ●

# Vow to cleanse the system of the evils of the past

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The People's Action Party had just swept the 1959 Legislative Assembly General Election, winning 43 out of 51 seats. It was the first time the PAP, which up till then was an opposition party, had come to power. Mr Lee Kuan Yew was 35 years old when he delivered his first speech in the Legislative Assembly as Prime Minister on July 21, 1959, attacking those who stood against the PAP and even the civil servants opposed to its policy changes. He also assured voters that the PAP stood with the masses and that party leaders remained dedicated to the service of Singapore.

“Mr Speaker, Sir, may I say that the PAP Government had put its cards on the table before it assumed office. We did it over three months of campaigning beginning from the famous day of 15th February at Hong Lim.

It was there the Deputy Prime Minister said things and set off a chain reaction which finally ended with the routing of the rogues and scallywags that used to haunt this Chamber.

We have placed before the people the mandate that we sought of them. We did not try to deceive anyone.

We know exactly what is expected of us because we have made these promises. Unlike the previous government, we gave no hostages to fortune.

Plainly and simply, we took the stand which we knew was necessary and in the interest of the survival of the democratic state in order, first, to cleanse the system of the evils of the past,

and to retrieve some of the liberalism, the tolerance which were the good things we should carry into the future.

I tell the Opposition this. They provide us, and I hope they will continue to provide us in the next five years, with that vivid contrast which will throw up the virtues of the PAP into magnificence.

But if we fail, let me tell them that this is not a constitutional position of Tweedledum and Tweedledee, Democrats and Republicans in America, or Tories and Labour in Britain.

If we fail, and we are unable to make the system work, it is not they who are going to come back.

They will be fleeing for their lives, because behind us there is no other alternative which is prepared to work the democratic system.

And therefore, in the last analysis, if we fail, then brute force returns.

I am sure no one in this House nor anyone in the country would want this to happen. And therefore, I say to all those who wish us ill, that if we fail, woe betide them.

But to those who wish us well, I give this message. This is a Government consisting of people who put their ideas, their ideals and the welfare of their people above themselves.

This is a party which has the courage of its convictions, which is prepared to pursue what it believes to be right in the interest of the people without deviating for opportunist reasons.

This will be an era which will light up the dark pages of the history of Singapore, post 1945.

If we succeed, as we intend to, in building a climate not only of national solidarity but a climate in which the ordinary people begin to believe that institutions of government in the country are run by people who are loved and revered because they are working for the mass of the people, then we will have done a service, not

only to ourselves, our party and our movement, but we will also have done a service to the democratic socialist movement.

Until the advent of the PAP, no group proclaiming the democratic socialist cause ever struck roots in the mass of the people.

Let me say, Mr Speaker, Sir, judge us not in the next five years by the standards of the British House of Commons and the British Government in Whitehall.

Judge our performance in the context of our objectives and the realities of our situation, and at the end of five years, you will certainly not find us wanting in courage, in skill, and in sincerity.” ●

**SPEECH: JUNE 14, 1962**

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# Leadership makes the difference

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Politics, to Lee, was about leadership, asserting authority and helping to take the people forward and improve their lives. He spelt out his view of politics and leadership in a speech to civil servants at the Political Study Centre on June 14, 1962. He identified three factors for the successful transformation of developing states: a determined leadership, which was durable enough to remain in office to exercise its authority and get the country moving, an efficient administration and social discipline among the people. His speech, culled from experience gained from visiting and studying countries such as India, Egypt and Yugoslavia, was broadcast over the radio in Singapore.

“One of the most important lessons I think we have to learn, and learn very quickly, is that when people emerge to independence they don't necessarily emerge from decadence to progress. It often happens that things get worse and there is no doubt about it, that if you allow your social organisations to sag, it will take an awfully long time to hold the thing together again to make sense. And it is easy for it to sag.

The tragedy about the one-man-one-vote system is that it is often easier to raise the bid, not knowing or, even worse, knowing full well that you will never be able to fulfil your promises. And the highest bidder usually wins. In all new countries, the electorate is inexperienced, unsophisticated. It'll vote for the chap who says, “Well I give it to you. I will open up this street for hawkers and I

will let you have the run of the place; I promise you the moon, the sun, stars and if there are some reserves left behind from before, well, you can exhaust it.” They are invisible. People don’t see it. And you can run through these things very quickly ...

Authority has got to be exercised. And when authority is not backed by position, prestige or usage, then it has to defend actively against challenge. But let me explain this. I went to India, that is a different composition. Authority there is not challenged. Mr Nehru is there. He is there and has been there almost as long as the Himalayas. Nobody doubts that he is going to be there as long as he lives. And that immediately produces a stiffening effect on the population, on the civil service, on the administration, the people. There is the old boy, he is going to be there, never mind all that shouting going on, everybody knows he is the man to trust.

And you know the trade union chaps who met Devan Nair. They said, yes, that’s right. We are communists but when it comes to voting, we vote for the Congress Party. And it is true. He was talking to one of what they call serving boys - Punkawallah - gentlemen with red cap and so on, who bring you a glass of syrup water. We asked him that union he belonged to; he said, his union is communist but, of course, when it comes to election, he votes Congress: they are not to be trusted, these communists, they will do something foolish. And that is because the leadership is traditional. They have got used to him [Nehru]. He, Gandhi, were big names in India. For 50 years they fought, and authority is exercised without challenge.

He who exercises authority has got to exercise it with firmness, competence and fairness, and what is most important, with a

degree of continuity. The expectation of continuance of policy. And that is where the Federation of Malaya has succeeded. It is not the Tunku's great quality of charm, which he has in abundance, but the fact that he has left an impression that he is there to stay, and the fact that he has left that impression helps the whole position.

People expect the state of affairs to develop, change gradually, progress, then they make their calculations accordingly. So that is what is happening in India. But when they don't have this certainty, one day Tweedledum, the next day Tweedledee, everybody has a go at power - then pandemonium. And that is what we must never allow.

I have enumerated in several of my talks what I consider to be the three basic essentials for successful transformation of any society. First, a determined leadership, an effective, determined leadership; two, an administration which is efficient; and three, social discipline. If you don't have those three, nothing will be achieved. And that is one of the fatal effects of the democratic system. This business of seasonal change and your civil servants get rattled. They say, "My God! I'll be in trouble, I'd better succumb. Why not look for something for myself, then whatever happens, I am all right." It's all these creeping doubts, this wavering, this wishing to cushion oneself from trouble, that brings a complete sagging of the whole machinery and helps to bring about chaos and collapse.

But in these three countries which are making progress, India, Egypt, Yugoslavia (backward countries, no doubt about it), there was in every one, dedicated leadership and determination. Whatever there may be of petty corruption in the provincial

governments, even the opposition in the Lok Sabha, the Lower House in Delhi - I had a chat with them - they admit the government is honest. That is important. You must be able to command respect. You may agree with Mr Nehru and his colleagues. You may agree with Mr Menon, you may like him, you may not like him, but you admit these are honest men who are out to do a decent job. If they command authority, that makes things easier. Their civil servants are self-respecting, the minister acts with reasonable decorum, the permanent secretary acts with reasonable confidence, the tamby feels he's got to behave himself; if he doesn't, he gets a rap on the knuckles. Everything ticks.

In every one of them, there was an effective administration. In the case of Egypt they had none, but they filled up. They changed the top hierarchy which was corrupt and everywhere they filled it with trusted army officers, young army revolutionary types. They knew nothing about administration. They have since learned, but the idea was to infuse a certain amount of backbone and stop the petty thieving that was going on. And in Yugoslavia the whole of the Partisan movement, the officer corps, went in and took over the administration.

The third quality: in every one of them, there was this social discipline. And what is strange is this. Where the social discipline is less, the progress is slower. And the social discipline was slightest in India. And tightest in Yugoslavia. You see, that is something which no politician, no political leader, no revolutionary band, can create overnight. It takes years to change a people in their habits, in their attitudes. If you don't get social discipline, everybody does what he likes to do, or will not bustle about what he is told to do. And that becalms the whole momentum.

When I was in Italy in 1957, everybody - that was the age of the scooter - everybody had a scooter. Five years ago, all Vespas running around. This time I went there and the first thing I noted was all the scooters had been replaced by little Fiats, 600, 500, and chaps who've got Fiats don't go and embark on revolution. They are thinking of the next instalment, how to make sure that they've got the next instalment to pay the Fiat dealer. Yes, it's a fact. We went out to the country one Sunday and I think there must have been 100,000 families with the same idea. They also went out, everybody with a little Fiat or an Alfa Romeo, depending upon your prosperity. And everybody brought a little tent or a fishing rod. They went round to the country; if they were young they made love, if they were old they just sat down under the sun and sipped mineral water. But no revolution.

Ah yes, the democratic system is erratic. Whilst I was there, the House or their Parliament was meeting day and night trying to elect a new president. And they couldn't elect the president because nobody had a majority. But they are kept down because their economy is bouncing. Men's minds turn to revolution when things are getting worse, not when things are getting better. That is fundamental. What we want to do here is to make things get better. And the reason why Barisan is not successful is because things are getting better. Supposing you have got no houses - you know the number of school children who are being registered, the number of chaps who are moving into flats in Singapore? These are the basic factors on our side, telling factors. Watch the Barisan branches, they opened like mushrooms. Now they are closing down one by one.

Why? Basically, because there is progress. Houses are going

up, chaps are earning money, there are lots of scooters around. Yes. Last year, they registered nearly 8,000 scooters, that's what they told me, ROV. It's no laughing matter. It's a small state; 8,000 scooters, you just imagine that. Three in the family using it, you've got 24,000 people kept happy. With 24,000 girlfriends you've got 48,000 chaps happy. ...

No government has yet gone down to communist subversion which has an effective administration. They only went down when the administration collapsed. And here you have got a determined leadership.

I say, compared to the rest of Southeast Asia, the administration is wholesome, but it needs to be shaken up, chaps get flat. Chaps get lazy, you shake them up, flap them up, sometimes rap them on the knuckles. Reward them when they do outstanding work.

And the social discipline? Well, it's not what's strictly desired, but it can be improved. In my prognosis for the future, I say, if I had to choose any place in Southeast Asia as the one most likely to survive for the longest possible time, in the best of possible circumstances, I say that is Malaysia. ●

# What I mean by a more just and equal society

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What were the economic objectives of the PAP when it formed the government in 1959? Lee explained in this speech to the Rotary Club on February 24, 1960 that although the PAP was a revolutionary party determined to change the existing social order of the day, it would work with industry and business to increase prosperity for all, but with one important difference: at the end of the day, it would strive for a more just and equal distribution of opportunities for education and advancement

“ I must confess to some hesitation in accepting your invitation to address the Rotary Club. I had, when the PAP was in the opposition, declined your invitation. You will forgive me if I explain why I declined in the past, and what considerations prompted me to accept on this occasion.

The political beliefs of the PAP would not normally commend themselves to a group of people who are successful in a given order of society. By the very nature of your constitution, your members are those who have succeeded in life. According to Article 3, Section 2 of your constitution, which lists out the qualifications for active membership, it is clear that only those who have already made good, or who are most likely to succeed, are admitted into your fellowship. It was not unnatural to infer that your membership consists of people who, having done well under an existing social order, are satisfied with that social order and therefore extremely anxious that nobody should alter things

in case they may not do so well under a new order. Not wanting to arouse more animosity from those who are not likely to be politically sympathetic to the PAP, I did not take advantage of the opportunity you offered me in the past to inflict my political views on your members. However, now that the PAP is the governing party, although you probably still do not agree with its political objectives, you may be interested to know what these objectives are.

A whole set of political principles and socialist beliefs have often been summed up in the PAP phrase, “a more just and equal society”. By this, the PAP does not mean that all men are equal and will be rewarded equally. Men are not born equal in either physical or mental capacity. But a socialist believes that society as a whole will benefit, and there will be more happiness for more people if all are given equal opportunities for education and advancement regardless of class or property. It therefore follows that even under the new social order there will be some men who are more successful than others, but with this fundamental distinction, that they have become more successful after free and equal competition and effort.

It is by now generally accepted that a revolution has taken place and is still taking place throughout Asia, and that Malaya and Singapore are a part of this revolution. The revolution began before the PAP was ever thought of, but the PAP hopes to endure to see this revolution through to its fulfilment. Last year, before we assumed power, we expounded the theme of the social revolution. It is useful briefly to summarise what is meant by the social revolution in the context of Singapore in the immediate future.

The term “revolution” connotes a sudden and far-reaching change, a major break in the continuity of development, and the qualifying adjective “social” denotes the emphasis we give to this aspect of the revolution. A recasting of the social order is a far more important characteristic of a revolution than a change in the political situation by the use of violence. A revolution occurs when the ruling class cannot, and the ruled class will not, continue the old system. And so in the proper sense of the word, the former colonial empires in Asia have all undergone a revolution. The upper class of the colonial society could not, and the lower class would not, continue the old colonial system, and so a sudden and far-reaching change has overtaken the social orders of these countries. But this is only the first stage of a revolution, a continuous and continuing process of change, the end result of which is very far from settled, and only brief glimpses are possible of the shape of things to come.

The PAP is basically a revolutionary and not a reformist movement, and the social and economic forces which threw the PAP into power have not altered. Although it is not practical or possible to have a profound change of social organisation by a major shift in the relations between social classes because of the entrepot island economy of Singapore, it is nevertheless important to remember that the have-nots, who form the mass of the workers - the underprivileged, the underemployed and the unemployed, are seeking a change in their position in society. A government of Singapore which represents these urges cannot modify its social programme or political principles without forfeiting the trust and confidence that have been placed upon it by the underprivileged. Such a government can trim its economic programme to fit into the limitations of an entrepot island economy only if a strenuous

effort is made to redress the economic balance by a redistribution of social and economic benefits.

For some time before a revolution, the ruling class finds itself in a position of a minority, isolated from the rest of society. If the British colonial government had persisted in maintaining its domination, then the machinery of the state would have given way and there might well have been a complete breakdown by a concerted attack of revolutionary forces from the ground. We have been saved this inconvenience by Britain's policy of withdrawal from positions of open colonial rule in Asia.

After the last elections, the political system was changed, and power passed from the last legitimate colonial government to the first representative government of the people, and thus the gulf between the rulers and ruled is for the time being bridged. It is important that, if the gulf is not to reappear, the government's social and political policies must reflect the sentiments and attitudes of the revolutionary mass from whence it draws its strength. But at the same time a revolutionary government which attempts in Singapore to upset the structure of the island entrepot economy will only bring deprivations upon the people and disaster upon itself. So the art of government in Singapore, through this phase of its history, can be summed up in two guiding principles: first, to work to the best advantage the present entrepot economy whilst slowly encouraging industrial expansion, partly through government capital but largely through private investment; and second, to satisfy the revolutionary urge of the mass of the people for a fundamental change in the relationship between social classes, and this in spite of the fact that there can be no fundamental change in the immediate future in the economic base

of the society. An orthodox Marxist will say that is an impossible task. The business of the PAP, as a democratic socialist party, is to show that, difficult and delicate a task though it may be, it can be done. However, in the long run, it is inevitable that the economic base itself will be transformed.

Those who feared disastrous changes in the economic system with the advent of a PAP government, but who are now agreeably surprised that the world has not collapsed, should remember that our political opponents were frequently not truthful. Never at any time did we consider, or pretend, that drastic changes in economic relationships were possible in our given set of political circumstances. It is not for lack of revolutionary purpose that we have not made more drastic changes in the relationships of the social classes. It is more the appreciation of the limitations of the Singapore situation which has predetermined our line of policy and action. Basically we are not reformists. We do not believe that changes in the social order can be accomplished through the alteration of some particular institution, activity or condition.

But, revolution aside, the first business of a government is to govern firmly and wisely in the interests of the whole community. And the interests of the whole community in our entrepot situation require the active participation and cooperation of the managerial and professional elite. We understand how you came to be leaders of trade and commerce, or captains of industry, or distinguished yourselves in the professions. We also understand that the incentives were material ones. And since it is our desire to see that the system continues to operate effectively and efficiently, it must necessarily follow that we are prepared to allow the old incentives to continue.

The problem of the government is how best to utilise the existing social order to produce the maximum results, and the only intervention envisaged in the next four years is a redistribution of the results of the fruits of the economy. At the end of our tenure of office, it is our intention that there should be more equality of opportunity for education and advancement. To fulfil this intention will require a tremendous expenditure of the national revenue on education, expenditure which cannot be made unless there is an expansion of the whole economy. And if there is one overriding problem which we must resolve, it is that of creating sufficient expansion in the economy: (1) to provide the jobs for a growing population, and (2) to provide the revenue to educate the younger half of that growing population.

The curious position now is that a socialist government is entrusted with the responsibility for industrial expansion and development in what is still essentially a free enterprise and capitalist system. To the extent that you help the expansion of that system, you will have the support of the government. And the message that I would like to leave with you this evening is this: regardless of our differing political beliefs, we have enough common ground, albeit for different reasons, in desiring a rapid economic and industrial development in the immediate future. For this phase of our social revolution, the better business you do, the more things you buy and sell to and from Singapore, the more shops and factories that you open, the happier we are. Where we might not be in agreement is the way in which we hope to spread the benefits of prosperity. But so long as your activity not only assures your own prosperity but the prosperity of the whole community, you will find the apparatus of the government willing and ready to assist you in your enterprise. ●

# Enemy of the people?

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In this speech on the widening Singapore-Kuala Lumpur rift, Lee took the battle into the heart of the Malay leadership when he spoke in the Federal capital during a parliamentary debate. Speaking sometimes in fluent Malay, he confronted them with attacks they had launched on him and challenged them to counter the PAP's ideas over how to uplift the Malay community. Following are extracts of his speech during the debate in the Federal Parliament on May 27, 1965, on the motion of thanks to the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong for his speech from the throne

“I would like, Mr Speaker, Sir, to read if I may what this same Malay press, the Utusan Melayu, was saying at the very same time that His Majesty was making the speech, and it is not what Utusan Melayu says that worries me but who Utusan Melayu is quoting from. Said Utusan of the 25th of May, headline, “LEE IS AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE OF MALAYSIA. Klang, 24th May, Dato Harun bin Haji Idris, Menteri Besar of Selangor, described Lee Kuan Yew as an enemy of the people of Malaysia and was endangering the peace of the country.” In the same issue day before yesterday, this time it's Berita Harian, the Menteri Besar of Perak, Dato Ahmad bin Said, has called upon the Malays and amongst the things he called upon them to take note of is his statement: Lee Kuan Yew is now not only our enemy but he is also the most dangerous threat to the security of this country.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, I think no advantage is served by equivocation. This has been going on and I have got a whole

file, it goes back to a campaign mounted immediately after we announced our intention to contest the last elections, it goes back one whole year. This is what the secretary-general of UMNO said in Utusan Melayu on the very same day, the 25th: the Secretary-General also called on the Malays to be more strongly united to face the present challenge; he stressed that the Malays should realise their identity, quote, “Wherever I am, I am a Malay. If the Malays were split the Malays would perish from this earth.”

Now, Sir, I would like if I may to start with the oath which we all took when we came into this Chamber before we had the right to participate in debates; it is laid down that no Member shall have the right to participate as a representative of the people unless he swears this oath, and the oath reads, which I read myself, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the Malay language: “I ... (full name), having been elected as a Member of the House of Representatives, do solemnly swear or affirm that I will faithfully discharge my duties as such to the best of my ability and that I will bear true faith and allegiance to Malaysia and will preserve, protect and defend its constitution.” This is its constitution, Mr Speaker, Sir, published by the government printer with the authority of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, compiled in the Attorney-General’s Chambers, Kuala Lumpur.

What is it, Mr Speaker, Sir, that I or my colleagues or the other members in the Malaysian Solidarity Convention, what is it that we have done which deserves this denunciation as “enemy of the people”? A danger, a threat to security? We have said we believe in a Malaysian Malaysia. We honour this constitution because that was what we swore to do. And if I may just crave the indulgence, Mr Speaker, Sir, to remind Honourable Members of what they

swore to uphold:

Part 2, fundamental liberties: Article 5, liberty of the person; 6, slavery and enforced labour prohibited; 7, protection against retrospective criminal laws and repeated trials; 8, equality - equality, Mr Speaker, Sir, political equality; prohibition of banishment and freedom of movement, freedom of speech, assembly and association; 11, freedom of religion; 12, rights in respect of education; 13, rights of property. But I will be fair to Honourable Members. There is also, as part of this constitution we swore to uphold, under 12, general and miscellaneous: Article 153, reservation of quotas in respect of services, permits, etc. for Malays; and just before that, Article 152, National Language.

We uphold that, we accept it. This is what we swore to protect, to preserve and to defend, and this is what we have every intention of doing, Mr Speaker, Sir, by every constitutional means open to us and given to us by this constitution, the basis on which solemnly and in good faith we came into Malaysia.

Sir, I think it is time we took stock of our position and we began to face each other on fundamental issues: where we stand in respect of Malaysia, what we propose to do to advance its cause, what we are prepared to do if in fact we are to be thwarted from our legitimate objective to get what was agreed in this constitution implemented. Therefore, I noted with regret that in spite of the protests we have made as Members of the Opposition, that grave constitutional matters require at least solemn deliberations of this House, we are still faced with standing orders which entitles the government to bring about radical and fundamental changes in the constitution, all within one day, one day's notice of the

Bill, the intention of the first, second and third readings, if the government so chooses. Is this likely to protect, to defend, to uphold the constitution?

Sir, I would like to divide the opposition between loyal and not-so-loyal opposition. The Member for Batu reminded the House that I once said there was a gulf between them and us. There is still, Mr Speaker, Sir, perhaps not between him personally and us, because he is not really what his party represents. Parties like the Socialist Front, Mr Speaker, Sir, and PAS, parties which have, over a series of elections spread over 10, 15 years, almost abandoned all hope of ever achieving what they want to constitutionally; it is only those parties that then began to become disloyal.

### **We don't intend to secede**

I can give the Prime Minister and his colleagues this very firm assurance that we have a vested interest, Mr Speaker, Sir, in constitutionalism and in loyalty because we know, and we knew it before we joined Malaysia, that if we are patient, if we are firm, this constitution must mean that a Malaysian nation emerges. Why should we oblige the Member for Johor Tenggara to get out of Malaysia? "Secede," says he, "I demand that we say so now." We tell him and all his colleagues now we have not the slightest intention of secession. Secession is an act of betrayal, to leave like-minded people like ourselves in Sabah, in Sarawak, in Malaya to the tender mercies of those who talk in terms of race: "Wherever I am, I am a Malay." I would have thought, Mr Speaker, Sir, if one were to say, "Wherever I am, I am a Malaysian," it would have sounded enormously more comforting to all of us and would have helped to consolidate the nation.

But let me assure him, he has asked and urged the Honourable Minister of Home Affairs to take action, he has been going on for some months now, but it's reaching crescendo - this was the 24th, the day before we met, Utusan Melayu, 24th: "Albar Qaafar Albar, secretary-general of UMNO] challenges Kuan Yew: Don't be fond of beating about the bush. Lee asked to state openly his stand whether Singapore wants to secede from Malaysia." And it goes on to say: "If Lee Kuan Yew is really a man he should not be beating about the bush in his statements and should be brave enough to say, 'I want to secede from Malaysia because I am not satisfied.' But, said Albar, Lee did not dare say that because he himself signed the Malaysian Constitutional Agreement. Regarding Lee as 'the most stupid person he has ever come across,' Albar said that Lee entered Malaysia with his eyes open and the present Malaysia is the same Malaysia which he had endorsed. Why did he not think of all these before? Why only now have we regretted? Why? asked Albar in a high-pitched tone" - not I who said that, the Utusan, high-pitched note - "and his audience replied, 'Crush Lee, crush Lee ...'

"Lee, continued Albar in a lower tone, was really like an 'ikan sepat' which cannot live save in muddy water. Several voices shouted, 'Arrest Lee and preserve him like entrails in pickle.' Dato Albar smiled for a moment and then replied, 'Shout louder so that Dr Ismail can hear the people's anger.'"

I want to make quite sure that everybody hears the people's anger.

Albar then went on - it is a very long piece, Mr Speaker, Sir, I

leave that for Honourable Members who are interested and we can put them on the mailing list, those who do not read Jawi, we will put them on the mailing list and provide them with copies so that day by day they can follow the theoretical expositions of this ideological group - “Albar regarded Lee Kuan Yew as a frightened man chased by his own shadow.” (What can I do about my shadow, Mr Speaker, Sir; it must follow me?) “Lee is like a traveller in the sands of the Sahara, said Albar” (Vistas of the Hydramaut, Sahara, Saudi Arabia.) “He looks to his left and sees the desert sands, to his right a vast emptiness and to his rear a wide open space, and he becomes frightened. To subdue his fear he shouts on top of his voice.”

Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have quite a number of things to say, so I hope Members will forgive me if I say what I have to say in a fairly modulated way but I think sufficiently distinct and clear to leave nobody in any doubt as to where we stand.

Sir, I have no regrets about this document [holding the constitution in his hand]. It was passed in this House and in the old Parliament of Malaya; it was passed in the Assembly of Singapore. Why should we regret it? What we will regret very much, as was obliquely hinted in the address of His Majesty, “There would be an end to democracy” - the constitution suspended, brushed aside. Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, I think these are important matters which affect all of us. And therefore, by the time a campaign which has been going on for some months finds an echo, albeit an oblique one, in His Majesty’s speech to us, it is worthwhile going into the credibility of this insinuation.

## **Malay rule**

Mr Speaker, Sir, we all want peace, we all want Malaysia to succeed, and that is why we came into Malaysia, but if we echo “yes” in this pernicious doctrine, “Wherever I am, I am a Malay” - said Dr Mahathir yesterday, “The trouble with us from Singapore is we are not accustomed to Malay rule.” That’s why, the implication being we ought to be, Mr Speaker, Sir. The bigger English language newspaper for some reason or the other left it out, this very important passage, but the smaller English language newspaper very kindly put it out in script for us, so if I may just read this: “On the question of Malay privileges about which Mr Lee made so much play while in Australia and New Zealand, the saviour of Malaysia ignores the facts as they really are. We Malays are very sensitive but this is a total war declared by the PAP and even if it hurts our feelings it is wiser to demonstrate that in this land the privileged Malays, Ibans, Dayaks and Kadazans live in huts while the underprivileged Chinese live in palaces, go about in huge cars and have the best things in life.”

I would have thought that was, if I had just read that without having heard Dr Mahathir say it yesterday, I would have thought it came straight out from Radio Jakarta, Mr Speaker, Sir. That is their line, that all the Chinese have got big houses and big cars. I can show Dr Mahathir any number of Chinese in very miserable hovels in Singapore where there is a housing programme, let alone any other part where they haven’t got a housing programme yet.

### **What Dr Mahathir said**

[Quoting Dr Mahathir again] “It is, of course, necessary to emphasise that there are two types of Chinese - those who

appreciate the need for all communities to be equally well off, and these are the MCA supporters to be found mainly where Chinese have for generations lived and worked amidst the Malays and other indigenous people, and the insular, selfish and arrogant type of which Mr Lee is a good example. This latter type live in a purely Chinese environment where Malays only exist at syce level. They have been nurtured by the British and made much of because they helped the British economic empire. They have never known Malay rule and couldn't bear the idea that the people they have so long kept under their heels should now be in a position to rule them.”

Ominous words, Mr Speaker, Sir.

[Again quoting Dr Mahathir] “They have in most instances never crossed the Causeway. They are in fact overseas Chinese first - more specifically Chinese of the southern region as their mind sees China as the centre of the world - and Malaysians a very poor second, a status so utterly artificial to them that it finds difficulty in percolating through their criticisms.”

What does that mean, Mr Speaker, Sir? They were not words uttered in haste, they were scripted, prepared and dutifully read out, and if we are to draw the implications from that, the answer is quite simple: that Malaysia will not be a Malaysian nation. I say, say so, let us know it now, why waste five-ten years' effort to build this, defend this - for whose benefit, Mr Speaker, Sir?

According to this sacred document, we are obliged on oath to uphold this for the benefit of all Malaysians and a Malaysian is there defined, but all Malaysians have a duty also defined there

under the General and Miscellaneous provisions, to ensure that the development, preservation of jobs, licences and so on in Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak will go to Malays. Quite clearly a distinction between our political equality and our duty as part of that political equality to give special attention to the economic and social uplift of the Malays and the other indigenous peoples in Sabah and Sarawak. We accept that obligation and I was delighted when I discovered that the secretary-general of UMNO agreed in print that I had the right to determine the destiny of Malaysia.

While on that basis, I say there is ground for believing that the future of Malaysia is fair. Deny that basis, I say we don't need Sukarno and Confrontation to destroy us.

Now, I believe it would be helpful, Mr Speaker, Sir, if I were to spell out not for the benefit of the Prime Minister or the Minister for Home Affairs, because I think they have already sat down and worked these things out in their minds and therefore they speak with greater and wider circumspection. Is it really that simple that you can resolve these problems on the basis of stifling or negating your democratic constitutional opponents?

This is Utusan Melayu again, Mr Speaker, Sir, and the secretary-general of UMNO urged in the strongest possible terms that action should be taken now. Well, I am a frightened man according to him and therefore I see shadows. I think it would help if I could sort of work out the various logical consequences. Frightened even though I may be, we are still not bereft of our senses. There are two ways in which developments in Malaysia could take place - first, in accordance with the democratic processes set out in the constitution, and second, not in accordance with it, using extra-

constitutional capacities and the administration of the Police and the Army.

We have calculated this before we came into Malaysia and we must accept the consequences, but let me spell out the consequences. First, Mr Speaker, Sir, I go back again to His Majesty's speech. Said he, "I would like to pay special tribute (not just a tribute - a special tribute)" and to those this special tribute was addressed were besides our own Security Forces and the Police, the British, Australian and New Zealand Armed Forces.

Now, what does that mean, Mr Speaker, Sir? It means quite simply that if we are without assistance, airlines between Malaya and Western Malaysia and Eastern Malaysia will be closed. The sea will be closed. We cannot carry troops on the Mutiara to go and fight in Sabah, can we? We know all that. We might be able to buy some, I don't know, perhaps, but let us be frank and honest to ourselves first, that Malaysia by itself hasn't got the capacity to be governed by force - it is as simple as that, and therefore that capacity must be borrowed from somewhere - the British, Australians, New Zealanders.

Well, Sir, I don't know the Australians and the New Zealanders as well as I know the British for I happened to have lived in that country for several years and therefore I took particular care and interest when I visited them recently to find out whether there was a possibility that such extraordinary aid can be given in order to hold Malaysia down. I will not talk about the governments because they are friendly governments - friendly to all Malaysians, which included me - and I will talk more pertinently of the people in these countries.

One battalion was sent to South Vietnam recently from Australia in defence of what the Australian Prime Minister called the survival of the democratic world and a very vociferous and articulate opposition disagreed profoundly. They may be right or they may be wrong, but of one thing I am certain - neither Australia nor New Zealand has got the capacity to play the role of the Americans in South Vietnam. Therefore, we ask - have the British got this capacity? Maybe for some time, but for all time? Because that is what it means.

Once you throw this into the fire and say, be done with it, it means that you do it for all time and history is a long and a relentless process. People born, people destroyed, and more are born and more surge forward. It is part of the story of the human race on this earth. Can it be done - will the British public be parties to that? Well, I am not talking about the British government, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am now talking of the British public when, whatever government it is - Conservative or Labour - it faces the same British public.

All right, so they want us to secede and leave our friends from Sabah and Sarawak, from Penang and Malacca and all the other parts of Malaysia at their tender mercies. We cannot oblige, Mr Speaker, Sir. We will not, we know the juxtaposition of strength and weakness on both sides. We are fervently of the opinion that if we give and take and accommodate, this can succeed, and there is no other way to make it succeed and we shall be patient, but I will tell Members on the other side why I think what they are doing is not likely to lead to success for them.

And if I may, in conclusion, spell out to all Malaysians where we stand, what we want to achieve and how we are going to achieve these things, then they will know what are their problems. Their problem is not that we are against Malay as the national language. We accept it: Kita Terima Bahasa Melayu menjadi Bahasa Kebangsaan. [We accept Malay as the national language.]

[Lee continues in Malay.]

But let me remind members in UMNO, and I would like to draw this to the attention of the members in the MCA and their associates. This is a very dangerous thing, leading people to believe that if we just switch in 1967 from talking English in the courts, and in business, to speaking Malay, therefore the imbalance in social and economic development will disappear. It will not disappear. How does our talking Malay here or writing to the ministers of the federal government, both Malays and non-Malays, in Malay, how does that increase the production of the Malay farmers? The price he gets for his products, the facilities he gets from the government, fertilisation, research into better seeds, marketing boards. How does that raise him? In fact our worry is not with Article 153, which gives special reservations to Malays for jobs and licences. I am saying it is inimical to the country. What I am saying is that it has been in force now for 10 years with the imbalance between the rural and the urban areas widening.

The Minister for Finance is aware of this. He has the figures. He knows what is the rate of growth between the urban and rural areas. We have got visible evidence of that - that the Malays are drifting from the kampongs into the towns in Kuala Lumpur

- shanty towns around the suburbs. And they are coming to Singapore looking for jobs. Malaya last year - on the change of identity card addresses, 10,000 young men came to Singapore looking for jobs. Equivalent to quarter of our birth rate of that generation - 20 to 25. We were having an annual rate of 40,000. One quarter added to our burden. Of that 10,000, more than 3,500 were Malays - more than 3,500 who tumpang with friends looking for jobs. Just solving these problems on the basis of Article 153? You are going to solve these problems on the basis of a Congress Ekonomi Bumiputra? What does it say the Congress is going to do? "Intended to give opportunities to all those who are familiar with the problems connected with participation of the Malays and other indigenous population in the field of commerce and industry."

Let us start off with the Chinese and the Indians - the non-Malays first. What percentage are in commerce and industry as bosses or shareholders? 0.2 per cent, 0.3 per cent, that is the total. For one bus company - that is the simplest unit because I think everybody will understand it; it is a simple operation, it has been done very often, so everybody knows. One bus company, let us say there are 20 shareholders and they employ 2,000 workers - mechanics, fitters, ticket collectors, drivers, people who repair the buses, paint them up. Let us assume that out of the 4.5 million Malays and another 0.75 million Ibans, Kadazans and others. We create the 0.3 per cent shareholders, do we solve the problem? How does the Malay in the kampong find his way out into modernised civil society? If you create this 0.3 per cent, how does this create a new and just society? By becoming servants of the 0.3 per cent who will have money to hire them to clean their shoes, open their motorcar doors? We have not done this before

because we tried to do it the friendly way. But I am afraid the time has come in which we have to state quite clearly what we think is happening, how we think these problems have to be tackled.

The urban rate of growth, the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Minister can confirm this. It is at least 2.5 to 3 times the rural rates over the whole population per capita. He has had discussions with my colleague Dr Goh and he knows why Singapore's per capita income is also higher. How can you lift this up? By trying to compete with Singapore as to who can build a better urban society?

It is the wrong objective. Surely by setting out to bring about a social uplift, change and progress in your rural areas. We never touched on these matters before, Mr Speaker, Sir, because we thought we would like to help members of UMNO with ideas and so on privately, but it is now necessary, because they will not listen to us-privately, to state our position publicly.

Of course, there are Chinese millionaires in big cars and big houses. Is it the answer to make a few Malay millionaires with big cars and big houses? That is what Alliance means. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sorry to say it, but that is how it works. How does that solve the ground problem? How does telling the Malay bus driver that he should support the party of his Malay director and the Chinese conductor to join another party of his Chinese director - how does that improve the living standards of the Malay bus driver and the Chinese bus conductor who are both workers of the same company? It is just splitting the workers up. We have taken some time before, we have come down to the bone and it cannot go on like this.

If we delude people into believing that they are poor because there are not Malay rights or because opposition members oppose Malay rights - where are we going to end up? You let people in the kampongs believe that they are poor because we don't speak Malay, because the government does not write in Malay, so he expects a miracle to take place in 1967. The moment we all start speaking Malay, he is going to have an uplift in the standard of living, and if it doesn't happen, what happens then? Oh, you say, well they are opposing Malay rights. We are not opposing Malay rights. We honour and support it, but how does Malay rights solve your Malay rakyat's living standards? So wherever there is a failure of economic, social and educational policies, you come back and say, oh, these wicked Chinese, Indians and others opposing Malay rights. They don't oppose Malay rights. They have the right as Malaysian citizens to go up to the level of training and education which the more competitive societies, the non-Malay society has produced.

That is what must be done, isn't it? Not to feed them with this obscurantist doctrine, that all they've got to do is to get Malay rights for a few special Malays and their problem has been resolved. I don't see how that follows. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are posing to the Alliance government now the fundamental challenge. Not Malay national language, which we accept and agree, not Clause 153, which we accept and agree, implement and honour this constitution, but let us go one step further and see how you make a more equal society - by taxing the poor to pay for the defence of the country? Special rights or do you tax those who have in order to uplift the have-nots including many non-Malays, Chinese, Indians, Ceylonese and Pakistanis? There

are many such poor people, don't make any mistake about that. I say, over the months, they will have to come across and meet us on this issue - development in the economy, in the social and educational sectors. Meet us, show to the people that Alliance has got the answers to this problem. If they haven't, don't stifle us, give us a chance to put forward an alternative, for we have an alternative which can work and has worked in Singapore and will continue to bear fruit.

We will wait and see - in 10 years we will breed a generation of Malays with educated minds, not filled with obscurantist stuff, but understanding the techniques of science and modern industrial management, capable, competent and assured: the family background, the diet - health problems, the economic and social problems that prevent a Malay child from taking advantage of the educational opportunities which we offer free from the primary school to university. We will solve them, we will meet them, because in no other way can you hold this multiracial society together if over the years the urban areas populated largely by people of migrant stock goes up and up and the rural areas remain stagnant.

Surely this is an unstable and unsafe situation? I would like to remind members of the government that they will find in the PAP and I hope in the members of the Convention - Malaysian Solidarity Convention - a loyal, constructive opposition, an opposition in accordance with this constitution. It is no use threatening us, that they are going to take away our local authority in Singapore and so on. It cannot be done unless you are going to use the guns and, as I have said, you haven't got enough guns and we are not going to allow them to get rid of the Member for Sarawak Affairs and

the Member of Sabah Affairs. They are valuable parts of Malaysia, because you can put one hundred thousand troops in Sabah and Sarawak and they may never be seen or heard of again if the Ibans do not like it.

Let us be frank. We did this calculation carefully and methodically. There is no other way. It is not credible. You want a whole little Malaya, maybe; a whole Malaysia on that basis, no. The threat is not credible. The Minister for Sarawak Affairs has got a knowing smile. He knows they are headhunting people, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let me inform all these members here, we change this, we will change that, this solemn document says - 161H - you will challenge nothing of that sort without the consent of the state government and first you have to win a democratic election in Singapore, and we hold it quite democratically you know. They say nine days; all right, I promise them next time, a full real long spell on radio and television, the whole works. We never run away from open confrontation as our friends from the Barisan Sosialis can testify. We love it, we relish the prospect of a meeting of minds, a conflict of ideas, not of force. We are gentle people who believe very firmly in ideas. ●

# On our own – but we will succeed

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It is the accepted wisdom now that Singapore's expulsion from Malaysia was the single most important factor in making Singaporeans want to put in the extra effort to succeed as an independent country. No one was more determined to lead them and prove the critics wrong than Lee Kuan Yew himself. Below are extracts of a fighting speech he made at the Sree Narayana Mission in Sembawang on September 12, 1965, just over a month into independence, to rally the people for the task ahead.

“We will set the example. This country belongs to all of us. We made this country from nothing, from mud-flats. It is man, human skills, human effort which made this possible. You came, you worked - for yourselves, yes. But in the process, your forefathers and my forefathers who came here: we built this civilisation.

It is one of the few cities in Asia where you can get anything you want. You pick up the telephone: it works; and it not only works internally. You can pick up the telephone and speak to Delhi, London, Tokyo, Canberra - anywhere you want. Do you think you can do that just by shouting slogans? You can get any kind of cuisine you want, any meal. European food? You can get the best in any of the hotels in town. Chinese food? What kind do you like? There is Cantonese, Hokkien and Teochew. Indian food? There are South Indian, North Indian: anything you like. Malay food? You like Sumatran food, nasi padang? Where else in the world can you get this?

And I say, we will progress. I was sad not because Singapore was going to suffer: no. I was sad because by this separation, we could not help millions, several millions of our own people, our own countrymen - in Malaya, in Sabah and Sarawak - to progress with us. That was why I was sad. We could not help them any more. They have now got to help themselves. They have got to throw up their own leaders and they have got to take a stand. We cannot interfere.

Here in Singapore, in ten years, Geylang Serai will be another and better Queenstown [Singapore's first modern high-rise housing estate] - all the shacks will be demolished. I say that for Singapore because I do not think Singapore is boasting when it says it can do it. It will do it.

But do you think in ten years the kampongs in Malaya will have Queenstowns? I do not think so. If you want that, then you must have the thrust, the ideas, the dynamism, the push, the tolerance of each other. That is why I was sad for them who are our people. Not just Chinese and Chinese, Indians and Indians. There are many Malays here.

Half of our police force comes from Malaya. Their families are left behind there. They will be quartered; they will live in modern civilised conditions. Their families will come down here and they will want to stay with them, and we will have to say "No" because there is a limit to what we can absorb. We have only got 224 square miles. It is a cruel thing to do this, but it has to be done. Some people wanted it this way. We could have helped them emerge, but it was not to be.

But I say to you: here we make the model multiracial society. This is not a country that belongs to any single community: it belongs to all of us. You helped build it; your fathers, your grandfathers helped build this. There was no naval base here, and it is not the British who built it. It was your labour, your father's labour which built that. My great grandfather came here and built. Yes, he came here looking for his fortune, but he stayed - my grandfather was born here.

Over 100 years ago, this was a mud-flat, swamp. Today, this is a modern city. Ten years from now, this will be a metropolis. Never fear!

Some people think that just because we are a small place, they can put the screws on us. It is not so easy. We are a small place in size and geography. But in the quality of the men, the administration, the organisation, the mettle in a people, the fibre ... therefore, don't try. That is why we got booted out. If they could have just squeezed us like an orange and squeezed the juice out, I think the juice would have been squeezed out of us, and all the goodness would have been sucked away. But it was a bit harder, wasn't it? It was more like the durian. You try and squeeze it, your hand gets hurt. And so they say, "Right, throw out the durian." But inside the durian is a very useful ingredient, high protein ... And we will progress.

Forty per cent - more than 40 per cent - of the purchasing power of the whole of Malaysia is in Singapore. We may be 20 per cent of the population of Malaysia, but purchasing power, the capacity to buy goods like microphones, clocks, drinks, fans, lights, television, transistors: the money is here because here

they work. And if people do not want that 40 per cent - 44 per cent market - well, that is their business. We want to open the market with them, but if they do not want it we will make our own soap ... We are buying soap from Petaling Jaya: Lux. You know, it is always advertised on TV: Lever Brothers. It is no harm. We buy the soap; it is good for them; it is good for us. We can make motorcars together for the whole of Malaysia. And never forget, if it came to the point then Lever Brothers may have to set up a soap factory here, because after all, nearly half the sales are in Singapore.

You ask The Straits Times: what percentage of their newspaper is sold in Singapore? True, we are only two million. But we have the highest literacy rate in the whole of Asia. Nearly half The Straits Times, if not more, is sold here. Here, everybody buys a copy. There, maybe one kampong buys one copy and everybody looks at it! It is true. We are talking now in terms of hard cash; the hard facts of life. And if people want to be hard to us, then we have got to survive. And we can keep this market to ourselves. But this is all shortsighted. Let us throw our eyes over the horizon into the future. What does Dr Ismail say: this will come back again. But under very different circumstances and different conditions.

You know and I know that anybody who says, "Go back to Malaysia on the same circumstances" will be called a lunatic, isn't it? We were patient; we were tolerant. We put up with it hoping that they would see the light. But we had to be firm. We could not give in. So as a result we are out.

History is a long process of attrition. It will go on. And one day, it will come back together. You see, this is not like a map

and you can take a pair of scissors and cut off Singapore and then take it and paste it in the South Pacific and forget about it. It is not possible. This is part of the mainland of the continent of Asia. And that Causeway ... You know, the Japanese blew it up; it was still rebuilt. It is part of history; and you are part of history. You are part of this place as much as I am. As much as Inche Othman Wok, my colleague, is. And I say that is the way it will be in the end.

I guarantee you this: there will be a constitution which we will get redrawn in which minority rights ... You know, it is very easy in Singapore for people to stand up and if you talk, "One race, one language, one religion," there will be a lot of trouble, you know. We do not want that sort of thing. That is stupidity. So we are going to get the chief justices of India, Australia, New Zealand and a few others together with our own Chief Justice and a few of our eminent lawyers to draft "entrenched" clauses ... You know, "entrenched": no government can just cancel the clauses. Entrenched, and enforceable.

If anybody thinks he is being discriminated against either for a flat or a scholarship or a job or for social welfare relief because of race or language or religion, he can go to the court, take out a writ; and if he proves that it was because of discrimination on the ground of race, language, religion or culture, then the court will have to enforce the constitution and ensure minority rights.

We are an equal society. You are equal to me; I am equal to you. Nobody is more equal than others. In some places, they say, "We are all equal." But what they mean is, they are more equal, you see - which makes life very difficult. But here, when we say

“equal”, we really mean it. We do not have to do it in Singapore. But we are thinking in terms of 100, 200 years, 1,000 years. You must help them emerge. And there is only one way: education and economic thrust. ●

# Make sure every button works

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Lee set very high standards for his administration and did not pull his punches whenever he encountered sloppiness and incompetence. In this speech to senior civil servants at Victoria Theatre on September 20, 1965, he related how he found some wanting.

“I caught a whole Works Brigade group. There was a slight drizzle and they all went into a house and disappeared. One hour after the drizzle, I looked around; I couldn't find them. I summoned them. Commander came out. Commander called the chaps out. They were all angry with the commander, not knowing what it was all about. Why were they disturbed in this way? Probably they were having a quiet game of cards. Finally, they took a count after a very leisurely line-up; six more missing. So chaps went around looking for them. The next day, the Director of the Works Brigade and that camp commandant turned up. And I put one big douche of cold water. So they woke up ...

You know, I will not tolerate this. I went to a government bungalow the other day and I pressed the button and nothing happened. And I went to the kitchen and I told my son, “Press the button now” and he pressed and nothing happened. And I wondered how it was. Succeeding families had been living there - prominent government ministers and officers - without that being put right. I just don't understand. And the following day, all buttons worked.

Now, if I may explain that to you in a graphic way. When you have a button, there must be a purpose. When you click it, the light goes off. So that is what it is for. When you want the light on, you make sure you click it and it is on.

I have now, perforce — because I am travelling from place to place, looking after more than just my own ministry - to have a telephone in my car, which is something I dislike intensely. In my office, there is only one telephone, and I don't like three telephones to be buzzing around. And I don't allow them to buzz because it drives you crackers to have four, five telephones buzzing. And my telephones only show one light and a dull thud, and at any one time, I talk to only one person, and I flick on and off at will, which chap is priority, which chap waits. But you know, every morning the driver has instructions to take that telephone and to test-dial it. I want to make sure that when I want it and I pick it up, it is working. And that is what I want this government to do.

I have been to other places. I have visited about 50 different countries and been a guest of about 50 different governments. And you form impressions of these places. Some of them you leave with an abiding impression that this place is going to hum and spin like a top. I have been to such places, and I say “Well, this works!” Now, I can't tell you the places where it hasn't worked because I want to be friends with all countries. But I'll tell you about what happened in Jakarta since, anyway, they are not my friends at the moment. But I wish them well and I hope one day, all will be well.

I was put in a VIP bungalow which had just been put right for another prime minister who had just visited the place. And that

night, it rained. And you know, I heard tong, tong, tong. The servants, of which there was an abundance, knew exactly where the pails should be put. And there were five pails. And I felt very sad, because it occurred to me that perhaps there were no more people who found it worthwhile - with the rupiah soaring like that - to learn how to climb roofs and put tiles in place. It is not worth the while. The best thing is to buy this and sell that and do this and cut that and do something else; probably to steal the wire off the telephone and sell it.

And I wanted to close the door and I did not know it was hinged ... You know these old Dutch doors; they have a hinge so that they stay in place even if the wind blows. And the hinge came off and with it plaster from the wall. So I was gravely embarrassed and I said, "I am very sorry." The man said, "No, no, no trouble at all. We will put it right." So we went out that morning and I came back that evening. And I went to look at it, to see whether it was all right. From a distance I thought "Oh, it seems all right." But there was no knob for the hinge any more. It was just wall. I went closer ... They had put a piece of white paper, pasted it and whitewashed the white paper. No, no. Those who accompanied me on that mission will remember that that was true. And we sat down and we said, "My God, this is trouble."

Now, this place will never be like that if for no other reason than because the people have got a habit of working. But I tell you: "I don't want just that. I want to make sure that every button works. And even if you are using it only once in a while, please make sure every morning that it works. And if it doesn't when I happen to be around, then somebody is going to be in for a rough time because I do not want sloppiness."

I do not ask of you more than I am prepared to give myself. And I say, it does you no harm whatsoever just to make sure that the thing works. And don't be too kind. If you want to be kind to your people, to our people, then you have got to be firm; and at times, stern to those who have a duty to perform, to see that the duty is performed.

I have not the slightest doubt that this Civil Service, having gone through what it has in the last seven years, will be more than equal to the task. And what is more, every year, we are going to take the best in.

I am tired of having first class honours graduates coming out, doing a bit of dabbling in the Attorney-General's chambers ... They get a bit of money, then they learn a bit of the law and learn how to practise and after three years, they go out into private practice, leaving the second class honours man ... The second class honours man goes to court to prosecute a case and the man defending is a first class honours man. Now if the law of evidence is loaded against the prosecution plus brains of the defendant being loaded against the prosecution, then thieves, rogues and vagabonds get away. That is not my idea of good government.

You know, the British ran this place with their men. But then they ran a different system. They recruited from Britain and they offered rich rewards when they retired. A fellow retires at the early age of 50 - and some of them live till 85 and we are still paying them pensions, big pensions.

We meet a different situation now. I am working out with my colleagues - the Minister for Finance and the other officers - a

scheme which will keep good men in the service. I don't want second-raters and the third-raters in and first-class men out-fighting us, because that is a stupid way of running the country. I want first-class men prosecuting. I don't mind a first-class man defending because if you have got a first-class man prosecuting and a good officer who has prepared his IPs, Investigation Papers, you will get a conviction. Particularly if you also have a good magistrate on the bench ...

I have watched all this, and this will not do. I watched specialists leave the hospital until finally my wife had to go to Mount Alvernia Hospital to get a former government surgeon to do an operation. It is stupid. I want them inside - better than those outside. That way, this place will hum. And I want those who believe that joining the government service means automatically you are going up the ladder, to forget it. Not with this government.

Those who have got the vitality and the grit and the drive and can climb up that rope, well, he goes up. Those who are sluggish and worse, those who have got ability but think that they have done their life's work by just passing an examination and getting a good degree and now they have got in through the PSC and they are sitting back and not blotting their copy book and so by affluxion of time they will become head of the ministry –I say, forget it. ●

# Cabinet decision-making, the Lee way

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“In the Cabinet, I would say there were about five or six strong ministers with strong views. And you want to get a consensus if you can. If you can't, then you get a majority. And by that, I mean not just a majority in numbers: I would prefer the strong ministers to back the policy. If one or two strong ministers strongly felt, very fervently, against the policy, I would postpone it because I would take their objections very seriously.

“Supposing on an economic matter, if Dr Goh had very strong views to the contrary, I would postpone it. I would not overrule him lightly, because I know that he has a deep understanding of the subject. His opposition would not be based on personal considerations. But if I had personal knowledge, if I had the expertise on the subject and I felt confident of it, then I would be happy even with a weak majority. And even if some strong minister objected, I would feel confident that in this area I am more of a specialist than he is.

“In most cases, I would say in 80, or maybe even 85 per cent of the papers that come up, the answer is quite simple. Between A, B, C, D, it's quite obvious you've got to choose A. It's only that 10, 15 per cent where, you know, it could be A, it could be B and it's a toss-up; then you say, 'What's the price if it fails, if A fails; what if B fails? Supposing B costs less after failure, maybe we try B. And

then if it fails, we go back to A.’ But there are some decisions you make which do not allow that kind of simple cutting of losses, then you’ve got to be extremely careful.

“I’ll give you an example. This is where militarily I was wrong, but politically I was right. We had to buy surface- to-air missiles. And the superior missile was the Hawk, American. This was in the 1960s as the British were withdrawing. And the British had installed Bloodhounds and they were prepared to let us have it at giveaway prices, but we had to refurbish them. Now, the Bloodhound is a high-level missile. It can reach up to 30, 40, 50 thousand feet up in the air, long range. So the professionals weighed the comparisons and said the Hawk was a better missile. It’s mobile, it’s not fixed on the ground, so is not easily targeted. And the aircraft coming in can come in lower and then this Bloodhound cannot reach them.

“But I decided that if we are going to get cooperation from the British and we want them to leave their air bases without denuding them, then we’ve got to try and go as much as we can with the British so that we do not make them feel they are being discarded for higher American technology, or that we do not take their interests into account. So despite the technical superiority arguments, I decided on the Bloodhounds. And I think, politically, it was the right decision and we had a very smooth transfer when the Royal Air Force withdrew in ’71 and gave up all their bases. We had no trouble. They left most of the hangars and all fixtures. We took over all fixtures.” ●

# Being a hard nation

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Lee identified culture as a key determinant of a society's chances of success as early as the 1960s. Some cultures were "hard", driven, and had a will to achieve. Others were more languid. These "soft" cultures set greater store by gracious living and an easy life. They were less ready to make sacrifices to attain material progress. Lee believed such different cultures existed in Asian societies. Their effects were acutely felt in multiracial societies like Singapore, he said in a speech at the Foreign Correspondents Association's dinner in Tokyo on March 21, 1967.

“I think you must have something in you to be a “have” nation. You must want. That is the crucial thing. Before you have, you must want to have. And to want to have means to be able first, to perceive what it is you want; secondly, to discipline and organise yourself in order to possess the things you want - the industrial sinews of our modern economic base; and thirdly, the grit and the stamina, which means cultural mutations in the way of life in large parts of the tropical areas of the world where the human being has never found it necessary to work in the summer, harvest before the autumn, and save it up for the winter.

In large areas of the world, a cultural pattern is determined by many things, including climatic conditions. As long as that persists, nothing will ever emerge. And for it to emerge, there must be this desire between contending factions of the “have” nations to try and mould the “have-not” nations after their own selves. If they want that strongly enough, competition must act as an accelerator, and no more than an accelerator to the creation

of modern, industrial, technological societies in the primitive agricultural regions of the world.

I think Asia can be very clearly demarcated into several distinct parts - East Asia is one: it has got a different tempo of its own. So have South Asia and Southeast Asia. I think this is crucial to an understanding of the possibilities of either development for the good or development which is not in the interest of peace and human happiness in the region.

I like to demarcate - I mean not in political terms - demarcate them half in jest, but I think half with some reality on the basis of difference in the tempo according to the people who know what these things are. I mean East Asia: Korea, Japan and mainland China and including the Republic of China in Taiwan and Vietnam. They are supposed to be Mahayana Buddhists. And then there is Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, Ceylon, which are supposed to be Hinayana Buddhists. According to the Hinayana Buddhists, if the bedbug disturbs you then you take your mattress and shake it off; there is that compassion not only for the human being but for the bedbug, and you give it another chance and you let it off. Either it finds its way on to some other creature or it finds its way back to your bed. But watching the Japanese over the years, I have not the slightest doubt that is not what they do. And I think this makes some difference. I am not talking now - isms or ideologies. It is something deeper. It is part of the tempo, the way of life.

My interest now in this thing is that I have Mahayanas and Hinayanas all mixed up in Singapore. So at any one particular time, I have to find out which is the dominant consensus. There is always a consensus either on one side or the other, but I have

to find out which is the dominant one. And I would like to believe that, in the long run, besides Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhists, there are lots of other people interested in maintaining peace, stability and some semblance of man's inevitable progress - or, at least, supposedly inevitable progress - towards the better life for everybody to make it possible for all those in South and Southeast Asia who want - this is crucial - who want and are prepared to pay the price of what they want, to join the world community of "haves". ●

# The mass media in new countries

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The media in developing societies had a role in helping to foster the societal values which would help them succeed. They were bulwarks against the foreign values and mores which these societies were exposed to in their quest to acquire foreign knowhow and technology. The media had a duty to galvanise the people behind the government and its policies so as to facilitate the country's efforts to make material progress, Lee argued in a speech at the general assembly of the International Press Institute in Helsinki on June 9, 1971.

“In the midterm elections in America in November 1970, television, the most powerful of contemporary mass media, did not prove to be decisive in winning elections. The neat packaging and slick presentation of programmes and personalities, and frequent spot advertisements, could not sell a candidate as well as TV could sell soap and detergents. For it is not improbable that the way people vote depends on more complex factors than what they are told on the mass media. Their pay packet, their subsidised housing, schooling, health and social services, the way specific policies hurt or advance their interests, these are probably more decisive in how they vote.

The sustained repeated “sell” through all mass media - television, radio, newspapers and magazines - undoubtedly helps to shape attitudes to fashions in clothes, foods and consumer durables. Although this power of persuasion falls short of what

John Kenneth Galbraith expounded in his Manchester Lectures in 1968, that the consumer bought what he was insidiously told to buy, not what he wanted, the huge and ever growing advertisement industry is evidence that sellers believe it helps sales. It is therefore not improbable that the sustained plugging of a line can also mould public opinion on political issues and policies. The recent bitter rows over TV and newspaper coverage of the war in Vietnam was a sad admission that even in highly developed countries, objectivity was the subjective views of the owners and commentators of the mass media as against those of the Nixon administration.

New countries can choose either this laissez-faire system of the West and allow complete free play and competition between TV stations, dailies and weeklies, or follow the closed and controlled system of communist countries, or some intermediate point between the two, depending on the level of education and sophistication of their peoples and the political traditions and style of the governments. But in practice, new countries, particularly the smaller ones, cannot altogether insulate themselves from outside news and views.

Some governments, like China or the Soviet Union in pre-Khrushchev days, effectively sealed off their people from the outside world. Then the world is what the rulers say it is. And the rulers are unchanging for long years. But there is a heavy price to be paid for such isolation. The incessant exhortation to progress, the constant stress on conformity in ideology, ideas and action, they lead to drab uniformity.

But watching the chaos and confusion that have followed

the election of temporarily popular governments in many new countries, many leaders, especially in Africa, have decided against free play and opted for the one party state with all mass media supporting the one party. On the other hand, in several new countries in Asia, every election is an exercise in auctioning the country's nonexistent reserves and future production. With an electorate ignorant of the economic and administrative facts of life, it is no surprise that governments do get elected on programmes and promises the countries' resources and administrative capacity cannot fulfil.

In just about all new countries, radio and television are controlled by the state. When power was handed over from a colonial government to the first elected government, they remained in state control, with varying degrees of latitude for dissenting views. But the problem, despite ownership and control of TV and radio stations, is that the economies of operation makes it necessary to buy foreign programmes. At best, these programmes entertain without offending good taste. At worst, they can undo all that is being inculcated in the schools and universities. This is particularly so in the new countries where the English language is widely used. Francophone states have only France (and perhaps Quebec) to worry about. English-speaking ones find their mass media carrying large chunks of canned programmes and syndicated features from the developed English-speaking world.

Their newspapers, even if nationalised, carry reports from the well organised worldwide news agencies of the West. There is also a whole range of American and British language magazines and journals to cater for all tastes. And if people cannot afford them, USIS [United States Information Service] and the British

Information Services provide ample library facilities.

At a time when new nations require their peoples to work hard and be disciplined to make progress, their peoples are confused by watching and reading the happenings in the West. They read in newspapers and see on TV violent demonstrations in support of peace, urban guerillas, drugs, free love and “hippie-ism”.

Many people are uncritically imitative. A report of an airplane hijacking leads to a rash of hijackings in other unexpected places. A report of a foreign diplomat kidnapped for ransom by dissident groups is quickly followed by similar kidnapping in other countries. Some monks burned themselves to death in South Vietnam in acts of gruesome protest. Others in Ceylon and elsewhere followed suit.

Is it not possible to take in only the best of the West? Why does TV in new countries not cut out the sensational and the crude, and screen only the educational and aesthetic, the scientific and technological triumphs of the West? We have tried this in Singapore. However, the costs of acquiring good programmes become higher, the less popular they are with other potential buyers in the region. Thus we are caught in the lowest common denominator of viewers in the region.

As for the newspapers, the vernacular press, before independence, had usually joined in the anti-colonial crusade. After independence they often seek an uncritical reversion to a mythical, romantic past. In the second phase, the more intelligent of these papers try to find some balance in retaining the best of the old, whilst absorbing the best of the new in the West. But in

any case foreign news and features are still extensively translated and published.

The English-language press in new countries, however, were, by and large, unenthusiastic about independence in colonial times. They were often owned by Western investors. Most change ownership after the colonial governments have relinquished power. In countries like India and Ceylon there has been a plethora of anti-establishment newspapers. Twice the left-inclined Ceylonese government has threatened to nationalise the English-language newspapers. At this moment all editorials are censored. And foreign correspondents had to be restrained or be expelled for what the Ceylonese consider over-imaginative reports of the Che Guevarist uprising. How much of the confusion and dissensions in these new countries are compounded by the daily outpourings of hundreds of anti-establishment newspapers, no one will know.

What role would men and governments in new countries like the mass media to play? I can answer only for Singapore. The mass media can help to present Singapore's problems simply and clearly and then explain how, if they support certain programmes and policies, these problems can be solved.

More important, we want the mass media to reinforce, not to undermine, the cultural values and social attitudes being inculcated in our schools and universities. The mass media can create a mood in which people become keen to acquire the knowledge, skills and disciplines of advanced countries. Without these, we can never hope to raise the standards of living of our people.

If they are to develop, people in new countries cannot afford to imitate the fads and fetishes of the contemporary West. The strange behaviour of demonstration and violence-prone young men and women in wealthy America, seen on TV and the newspapers, are not relevant to the social and economic circumstances of new underdeveloped countries. The importance of education, the need for stability and work discipline, the acquisition of skills and expertise, sufficient men trained in the sciences and technology, and their ability to adapt this knowledge and techniques to fit the conditions of their country - these are vital factors for progress.

But when the puritan ethics of hard work, thrift and discipline are at a discount in America, and generally in the West, the mass media reflecting this malaise can, and does, confuse the young in new countries.

We have this problem in a particularly acute form in Singapore. We are an international junction for ships, aircraft and telecommunications by cable and satellite. People from the richer countries of the West, their magazines, newspapers, television and films, all come in. We are very exposed. It is impossible to insulate Singaporeans from the outside world. One consoling thought is Arnold Toynbee's thesis that crossroads like the Lebanon benefit from the stimulation of ideas and inventions from abroad.

Western investments in industries in Singapore mean importing Western machinery. With the machinery come Western engineers and managers, and their families. They live in Singapore, reinforcing by personal contact the impact of Western mass media. To take in Western science, technology and industry, we find that we cannot completely exclude the undesirable ethos

of the contemporary West. This ethos flakes off on Singaporeans. So we must educate Singaporeans not to imitate the more erratic behaviour of the West.

Few viewers and readers of the mass media in new countries know of the torment amongst Western intellectuals. Some Americans question where their bureaucratized science and technology, their military-industrial complex, are leading them. Even fewer read of the torment of American intellectuals who question the wisdom of exporting this science and technology to the impoverished people of the underdeveloped world, when it has wrought such havoc on America, dehumanising an opulent society.

But the underdeveloped have no choice. Whatever the side effects of importing Western science and technology, not to do so will be worse.

With parts of our population it has been wiser to inoculate them from these maladies. Those who have been brought up in their own traditional lifestyles and cultural values have greater resistance to Western ills. By all means have the pill to keep the birth rate down. But must it lead to promiscuity, venereal diseases, exhibitionism and a breakdown of the family unit? I do not have all the answers. I can only hope the pill, plus the traditional importance of the Asian family unit, where paternity is seldom in doubt, can prevent the excesses from imitating contemporary Western sexual mores.

To compound our problems, the population of Singapore is not homogenous. There are several racial, linguistic, cultural and

religious groups. For the Singapore Chinese, about 76 per cent of the population, there is a wide range between Confucianism and Taoism to Maoist materialism. They can view or read the output of local talent, or that of freewheeling Hongkong, with its own brand of Westernised lifestyles, or the archaic values and political styles of Taiwan, by and large still those of Kuomintang Nanking, or films and publications of the People's Republic of China, every product dyed in Maoist red. Censorship can only partially cut off these influences. It is more crucial that local production of films and publication of newspapers should not be surreptitiously captured by their proxies.

The Malays of Singapore, some 14 per cent of the population, have the mass media from peninsular Malaya and Indonesia. These irredentist pulls are reinforced by visits of businessmen and tourists.

For the Indians of Singapore, some 7 per cent, there are Indian publications and films, primarily from South India, carrying the pulls at the heartstrings of cultural and ethnic loyalties. But the second generation are nearly all English-educated, more interested in their future in Singapore, and less in India's destiny.

The rest of the population - 3 per cent - are Eurasians, Ceylonese, Pakistanis. They are nearly all English-educated and present no problems of irredentism.

But with nearly all sectors of the population the deleterious influence from the mass media of the West is an increasing problem. Fortunately, we have not got to the stage of mod styles, communal living, drugs and escapism.

An interesting question is whether the mass media can affect a people to an extent where, over a sustained period, they not only determine social, behaviour but also spark off political action. I believe every now and again they do. People are affected by the suggestion of the printed word, or the voice on radio, particularly if reinforced by the television picture.

12,000 Sikhs from Punjab form one of the smallest communities in Singapore. They are split into contending factions, reflecting the contest between contending groups in the Punjab, of which they have heard on radio and have read in Punjabi language news-sheets. A recent fast to death by a Sikh leader in the Punjab to get Chandigarh given to the Sikhs generated tension among Sikhs in Singapore. True, nearly 60 per cent of the adult Sikhs were born and bred in the Punjab and emigrated to Singapore after their cultural values were settled. I believe, and hope, the second generation Sikh will be different.

In 1950, the publication of a photograph in a Malay newspaper of a Muslim girl in a convent, with the Virgin Mary in the background, caused riots. It was known as the jungle girl case. A Dutch girl, given to a Muslim Malay woman to look after, as the Japanese overran Southeast Asia, was rediscovered by her Dutch mother. She claimed her return. The girl had become a Muslim convert. The court, presided by an English judge, ordered the girl to be sent to a convent pending the outcome of the trial. There were four days of rioting. Some 50 Europeans were slaughtered and many more maimed by Malay and Indian Muslims. Their sin was to be European Christians, like the judge. The police, then mainly Muslims, just looked on.

And again, on July 21, 1964, a sustained campaign in a Malay language newspaper, falsely alleging the suppression of the rights of the Malay and Muslim minority by the Chinese majority, led to riots in which 36 people were killed and many more injured, during a Prophet Mohammed's birthday procession.

There have been several outbursts of violence by young Chinese workers and students. They were communist-inspired though few were themselves communists. These riots and arson were invariably preceded by calculated campaigns in which the newspapers and broadsheets played an important role. The printed word reinforced the staged mass rallies to stoke up enough emotional steam for the explosions the communists required for their "people's uprising".

I used to believe that when Singaporeans become more sophisticated, with higher standards of education, these problems will diminish. But watching Belfast, Brussels and Montreal, rioting over religion and language, I wonder whether such phenomena can ever disappear.

Finally, making for more pressures is the interest in Singapore of our smaller neighbours and that of several great powers. The smaller countries do not have the resources or the stamina to be a threat. But in the growing contest for maritime supremacy of the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, the great powers are prepared to spend time and money to influence Singaporeans towards policies more to their advantage. They play it long and cool. Radio reception on handy transistors gives Singaporeans a whole variety of programmes, from the Voice of America to Radio

Peking, and also the Voice of the Malayan National Liberation League clandestine radio station. The Malayan Communist Party want to liberate not only West Malaysia, but also Singapore. On top of this, foreign agencies from time to time use local proxies to set up or buy into newspapers, not to make money but to make political gains by shaping opinions and attitudes.

My colleagues and I have the responsibility to neutralise their intentions. In such a situation, freedom of the press, freedom of the news media, must be subordinated to the overriding needs of the integrity of Singapore, and to the primary purposes of an elected government. The government has taken, and will from time to time have to take, firm measures to ensure that, despite divisive forces of different cultural values and lifestyles, there is enough unity of purpose to carry the people of Singapore forward to higher standards of life, without which the mass media cannot thrive. ●

# Can the Singapore system be replicated elsewhere?

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One perennial question which has been raised is whether Singapore's method of governance and especially its system of inducting the best and the brightest into government can be replicated elsewhere. What appeals to many about the Singapore system is its record of not only achieving rapid economic development but of doing so with a government acknowledged for its clean and open style. Can the Singapore way be transplanted elsewhere? Lee recognises the limitations of the model.

“I do not want to be dogmatic. If we were 30 million and not three million, I think the system would work differently because the number of people available to form a Cabinet would multiply by 10, right? Or if we were 300 million people, then it will multiply by 100. Then if you have so many people, although you may run a good system, it is still possible somebody outside there, some maverick, can get together a comparable group and can challenge you. And in a moment of unhappiness, the people will vote the other way.

“But when you're dealing with three million people and the talent pool is so small, I think really competent people to be in government, between the ages of 35 to 65, fit people I would entrust the government to, would not number more than 100. So where is the alternative?

“If we reject people who are natural activists with ideas, with ability, with dedication, then the PAP is inviting breakdown of the system. It cannot reject people who are committed with ideas and ability. It must absorb and allow change to take place from within because the party cannot have the foresight to incorporate in its programme and its policies all the changes that are going to happen in this world.

“But we devised this system because we were confronted with a problem of succession and we analysed our situation and said, ‘Well, this is it.’ No other way. And there were honest differences of opinion. In the end, Dr Toh Chin Chye and Ong Pang Boon, they were not very enthusiastic about this. They said, ‘No, we’re getting a lot of careerists, people who have not gone through battle.’

“But there are no battles. And if we don’t do this, who takes our place? The branch activists? He may deserve it because he’s run around for so long. But can you, in good conscience, hand over your authority, even for a few years or a few months, to people who you know do not have that helicopter quality?” ●

# Clean, clear prose

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This speech is included here to show the extent to which Lee went to improve the civil service - in this case, its standard of writing. He had gathered the top brass of the administration to lecture them on the finer points of writing plain, simple English and to impress on them the importance of doing so. The speech was made at the Regional Language Centre on February 27, 1979



Ladies and gentlemen,

You may wonder why I have taken the trouble of getting you all together this afternoon. I have asked ministers, ministers of state, permanent secretaries, deputy secretaries and everybody who has to do with the drafting of minutes, memoranda, Cabinet papers and other documents that go up to ministers, to be present. But this is only the tip of the iceberg. The problem is much graver lower down.

First, the genesis of our problem. From about 1955, language became a sensitive, emotional, political issue. You remember the Chinese middle school student riots and strikes of 1954-55. We have allowed the education system to develop in accordance with the choice of parents. We offered them four streams. I was on the Commission of members of the Legislative Assembly. We recommended this. It was a politically wise recommendation.

When the PAP took office in 1959, we decided to select students for university scholarships and for jobs on the basis of their ability. We tried to eliminate the advantage of language skills because of better home environment and to diminish the disadvantages of a poor command of the English language for those from the Chinese stream or the Malay stream. We therefore awarded higher weightage to subject performance and ignored linguistic skills - how did you do in your mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology? How much intelligence does a boy or girl have? It was the right decision. As a result, we did not have bright students stuck in lowly jobs, and gradually the move into the English language grew into a swell.

Now we have removed language and education as political issues. Now we can openly discuss language as an important instrument of communication. We have decided that English shall be our working language. The price we have paid for identifying talent in the way we did, was a lowering in the standards of both spoken and written English. It will take 10 to 20 years to make up for the omissions of the last 20 years.

I could have put into a five-page note what I am going to tell you. But it will not have the same impact. The spoken word is always stronger, more emotive, and commands attention. The written word requires a practised, educated mind to extract nuances of meaning.

What I want to discuss is the importance of simple, clear, written English. This is not simple. Dr Goh gives every officer whom he thinks is promising and whose minutes or papers are deficient in clarity, a paperback edition of Gowers' Complete Plain

Words. It presupposes that the man who attempts to read the book has reached a certain level of literary competence. The book, written words - just as my memo if I had attempted one - cannot convey to you the emphasis, the importance, the urgency, unless the receiver is a trained reader. And in any case, human beings are never moved by written words. It is the spoken word that arouses them to action. Arthur Koestler rightly pointed out that if Hitler's speeches had been written, not spoken, the Germans would never have gone to war. Similarly, Sukarno in print did not make great sense. According to language specialists, in face-to-face communication, 40 per cent of meaning is conveyed by words; 60 per cent is conveyed through intonation, gestures, the facial expressions.

The spoken language is better learned early; then you will have fluency. However, my thesis is that the written language can be learned and mastered at any age in life without much disadvantage. It is learned fastest when your written mistakes are pointed out to you by a teacher, friend, or senior officer who corrects you. That was the way I learned. When I was at school my compositions were marked. When my children were in school they simply got grades for their written work. Their teachers had so many essays that they never attempted to correct the compositions. This has contributed to our present deplorable situation.

I want to convince you, first, of the importance of clear, written communication; second, that you can master it, if you apply yourself. The use of words, the choice and arrangement of words in accordance with generally accepted rules of grammar, syntax and usage can accurately convey ideas from one mind to another. It can be mastered, even though you are not an Englishman. Then

we will spend the rest of this afternoon discussing how we can help each other to master it. If I persuade you to want to master the skills in written English, then this meeting will have been successful.

When I was a law student I learned that every word, every sentence, has three possible meanings: what the speaker intends it to mean, what the hearer understands it to mean, and what it is commonly understood to mean. So when a coded message is sent in a telegram, the sender knows what he means, the receiver knows exactly what is meant, the ordinary person reading it can make no sense of it at all. When you write notes, minutes or memoranda, do not write in code, so that only those privy to your thoughts can understand. Write so simply that any other officer who knows nothing of the subject can still understand you. To do this, avoid confusion and give words their ordinary meanings.

Our biggest obstacle to better English is shyness. It is a psychological barrier. Nobody likes to stop and ask, "Please, what does that mean?" or "Please tell me, where have I gone wrong?" To pretend to know when you don't know is abysmal folly. Then we begin to take in each other's mistakes and repeat them. We recycle and reinforce these mistakes, compounding our problems. Of course, this happens not just with us. It is worldwide. The Americans use English words and give meanings to them, never so intended by the British. Finally its usage becomes established. There are four times as many Americans as Britishers. They produce so many more books, films, and TV features that the American meaning of these words has overwhelmed the English.

But let us discuss simpler problems that confront us. The facility

to express yourself in a written language is yet another facet or manifestation of your ability, plus application and discipline. It is a fallacy to believe that because it is the English language, the Englishman has a natural advantage in writing it. It is not so. He has a natural advantage in speaking the language because he spoke it as a child, but not in writing it. It has nothing to do with race. You are not born with a language. You learn it.

It is the same with Chinese. You have very able Englishmen like Giles and Wade who knew Chinese more profoundly than I think any one of us here. They spent their lifetime mastering the mysteries of the language. So Winstedt compiled the first Malay-English dictionary. And when I started learning Bahasa Indonesia, the Indonesian consul-general in 1957 presented me with an Indonesian-English dictionary by T. Wittermans, a Dutchman. And so Americans - whether they are of Dutch, French, German, Swedish, Italian, African, Japanese, or Chinese descent - born and bred in America suffer from no disability in their written English.

First, you must want to achieve it. I want you to, because without effective written communication within the government, there will be misunderstanding and confusion. Every passing year we shall more and more assess the worth of officers for their language competence. We cannot afford to overlook language incompetence. We ignored language competence in the past because it was too difficult a problem. It would have been unfair to those from the non-English medium universities. Now that Nanyang University is teaching in English we cannot afford to tolerate slipshod writing without grievous results. This is the price we have had to pay for inadequate bilingualism. However, those who have made it to university and the top echelons of the

public service have no excuse for not being able to master the written language.

Let me just give a few recent illustrations of writing so sloppy that I had to seek clarification of their meanings:

First item: “With increasing urbanisation and industrialisation, we will require continued assistance particularly in the technological and managerial fields.” I asked myself, “What have I missed in this? What has the first part about urbanisation and industrialisation to do with the second part about continued assistance? Why do we need more assistance particularly in technological and managerial skills because of increasing urbanisation and industrialisation?” It is a non sequitur. We need technological and managerial assistance anyway. The first part does not lead to the second part.

Item from the Ministry of Education: “(It is necessary to study) the correlation between language aptitude, intelligence and values and attitudes to ensure that the various echelons of leaders are not only effectively bilingual but also of the desirable calibre.” I read it over and over again. It made no sense. This is gibberish. I inquired and I was told, well, they were trying to find out how language ability and intelligence should influence the methods for instilling good social values and attitudes. Well, then say so. But somebody wanted to impress me by dressing up his ideas in many important words. Next time impress me with the simple way you get your ideas across to me.

Next item: “France is the fourth major industrial country in Europe after West Germany, Britain and Italy.” Calculating

backwards and forwards, I decided France cannot be the fourth. I queried. The reply was that France was fourth in terms of number of industrial workers. Now, China probably has the largest number of industrial workers in the world. In some factories they may have 14,000 workers when a similar factory in America would have 4,000. Does that make China the first industrial country in the world?

Item from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on North-South relations: “The Third World has the stamina to sustain pressure for the Common Fund. Progress will probably be incremental with acceleration possible if moderation prevails.” Now what does this mean? By “incremental” the officer meant “slow”. “Slow”, I understand, but “acceleration possible”, I do not.

If we do not make a determined effort to change, the process of government will slow down. It will snarl up. I have noted this steady deterioration over the last 20 years. I want to reverse it. If we start with those at the top, we can achieve a dramatic improvement in two years, provided the effort is made. Now I want to discuss how we can do it.

Let me explain my problems over learning languages so that you will know that you are not alone. When I made my first speech in Hokkien in 1961 during the Hong Lim by-elections, the children in China Street hooted with derision and contempt. I was unintelligible. I was talking gibberish. They laughed and jeered at me. I was in no mood for laughter. I could not give up. I just had to make myself understood. I could not, like David Marshall, get an interpreter - I would have lost. I had a Hokkien teacher follow me. He knew what I wanted to say. The ideas were there.

Let me emphasise this point. Before you can put ideas into words, you must have ideas. Otherwise, you are attempting the impossible. My ideas were there. My problem was how to say it in Hokkien. So my teacher would listen to what I had said in Mandarin. He knew what I wanted to say. The next day he showed me where I had gone wrong and how I could express myself. I made rapid progress.

Over successive election campaigns I reached higher and higher plateaux. He and I worked out this method. He would listen to me. Before I made my speech at a major place, I would first go to a minor function, a small street corner rally or a rural community centre gathering. There I would practise. My teacher would listen. He noted down my mistakes. My ideas he gathered from my Mandarin and my English speeches. He polished up my Hokkien, gave me new words and phrases, told me where I'd expressed myself wrongly so I made progress. If I had pretended I knew, or I had been shy to ask, I would have got nowhere.

The written English we want is clean, clear prose. I choose my words carefully - not elegant, not stylish, just clean, clear prose. It means simplifying, polishing and tightening.

I do not think the correct script that I have seen circulated of my Chap Goh Mei speech gives you an accurate impression of the effort required. I made the speech off the cuff. In that way I sensed the mood of the gathering and pitched my thoughts on a note and in a way which made my listeners receptive. Then it had to go into print. I had to pencil it through, to tighten, to clarify, so that in written form it would be clear and clean. Remember: That which is written without much effort is seldom read with much pleasure.

The more the pleasure, you can assume, as a rule of thumb, the greater the effort.

So do not be ashamed that you have got to learn. I pencilled through my answers to the Asian Wall Street Journal. It was 45 minutes of questions and answers on tape. I took one hour and 30 minutes to pencil through. And yet when I reread it in the newspapers, I noticed a grammatical error, an obvious one, which I should have corrected. So this needs discipline.

So when you send me or send your minister a minute or a memo, or a draft that has to be published, like the President's Address, do not try to impress by big words - impress by the clarity of your ideas. Then I am impressed. I speak as a practitioner. If I had not been able to reduce complex ideas into simple words and project them vividly for mass understanding, I would not be here today. The communists simplified ideas into slogans to sway people's feelings, win people's hearts and settle people's minds, to get the people to move in directions which would have done us harm. I had to check and to counter them. I learned fast. The first thing I had to do was to express ideas in simple words.

How do you learn to do this? CSSDI [Civil Service Staff Development Institute] has only two trained persons who can help. There is Mr Roger Bell here, under the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation, and Miss Teo, who is also acting as my projectionist. That is the sum total of our teaching talent. This problem is similar to what we face in the joint campus. There we have about 1,800 English stream/Chinese stream students. Even those from the English stream suffer from poor English. There are about 600 from the Chinese stream, only 30 per cent with

adequate English. Their teaching resources are stretched to the limit. The only way is for the students to teach each other. Those who know must help those who do not.

My experience is that attending courses helps but not as much as lessons tailored for you. You have written a memo. Somebody runs through it and points out your errors: “You could have said it this way.” “This is an error.” “This can be broken into two sentences, a full-stop here, a different phrase there.” In other words, superiors and peers and even subordinates who spot errors should be encouraged to point them out. My PAs point out my mistakes; I tell them to. When going through a draft three or four times I am concentrating on and amending the meaning. So I miss the consequential mistakes in grammar. My PA who puts up a clean draft is not so hypnotised and by rereading the phrases, spots these errors and sidelines them. I tick the corrections off, indicating “Yes, incorporate.” If I do not do that, I will make more mistakes.

Let us discuss how to improve, how to teach each other. Of course the ideal is to get one instructor for one person. One Miss Teo can probably cope with four officers. In six months to a year, the four officers should show dramatic improvement. You have the ability. The problem is applying this ability to mastering grammatical roles and the meanings of words, and using them to put your ideas across. You did not learn it in school thoroughly enough. It will be painful at the start, but it has to be done. In short, how do we maximise teaching resources, by what methods? I want a free discussion on how we can help each other because there just is not the staff to teach everyone.

Three final examples on how urgent the problem is, from two papers coming before Cabinet on Thursday. The first is a very well written paper; the other badly written. But even the well written paper contained a repetitious phrase which confused me. Because it was well written I thought the repeated words must be there to convey a special meaning I did not see.

“If the basis of valuation is to be on a basis other than open market value as evidenced by sales, arbitrariness and protracted litigation would occur, thus tarnishing the credibility of government machinery.” I ran my eye back over the opening words. I had to query: Do we lose anything if we dropped the words “to be on a basis” before “other” - “If the basis of valuation is other than open market value ...” Answer came back - “No meaning is lost.” And this was in a well written paper.

I will read extracts from the other paper. The writer had to explain why we must set up an institute. I read the paper and found it disjointed. It made no sense in parts. So I reread it. Let me read one part: “The need for such services is made more acute as at present, there is no technical agency offering consultancy services in occupational safety and health.” I asked, “What’s happening as at present? Why ‘as at present’?” What the officer meant was: “There is acute need because there is no department which offers advice on occupational safety and health.” We have taken in each other’s mistakes. He had constantly read “as at present”, “as of yesterday”, “as of tomorrow”, so he just stuffed in three unnecessary words - “as at present”.

Next extract: “He recommended that a central autonomous body be set up to give clear direction, to coordinate and to

strengthen Singapore's industrial safety and health efforts, to service industry and protect valuable manpower." I asked, "What is it we are going to do?" If the officer has no ability, I will be wasting my time. But he has ability. What he wants is sufficient application, to know the rules, to try and achieve the simple. And this is not simple.

There is such a thing as a language environment. Ours is a bad one. Those of you who have come back from a long stay in a good English-speaking environment would have felt the shock when reading The Straits Times on returning. I spent a month in Vancouver in October 1968. Then I went on to Harvard in Boston. For one month I read the papers in Vancouver. They were not much better than The Straits Times. They had one million people, English-speaking. But there was no sparkle in their pages. The contrast in Harvard was dazzling. From the undergraduate paper, The Harvard Crimson, to the Boston Globe to the New York Times to the Washington Post, every page crackled with novel ideas smartly presented. Powerful minds had ordered those words. Ideas had been thought out and dressed in clean, clear prose. They were from the best trained minds of an English-speaking population of 220 million!

Let us try to do better. We are not doing justice to ourselves. If you do not have the ability I would not be spending my time here. I know the ability is there; it has just not been trained to use the written word correctly and concisely. And it is not too late to start the training now. It is not possible to conduct the business of government by talking to each other with the help of gesticulation. You have to write it down. And it must be complete, clear and unambiguous.

I have discussed this with Head of Civil Service and PS (Prime Minister's Office). Dr Goh Keng Swee has sent his promising Mindef staff for training in batches of ten. They have improved. I believe if officers are prepared to point out each other's mistakes, those who know can help those who do not. It does not mean that the person who does not know is the lesser mind. It is not the case. If he had concentrated on learning the use of the written word in school, he would have developed the skills. How do we do it, gentlemen? I want to hear you. ●

# Graduate mothers should reproduce more

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This speech is made by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew at the National Day Cultural Show and Rally held at the National Theatre on August 14, 1983. The speech sparked an uproar at that time. Mr Lee noted during the speech that a large pool of graduate women were left unmarried, or marrying down, and having fewer children. On the other hand, less educated Singaporeans were spawning large families. To him, this signalled a dangerous trend which would diminish the quality of the nation's gene pool. While others would deride this as an attempt to tinker with the genetic makeup of society, for Mr Lee it was little more than a forward-looking attempt to forestall societal problems. An extract of the speech is reproduced here.

“The results of better education and the drive for higher productivity are going to take 10-20 years before their full benefits are felt. Those campaigns which can give simple, quick returns have all been done. The swiftest gains were when we established confidence in our stability, discipline, efficiency and security. Now comes the more difficult, long haul to do better: better education, better performance, zero defects, better productivity.

Eventually, we shall reach our maximum potential. And that maximum is determined by our inherent capabilities, the kind of people we are, as individuals, and as a society.

From our 1982 school 'examinations, we can improve on our

present talent pyramid and project that our population will consist of the very able, about 0.1 per cent of each year's school intake who become scholars; the able: 7 per cent tertiary educated, up from 2 per cent in 1980; the above-average: 9 per cent upper secondary, up from 5 per cent; the average: 52 per cent secondary, up from 13 per cent; the below-average: 20 per cent primary, down from 37 per cent; the slower learners: 12 per cent, down from 44 per cent. Each is capable of learning to achieve her respective potential; and must be helped to do so.

From the 1980 Census, we know that the better educated the people are, the less children they have.

They can see the advantages of a small family. They know the burden of bringing up a large family. And when a well-educated wife with high income is not working, the disruption to the wife's career and loss in joint family income is serious. This is having serious consequences, but more on it later.

A person's performance depends on nature and nurture. There is increasing evidence that nature, or what is inherited, is the greater determinant of a person's performance than nurture (or education and environment). Researches on identical twins who were given away at birth to different families of different social, economic classes show that their performance is very close although their environments are different. One such research, for over a decade, is by Prof Thomas Bouchard of the University of Minnesota, which has located identical twins wherever they can be found at whatever age - 20 plus, 30 plus, 40 plus. They test their vocabulary, their habits, their likes and dislikes, for colours, food, friends. The conclusion the researchers draw is that 80 per

cent is nature, or inherited, and 20 per cent, the differences from different environment and up-bringing.

Even though only 20 per cent of the performance of a human being is due to nurture, much more than 20 per cent of the performance of human beings as a group depends on training and organisation. Compare the East Germans and the West Germans. Their genetic make-up is the same but the performance is vastly different. So with the North and South Koreans. These differences arise from differences in the social, administrative and economic system.

So it is crucial to help every Singaporean, whatever his inherited characteristics, to achieve his best through improved training and education.

The 1980 Census disclosed that whilst we have brought down the birth rate, we have reduced it most unequally. The better educated the woman is, the less children she has. Ironically/she has the greater resources to provide her children with a better environment, nurturing and care. A woman below age 40 with no educational qualifications, on average, produces about 3 children although she has limited income and few resources to give her children the extra attention, help and stimulation required. With primary education, she produces about 2 on average; with secondary education,  $1\frac{1}{4}$ ; with upper secondary education,  $1\frac{1}{3}$ ; with tertiary education,  $1\frac{1}{4}$ .

I was so disturbed by these figures that I refused to use them as the basis for the future. They show how many children for each ever-married woman aged 10-39.

I asked for figures of the older women aged 35-39. They have slightly more children. Adjusted for those women in the group who remain unmarried, the mean figures are:

No education	- 3.5
Primary	- 2.7
Secondary	- 1.9
Upper secondary	- 2.0
Tertiary	- 1.65

If the younger women, aged 10-34, turn out to have the same pattern as the older, aged 35-39, the position is not so disastrous, though still bad. Those without education still have more than double the children of those with tertiary or secondary education, who have not reproduced themselves.

I shall base my arguments tonight on these less disturbing figures. I suspect the actual results will be that the younger women will have slightly more children than at present, but less than the older women.

Before 1960, most girls had no education. The law permitted and people practised polygamy.

We have altered our pattern of procreation producing the next generation, first by educating everyone, second by giving women equal employment opportunities, and third by establishing monogamy since 1960. We gave universal education to the first generation in the early 1960s. In the 1960s and 70s, we reaped a big crop of able boys and girls. They came from bright parents, many of whom were never educated. In their parents' generation,

the able and not-so-able both had large families. This is a once ever bumper crop which is not likely to be repeated. For once this generation of children from uneducated parents have received their education in the late 1960s and 70s, and the bright ones make it to the top, to tertiary levels, they will have less than 2 children per ever-married woman. They will not have large families like their parents.

The results are going to be felt in Singapore, not in one to two hundred years as in Europe, but in one generation, in 25 years. Unlike Europe, we do not have a large rural community, where most farmers were uneducated, and so the uneducated but able parents had as many children as their less able but equally uneducated neighbours.

If we continue to reproduce ourselves in this lop-sided way, we will be unable to maintain our present standards, levels of competence will decline. Our economy will falter, the administration will suffer, and the society will decline. For how can we avoid lowering performance when for every two graduates (with some exaggeration to make the point), in 25 years' time there will be one graduate, and for every two uneducated workers, there will be three? Worse, the coming society of computers and robotics needs more, not less, well-educated workers.

In all societies, the trend is for the better-educated people to have less children than the less educated. But no other society has ever compressed this process into just over one generation, from the 1950s to the 1970s, and have the first statistical evidence in the 1980 Census.

A minority of women, about 14 per cent of all ever-married women aged 10-39, have 4-7 children, and a smaller minority, about 0.4 per cent of all ever-married women aged 10-39, have 8 or more children. Nearly all of them (97 per cent) have no secondary education. In future, such women will be better educated and will be urged to stop at two. Singapore does not have the space or the resources for such an explosive family expansion. The government has concentrated on better health, education and housing to improve performance through better environment. Parents must be made to do their part in family nurturing which is only possible in small families.

From data collected by the Ministry of Education on the educational qualifications of the parents of Primary 1 students for 1981-83, we discover that women marry their educational equals or their educational superiors. In other words, the Singaporean male marries his educational equal or his inferior. Seldom does he marry his educational superior.

The result is a considerable loss in well-educated women remaining unmarried at 40+ and not represented in the next generation: 13½ per cent of all tertiary educated women, 8½ per cent of all upper secondary educated women, and 10½ per cent of all secondary educated women. It could be male ignorance and prejudice which lead to his preference of a wife less educated than himself.

Or it may be that an educated woman shies away from a husband with less educated ways. Whatever it is, this is a new problem. In the old days, matchmakers settled these matters. Now we are caught betwixt and between. We have gone for western style,

individual free choice. At the same time, the Singapore male is chauvinist enough not to like marrying women better educated than himself. Most men hope that their children will be as bright as themselves. After all they carry their father's surname. Many men are ignorant of the fact that biologically and genetically, every mother and father contributes equally to the child's physical and mental attributes.

Meantime, to make up for this loss of replacement at the top of the educational pyramid, we must increase recruitment of top talent from outside. It is slow and difficult. Our projected losses through graduates not reproducing themselves under present patterns will be over 20 per cent (based on the mean of 1.65 children born alive per ever-married woman aged 35-39) of about 2,000 graduates per year or about 400 graduates. Our recruitment at present is less than 80 graduates per annum, and unlikely ever to exceed 200 however much we try.

Our most valuable asset is in the ability of our people. Yet we are frittering away this asset through the unintended consequences of changes in our education policy and equal career opportunities for women. This has affected their traditional role as mothers.

It is too late for us to reverse our policies and have our women go back to their primary role as mothers, the creators and protectors of the next generation. Our women will not stand for it. And anyway, they have already become too important a factor in the economy. Therefore, we must further amend our policies, and try to reshape our demographic configuration so that our better-educated women will have more children to be adequately represented in the next generation.

I am sanguine that we can succeed in getting the few with families of 4 to 10 or more down to 2, as the majority have done. I am not sure we can persuade those with families of one to have two. They need incentives, not disincentives. Incentives for more children have not worked in Europe. Anyway, it is no offence not to marry and to have any children at all. All the same, we must think deep and long on the profound changes we have unwittingly set off. In some way or other, we must ensure that the next generation will not be too depleted of the talented.

Government policies have improved the part of nurture in performance. Government policies cannot improve the part nature makes to performance. This only our young men and women can decide upon. All the government can do is to help them and lighten their responsibilities in various ways. ●



# How much is a good minister worth?

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So determined was Lee to induct good men into government that he made in 1994 a most revolutionary alteration to the way they would henceforth be rewarded. He introduced a formula pegging their salaries to the top earners in the private sector. In this speech in Parliament, he spoke about how times had changed and why it was no longer possible to depend on men who were motivated by a desire to serve the country while paid a pittance. He was speaking during the debate on the White Paper on ministerial salaries on November 1, 1994.

“My generation of political leaders have become dinosaurs, an extinct breed of men who went into politics because of the passion of their convictions. The problem now is a simple one: How to select younger leaders when the conditions that had motivated the old guards to sacrifice promising prospects of a good life for a political cause no longer obtain in a completely different social climate. This change in climate is inevitable with economic progress and a change in social values.

In the '60s and '70s, as prime minister, I responded to this problem by a gradual increase in pay to reduce the big gap with the private sector. But in the 1980s it no longer worked. So in 1984 I decided to target ministers' salaries at 80 per cent of their private sector counterparts.

I've spent 40 years trying to select men for big jobs - ministers,

civil servants, statutory boards' chairmen. So I've gone through many systems, spoken to many CEOs, how did they select. Finally, I decided that Shell had the best system of them all, and the government switched from 40 attributes to three, which they called "helicopter qualities", which they have implemented and they are able to judge their executives worldwide and grade them for helicopter qualities. What are they? Powers of analysis; logical grasp of the facts; concentration on the basic points, extracting the principles. You score high marks in mathematics, you've got it. But that's not enough. There are brilliant mathematicians but they make poor executives. They must have a sense of reality of what is possible. But if you are just realistic, you become pedestrian, plebeian, you will fail. Therefore you must be able to soar above the reality and say, "This is also possible" - a sense of imagination.

Then Shell has evolved certain other attributes - leadership and dynamism - a natural ability that drives a person on and drives the people around him to make the effort. The two psychologists who worked this out are Professor Muller, a Dutchman, and a Van Lennep, whom I met because I was interested some 15 years ago. These qualities are really inborn. You can develop knowledge but if you haven't got them, you haven't got them, including the ability to be a good interviewer. Have you got that capacity to see through a person? Listen to his voice, hear what his words are saying but look him in the eye, watch his face muscle and you'll know that he is actually thinking the opposite. A good interviewer does that.

So, the first premise that I worked with is that, yes, they are interchangeable. But you must interchange them at an age when

they are still flexible because the older you grow, the more set you are in your ways, then the less able you are to take on a new career.

I had to choose men from all sources and it was an extremely difficult job as the economy took off. In actual practice, my formula of 80 per cent did not work because income tax returns came for last year. By the time the Finance Ministry and the Public Services Division had adjusted them and worked it out into the salary scales and made sure that everybody's relativity was worked out, there was another one or two years, and so we were two to three years late. By which time, because we went through a buoyant period, private sector went on another 20 to 30 per cent. Under the new system the only lag will be because the income tax returns are late and analysis and review will only take another year, so it's two years behind time...

One corporate chief who was head of a think-tank some 15 years ago passed a scathing judgement on British Cabinet ministers - that of the 20-odd Cabinet ministers, he doubted if three would be CEOs of British corporations. Who's responsible for that? They are. They created that climate of opinion where so much hypocrisy exists and the public believes, yes, it's glory. Therefore, you do your job for the country. You end up with what they now call "sleaze". I spent a few days flipping through the English Sunday newspapers and they are just full of it. Contact men. You want to meet the minister? Give me sterling pounds 40,000 a year as a retainer, I'll arrange a dinner. But it's commonplace in Britain, where it never was. It only used to be Americans who did that. But hypocrisy has led to that same position.

Then, you know, the memoirs that people have written - Bob Hawke has a highly controversial, colourful piece. But of course it's not in the same class as Margaret Thatcher when it comes to pounds. Harper Collins paid her sterling pounds 2.5 million. That's an American publisher, and the London Sunday Times paid her, just for serial rights, a few million pounds.

For the past four years since I stepped down as prime minister, I've been studying the external economy and Singapore's place. Prime Minister wanted me to brainstorm and look ahead. I came to the conclusion that unless there was a major upset in peace and stability, which is not very likely for the next 10 years and probably for the next 15 and maybe even 20 years for this generation, this region is going to boom because it is taking off. It started off with the Korean War in the 1950s when the United States built up Japan. Then the Vietnam War - the United States had to source their supplies from Southeast Asia. From Japan, the industrialisation went to Korea, to Taiwan, to Hongkong, to Singapore. The Plaza Agreement in 1985 pushed up the yen so the Japanese had to relocate their industries at the lower end. Then the Americans put pressure on the Koreans and on the Taiwanese and on us and pushed our currency up, so we in turn had to relocate. And now there is a web of cross-investments right across the Pacific, the western end. Unless we are fools and start going to war with each other, we are all going to boom.

### **Why PAP ministers are sought after**

The corporate world in Singapore knows that PAP MPs have been carefully selected. A PAP MPship is like a good housekeeping seal, a hallmark of character and integrity that adds value to

a person. I instituted the practice. If you look through the MP lists from 1955 onwards, you will find that in 1955 we had two barbers, two postmen, clerks. But they were unionists, they were not ordinary people. But with rising standards, every election term, I had to move with the higher educational levels of the voters. This is a demanding electorate. Everybody strives to get up to the highest he can of the education ladder. And he wants somebody who is better than him to represent him. He doesn't want somebody he can talk down to.

So these people, PAP MPs, are sought after. But let me assure the House that the government enforces strict rules to prevent influence-peddling for the benefit of any person or company. But for that, Singapore will be just another of the governments in the Third World, which we are not. And it is important that we remain different because that is an enormous economic capital for us. Lose that and we may lose about 30 per cent of the rationale why we are different and why we attract different kinds of investments.

But I have had to recognise, and I have told the Prime Minister, you can't fight this. Now, a powerful wave has swept up our young and some of our not-so-young. There is an eagerness, almost anxiety, that they miss the escalator that is moving up and that can carry them to golden opportunities. And in fairness to the young, I will add this, with almost a touch of nostalgia for older and better times - it has swept up part of the older generation too. Because the old guards, they don't just die away. In Hollywood movies, you walk into the sunset and music and clouds. But in real life you live on, you become a little bit more infirm, you need medical treatment, and you have needs to meet. For example, Dr Goh Keng Swee. Recently he resigned from the Board of the

Government Investment Corporation in order to avoid conflict of interest situations with the GIC when he advises several financial institutions on investments in Singapore and abroad which may also be of interest to GIC fund managers. That's quite a shift in the world. It's as if I suddenly decided that I'll join Henry Kissinger Associates. And the rewards are in, for key personnel, it's six, seven figures. Or I don't even have to leave Singapore. I could go back to Lee & Lee. I started the firm.

Recently, another distinguished former minister, old guard, part of my generation, was deputed by the retired MPs to see the Prime Minister, who told me of this. He was deputed to request that the commuted part of the pensions should be restored after twelve and a half years, as is the case with civil servants. It is not the case with ministers and MPs.

I know what the old guards feel. They have seen me. I've said, "You know the rules of the game. You went in, these were the rules, these were the pensions." But they feel they've been short-changed because their fixed pensions have deprived them of their share in Singapore's growing prosperity. So the PM has to consider the matter. It is the same society, the same old guards who sacrificed. Some of them literally took their lives into their hands when they decided to stay with the PAP and not move over to Barisan in this House in 1961. But for several of them, the history of Singapore would be different and I would not be meeting and talking to you here. We may be in a completely different age and a different world.

Now, let me talk about the recruitment of ministers. In the last 14 years, only four ministers have been recruited from the private

sector - Tony Tan from OCBC, Yeo Ning Hong from Beechams, Wong Kan Seng from Hewlett Packard and Yeo Cheow Tong from Le Blond. Indeed, the last two - Wong Kan Seng and Yeo Cheow Tong - were originally from the government: Kan Seng was in the Admin Service and Yeo Cheow Tong was in EDB. All other ministers have been recruited from the public sector, either the SAF or public institutions.

For the future, the position will be more difficult, and I believe the Prime Minister will be very fortunate if he can find one out of five ministers who will come from the private sector. He keeps on trying. He never gives up, he keeps on making friends, he keeps on inviting them to tea sessions. They keep on saying, "Next time, please, when my children are grown up." They could not afford to accept the offer he's made to them to become MPs and ministers of state or ministers.

### **We must get a mix of ministers**

Now, let me explain why it is important to have a mix of ministers from different backgrounds in the Cabinet. I'll give my personal experience and example.

Lim Kim San was and is a very practical man of business. He doesn't write speeches and books. Every time he has to make a speech I know it's a tremendous effort and he tells me, he says, "Must I make this speech?" I say, "Yes, you have to. It's your own constituency." But he has a lively, practical mind. That's why Singapore Press Holdings' profits have increased. He's gone in there, looked at the accounts, decided that the following changes will be made, costs will be cut, this will be amalgamated. And it

has just jacked up profits, as I knew he would do.

We made him chairman of Housing and Development Board in 1960 when we formed HDB. It was crucial, life and death. If we failed, we would not be re-elected. This was the first year of office of PAP, remember? And there were a lot of zealous idealists who wanted to put theories into practice. One of them, a member of the PAP central executive committee, said, “We must be different from other builders. Other builders hire contractors who exploit workers. We will hire the workers direct, cut out the middleman, they’ll be paid more and we’ll be model employers.”

Ong Eng Guan (Minister for National Development) ordered Lim Kim San to hire the construction workers direct. Kim San was nonplussed. He came to see me in my office. He asked me a very simple question. He said, “Do you want me to build houses or do you want me to be an employer of construction workers?” He said, “If you want flats, then I know how flats are built. You leave it to me. I’ll produce you the flats. If you ask me to hire workers, better look for another chairman.”

“Let me explain,” he said. “Every contractor has an elaborate supervisory system. He has his relatives. He has his trusted ‘kepalas’. They in turn have each a gang and they know each person in that group and each person has got to produce results to deserve the pay. Now if I hire them all, including the ‘kepalas’ who don’t know each other, you’ll be lucky if you get half a flat for where you would have a flat.” So I said, “Proceed!” All these ties of kinship and personal obligations ensured success. So I overruled Ong Eng Guan and he built the flats. One block was in my constituency, opposite the former Singapore Harbour

Board Union House, Cantonment Road. It's still there. If that had not gone up, I may not have been re-elected because Nanyang University and all the Chinese middle school students targeted Tanjong Pagar to canvas against me. But they looked at the flat that was going up, they decided these little boys are not going to put up the flats, I was. That was why I came back to this House.

Later, I persuaded him to take part in the 1963 general elections and I made him Minister of National Development. On several occasions, his practical market approach to problems made a difference to the success of projects.

So it is important for the PM to find younger generation Lim Kim Sans, people with different backgrounds who will sit down, cross-fertilise ideas, improve and sometimes block a plan which is theoretically marvellous but will not work out in practice. It has a leavening effect. You need people with different backgrounds. Now if we keep to past practices, suppose we make no change, we just keep on tampering with the system, and every few years we come back here and have another long debate; I've had them every three, four, five years since 1972. Individuals in Singapore and corporate entities will flourish but Singapore will be depleted at its heart, at the core. And without this functioning core, you will not have your opportunities.

The Prime Minister is already 53, the Deputy Prime Minister is 43. This team will not last two election terms without considerable infusions of fresh blood. Three ministers have got two ministries each and ministers need 15 ministers of state as backups and they haven't got it. They've only got seven. And they need to be recruited in order that they learn on the job and become part of

the team.

## **The Singapore way works**

If our solution - and I believe this one is a realistic solution and a sound one - works in five to ten years, the World Bank will again give us a citation as they did this year. And let me read what they said: “Not surprisingly, Singapore, which is widely perceived to have the region’s most competent and upright bureaucracy, pays its bureaucrats best.” When they use the word “bureaucracy”, these are Americans, they mean ministers too. But they went on to say, “The monthly base salary of a full minister in Singapore ranges from US\$13,800 to US\$17,300, while a minister of state receives the equivalent of US\$5,600 to US\$7,600.” They are saying, yes, it works.

I am pitting my judgement after 40 years in politics - and I’ve been in this chamber since 1955 - against all the arguments on the other side. I say this is necessary for Singapore. I say face up to the facts, get a good generation in, get the best of this generation. When it works, the World Bank will cite us again. You don’t get cited because you are conventional, you follow other people. You become a model because you went against conventional wisdom and proved that they were wrong and you were right. And if we can keep honest, competent government, never mind about it being brilliant - that is a tremendous achievement.

Look at all the countries around us. They started off self-sacrificing revolutionaries - Vietnam, China. They went on long marches. Their friends died. Their families perished. Their systems are now corrupt. Their children are corrupt. We have not

gone that way because we are realistic and we know adjustments have to be made. There is a price to be paid for hypocrisy. Ministers deal with billions of dollars in contracts. It is so easy. But when discovered, like Teh Cheang Wan [National Development Minister, suspected of corruption], he preferred death because he lost everything. In this society, you lose the respect of your friends and probably also of your relatives.

The fate of a country, when it's a matter of life and death, you throw up people who put personal considerations of safety and security and wealth aside. But that's when you have a revolutionary situation, when a whole people depend on the actions of a few. Now I believe if such a situation recurred again, some Singaporeans will again emerge and rise to the occasion.

So it is crucial when you have tranquil Singapore that you recognise that politics demands that extra of a person, a commitment to people and to ideals. You are not just doing a job. This is a vocation; not unlike the priesthood. You must feel for people, you must want to change society and make lives better. And if I had done that and got no satisfaction out of it, then I would be a fool doing it because I could have gone back to Lee & Lee umpteen years ago and ridden the boom and sat back, probably at least as rich as my brother or my two brothers - one is a doctor, another a lawyer. But why not? But somebody has to do this in order that they can prosper. And I am saying those who do this deserve not to be penalised or you will get nobody doing this.

### **Will it change the name of the game?**

Now, one journalist told me that there is some public concern

that these higher salaries would change, and I quote him, “the name of the game and attract a different type of person with different motivations.” It is possible that politically and socially uncommitted people from the higher management and professional brackets will be attracted to the idea of public office for this higher pay. I doubt it. But if it is so, and they can do better than the present ministers, they should come out and offer themselves as the alternative. That will be good for Singapore. Far better to have a credible alternative to the PAP than the motley collection of lacklustre candidates put up by the Workers’ Party, the Singapore Democratic Party, the National Solidarity Party, the Singapore People’s Party and so on and so on and so on.

None of them has ever assembled a team remotely credible as an alternative government. Yes, they have got Mr Low Thia Khiang. He is a good MP. He looks after his constituency. But you need more than a good MP. To be a movement, to be a government, you must produce 15 men with the capability to run the government. I am not sure that a good MP can run a ministry. I am not passing derogatory remarks because being a teacher and being a public speaker, especially in Teochew, is a useful attribute. The PAP had plenty of that and they were very useful for campaigning. But at the end of the day you’ve got to sit down, look at the file, masses of figures, and zero in on the critical issues and say, “no, don’t do that, do this”.

If this salary formula can draw out higher quality men into politics, whatever their motivations, I say, let’s have them. It’s better than the opposition we now have. If we can get in opposition people of the calibre of the Nominated MPs, I say Singapore is better off. At least I respect them. I can join in the argument. The

only one that I find worth listening to is Mr Low Thia Khiang. The others, I switch off. And I have asked the press. They say, yes, they also switch off, it's very difficult to put your earphones on. It is a sad commentary on the standard of Singapore opposition politics.

## **What makes a good government**

At the heart of the question is, what makes a good government? That is the core of the question. Can you have a good government without good men in charge of government? American liberals believe you can, that you can have a good system of government with proper separation of powers between the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary, plus checks and balances between them, regular tussles between Congress and the White House, and between the House of Representatives and the Senate in the US, and there will be good government even if weak or not so good men win elections and take charge. That's their belief.

My experience in Asia has led me to a different conclusion. To get good government, you must have good men in charge of government. I have observed in the last 40 years that even with a poor system of government, but with good strong men in charge, people get passable government with decent progress.

On the other hand, I have seen many ideal systems of government fail. Britain and France between them wrote over 80 constitutions for their different colonies. Nothing wrong with the constitution, with the institutions and the checks and the balances. But the societies did not have the leaders who could work those institutions, nor the men who respected those

institutions. Furthermore, the esteem, the habits of obedience to a person because of his office, not because of his person, is something that takes generations to build into a people. But the leaders who inherited these constitutions were not equal to the job and their countries failed and their system collapsed in riots, in coups and in revolution. So every time I hear people criticising us. When we are successful, they say we are sterile. When you are not successful, they say look at the slums, look at the degradation, look at the filth. These are the wiseacres. We have got to live with the consequences of our actions and we are responsible for our own people and we take the right decisions for them.

You look at the old Philippines. The old Ceylon. The old East Pakistan and several others. I have been to these countries and places. When I went to Colombo for the first time in 1956 it was a better city than Singapore because Singapore had three and a half years of Japanese Occupation and Colombo was the centre or HQ of Mountbatten's Southeast Asia command. And they had large sterling reserves. They had two universities. Before the war, a thick layer of educated talent. So if you believe what American liberals or British liberals used to say, then it ought to have flourished. But it didn't. One-man-one-vote led to the domination of the majority Sinhalese over the minority Tamils who were the active and intelligent fellows who worked hard and got themselves penalised. And English was out. They were educated in English. Sinhalese was in. They got quotas in two universities and now they have become fanatical Tigers. And the country will never be put together again. Somebody should have told them - change the system, loosen up, or break off. And looking back, I think the Tunku was wise. I offered a loosening up of the system. He said, "Clean cut, go your way." Had we stayed in, and I look at Colombo

and Ceylon, or Sri Lanka, I mean changing names, sometimes maybe you deceive the gods, but I don't think you are deceiving the people who live in them. It makes no great difference to the tragedy that is being enacted. They failed because they had weak or wrong leaders, like the Philippines.

Singapore must get some of its best in each year's crop of graduates into government. When I say best, I don't mean just academic results. His O levels, A levels, university degree will only tell you his powers of analysis. That is only one-third of the helicopter quality. You've then got to assess him for his sense of reality, his imagination, his quality of leadership, his dynamism. But most of all, his character and his motivation, because the smarter a man is, the more harm he will do society.

But I also believe from my experience that Muller and Van Lennep are right, that at 21 the man is fully developed and you can discover what he is if you can test him assiduously enough. But by 30, 25 to 30, it's obvious what he is. You want men with good character, good mind, strong convictions. Without that Singapore won't make it. My problem is how do you do that when the booming economy is drawing them away?

### **Forget conventional attitudes**

I don't think we can afford to be inhibited by conventional attitudes. Now editors of our newspapers, when they were given copies of the White Paper, were surprised at the high earnings of the top men in the professions. My answer is, let's have these figures every year independently verified. IRAS is not cooking them up. We know how much people are earning. Let's have

them. Under oath of secrecy, a group of men independent of the government and the IRAS can testify and verify.

But what is it we are arguing about? The government today - ministers, Cabinet ministers, parliamentary secretaries, political secretaries, everybody - cost \$17 million a year. That's the cost, working a GDP of nearly \$90 billion growing at 8 per cent, which is \$6 billion a year. You have wrong men here, it's a disaster. There's no way a prime minister can argue that any minister can walk out of his Cabinet and get this kind of salary. Just as there was no way when I was a partner of a legal firm and we shared profits in a certain ratio that any partner could walk out and get that share.

In any team, like a football team, there are strikers who score the goals. But he needs his fullback, his wings, to feed the ball in to him. And he has to decide how to deploy them. And really we are arguing at the end of the day whether by this formula which over three, four years will pay them \$5 million more, the whole lot... What on earth are we arguing about? Except people get envious and they say, "Oh well, they should really be sacrificing."

If it were possible to carry on with the system, I would be in favour of carrying on with what I've been familiar with. But I know it is not possible. I have explained to you on my recent journey how I met three persons and immediately the changed circumstances became obvious to me. And I came back reinforced in my belief that the Prime Minister has to move and move quickly.

Let me take Members now to a different angle to this problem. He is like the conductor of an orchestra. He's got to make great

music. I think the best metaphor or simile for a prime minister is really a conductor; in other words, he's got to know something about each instrument; what sounds they make, where they come in. When I started my job I didn't, but I had to learn it quickly - home affairs, finance. You have to have stability. You have to have an economy going. You've got to have labour relations, education, national development, housing, the whole lot. You must know how to deploy your resources, not just money, but manpower. So at any one time a certain sector is the important one and I send my best minister and my best permanent secretary to support him to make sure that that sector succeeds.

And he's got to decide how he rewards them. Now he needs people in his team who are goal-scorers. Any team, to win, must have sharpshooters. In other words, in government, you must have ideas, you must create new concepts, build new institutions and be innovators and not simply followers of orthodoxy.

### **Let's blow a few trumpets**

I'll give you a few examples from the past. It's like blowing the trumpet of the old guards, but maybe they deserve to have a few trumpets blown on their behalf.

We had massive unemployment in 1959, more than 14 per cent. Every year 55,000 to 60,000 children were born, 4 per cent of our population growth. Quite frightening, beyond the capability of Singapore to solve it. We knew industrialisation was the only way. Commerce could not solve it. United Nations sent a team; Dr Albert Winsemius [the late Dutch economist who was Singapore's economic adviser for nearly 25 years until 1984] was

their leader. He recommended, yes, proceed. Dr Goh discussed it with him and I discussed it with Dr Goh and met him and said, “Right, let’s try EDB [Economic Development Board] and sell Singapore to America, to Europe, to Japan as a manufacturing centre.” Nobody had an EDB in the world. We formed one.

And we put in our brightest and our best. You want to know why you’ve got good jobs, why you are doing well? Because every year I allowed Dr Goh to have his pick. Of course you make mistakes. Some are bright, but they are not much use, lacking judgement. But within a couple of years you know who’s got judgement, sense of reality, imagination, leadership, dynamism, plus the powers of analysis. They served Singapore well. We innovated.

He created that organisation and he also built up Jurong, invested hundreds of millions of dollars, built roads, canals, filled up the earth, put in power, put in water. And for five years it was empty, capital lying fallow. We watched it, wringing our hands because two years in Malaysia, the finance minister of Malaysia squeezed us and didn’t give us pioneer certificates. We nearly failed.

But we did not fail. I gave Dr Goh the best permanent secretary we had - Hon Sui Sen - to help him. He became chairman of EDB and he was a very good judge of people and persons, a very quiet man, didn’t make great speeches, but understood people and knew who could do what. He built up a good team and from EDB sprang TDB (Trade Development Board), sprang DBS, because we had to build up the finances to help people start their industries. This is not administration, doing a job. This is entrepreneurship on the political stage, on a national scale. We

changed the complexion of Singapore. You can bring him back to life and reward him?

In 1968, we were looking for ways to fill up our economy. Hon Sui Sen came to see me. He said, “Let’s take a chance. Change our foreign exchange regulations. Release it.” We were part of the sterling era. We had foreign exchange controls. He said, “Cancel it. Let’s start the Asian Currency Unit. Collect all the dollars in the region, lend it to the world. We will be the link between New York closing and London opening.”

I listened intently. I said, “Proceed.” Took the Bills through. Today, Singapore is the third largest foreign exchange trading centre in the world, next to New York and London. We have also got a budding futures trading exchange in Simex. We have a great potential for growth and very high value-added. Can you thank Hon Sui Sen?

True, it wasn’t all his idea. But he had the good sense to listen to people with ideas. So a Dutch banker called Van Oenen, who worked for Bank of America, who was a friend of Winsemius, said, “Try.” But we made it work. Now, everybody wants to be a financial centre. We have overseas HQ. Kuala Lumpur immediately followed. We have no patent on it. They studied our laws. They upped the stakes. So we have to keep on innovating, moving ahead. You do that with a bunch of mediocrities?

I make no apologies for collecting the most talented team I could find. Without them, none of you would be enjoying life today in Singapore, including the reporters up there. I say this without any compunction. Who pays for all this? A Singapore economy

which has been so finely tuned that it is able to take advantage of every opportunity that comes our way.

### **This is political entrepreneurship**

You want to know entrepreneurship? Without Dr Goh Keng Swee, there is no Singapore Armed Forces. He is the SAF. 1965 - we were suddenly independent. I said, "You are a corporal in the Singapore Volunteers. You know something about this. Better learn something more. Start it." He came back one day in February 1966 and he told me, "You know, we've got two battalions." And, you know, they were in Malaysia for two years. He said, "So, more than half the battalions are now Malaysian Malays."

So when one battalion came back from Sabah and the Malaysian Regiment refused to move out of their camp, they had to be put up at Farrer Park and they might have gone on riot or mutiny. So he came to see me. He said, "You have made me as if I am a British general in charge of troops, half of whom are Italians." So we worked day and night to sort that out so that we would have troops who are Singaporeans. Had we failed, I wouldn't be here to tell you this story. We got the Israelis, we studied the Swiss, we got an SAF that nobody believes is just for show.

But the most important entrepreneurship is really the structuring of Singapore. I was determined that before the soldier fights for Singapore he must have something to fight for. Each family must own their home. So I set out right from the word go against any opposition from any quarter to build up the Central Provident Fund. At each salary increase I pushed something into CPF and built up the home ownership programme that today

gives 91 to 92 per cent who own their homes, which are going up in value year by year because the infrastructure is getting better, the economy is getting better and they are rising with it. So you can sell one five-room flat in Singapore and buy two bungalows in Perth. But before you do that, remember, your five-room will go up in price; your two bungalows there will be empty and will go down in price.

I take this as a matter of fact. Things have to be done which are unpleasant. I changed the acquisition laws and cleared off compensation for sea frontages so that we could reclaim the land, then we've got East Coast Parkway. Fire sites - I reclaimed and acquired the right to acquire as of occupied status. It was Robin Hood but I succeeded in giving everybody their own home. Of course, not me alone, but the concepts, the planning, I make no bones, took responsibility, and it has succeeded. I put in Medisave in place. I faced opposition in the Cabinet. Ministers came back from China and said, "Wonderful place. Everybody has got the same medical services and for free." I listened to this and I said, "Why do you believe this fairy tale?" I put 4, 5 per cent aside. I changed the minister and I put Mr Goh Chok Tong as Minister for Health. I said, "Implement this." And today we have our viable national health service which avoids waste, no buffet syndrome, but guarantees adequate support for everybody, adequate health.

The CPF [Central Provident Fund] also. Low interest rates, yes, but it has paid for all the infrastructure of our roads, bridges, airports, container ports, telecommunications, MRT, land reclamation. An ordinary group of people would think that up? If we didn't have the entrepreneurs, we would not be here. And look at all the housing estates. Public housing in Singapore is

not an apology for slums. You go to Britain, you go to America and vandalism and crime. Have you ever asked why it is different? Because from my own experience, as I went around on constituency tours in '62 and '63, I discovered there were grassroots organisations, kompong groups, Muslim mutual fund groups, clan associations, retailers' associations. I organised them and I made them community centres' management committees and they ran the place for themselves, for their community. From them I formed Citizens Consultative Committees, altered the face of Singapore. Then as we moved into the housing estates, the same experience. I said, "Start zone committees, residents' committees every five, ten blocks." So there is a nervous system of human beings transmitting messages, getting people together so that they know they are a community and not just anonymous individuals who shut their flat doors and live their own private lives ...

Finally, let me put the issue very simply. I have been through this life and had I lived a different life in Lee & Lee, I would never have had this experience. Because I have gone through this, I say "do it". I am in a position to judge. I say I'm prepared to put my experience and my judgement against all the arguments the doubters can muster. In five to ten years, when it works and Singapore has got a good government, this formula will be accepted as conventional wisdom. ●

# English for trade; mother tongue to preserve identity

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This speech, delivered on Nov 24, 2004, was made in support of a revised, more flexible Chinese-language curriculum while he was Minister Mentor, is one of the most complete statements of Mr Lee Kuan Yew's views on bilingualism and language policy.



“Start off from where we were, let us say after the war, 1945, or even 1965. We were in different communal groups – Malay kampungs, Chinese villages. You would see Hainanese at Lorong Tai Seng, Malays in Kampong Ubi, and so on.

(My Old Guard colleague) Mr (S.) Rajaratnam was the exponent of “we can create a race of Singaporeans”. Idealistically, I would go along with him. But, realistically, I knew it was going to be one long, hard slog; maybe we’ll never get there, but we should try.

Ask yourself this question. If your child brings back a boyfriend or a girlfriend of a different race, will you be delighted? I will answer you frankly. I do not think I will. I may eventually accept it. So it is deep in the psyche of a human being.

Before we entered Malaysia when we negotiated the terms of entry, education, language and culture were such important subjects... Right from the start, education was already a red-hot issue.

What did we do as a Government? From 1959 to 1965, we had a laissez-faire policy. We inherited from the British, English schools, Malay schools, Tamil schools and other schools.

When we became independent in 1965, the Chinese Chamber

of Commerce committee came to see me in my office, then at City Hall. They urged me to have Chinese as our national and official language. I looked them in the eye and said, “You must be mad, and I don’t want to hear any more of that from you. If you do, you are entering the political arena. I have to fight you. Because Singapore will come apart.”

Supposing I had been otherwise inclined, which my colleagues would not have allowed, and had said, “Yes, okay.” What would have happened to Singapore? Where would the Malays be, and the Indians, what future would they have? The English-educated Chinese would also be against us. The country would fall apart.

Let us assume that we were all Chinese, no Malays, no Indians. Could we make a living with Chinese as our language of government and our national language? Who is going to trade with us? What do we do? How do we get access to knowledge? There was no choice.

Having made English the working language of government and administration, what do we do about the mother tongues? If we had no set policy and allowed free market practices, free choice, all mother tongues would have eventually vanished. Because the first business of any parent is to make sure that his or her child can make a living.

Therefore, we decided that, however unpleasant, however contrary to the concept of a homogeneous society, each racial group would learn his mother tongue as a second language. Most unhappy for English-speaking Chinese homes and, I am sure, also for Indian homes. For Malays, nearly all of them spoke Malay at home; so they were happy.

Was that policy right or wrong? If you bring me back to 1965, I would say that is the policy I would still adopt... Did I legislate it; (tell Chinese-medium school students) you go to English school,

and (learn) Chinese as a second language?

I think we would have lost the next election. Because after Independence, the enrolment for Chinese schools increased; 1966, over 55 per cent. Many parents thought, “Yes. Let’s do Chinese now. We are out of Malaysia.”

I left it alone. By the 1970s, the job market decided what parents chose, and the rush began to English schools... It became so rapid that I had no choice but to urge parents to go slow, because we could not produce enough English teachers.

So I faced the problem of (the Chinese-medium) Nanyang University. By 1978, Nanyang University was in dire straits ... It was so bad that when a Nanyang graduate applied for a job, he would produce his school certificate. Because employers knew that the Nanyang graduates of the 1950s and 60s were not the same as the Nanyang graduates of the late 70s. The (good) students had moved across to English schools.

Do we allow this to go on? What was the solution? We tried to convert Nantah from within, get the teachers to lecture in English because they all had American PhDs. They could not. They had lost their English fluency. So we moved the whole campus into University of Singapore... We decided to merge the two universities and made it the National University of Singapore.

I have been berated all these years by the Chinese-educated in Malaysia for having killed Chinese education. I am a convenient excuse for letting off their frustrations. They are not really hating me. They are saying, “Look. Please don’t go that way in Malaysia.”

If you have a unified system based on the national language, that will be a big problem for the Chinese community. It is not a problem here because I never forced anybody into the English stream. They could have chosen Chinese as their primary language and English as a secondary language. But career prospects

determined what they chose. Will we ever become completely homogeneous, a melange of languages and cultures? No. Why did we take this route? Because we have no other choice. If we have only English and we allowed the other languages to atrophy and vanish, we face a very serious problem of identity and culture.

How do I know this? Because I learnt Chinese late in life, and I rediscovered snatches of what I heard when my parents, my grandparents spoke: “Ah! yes, that was what they meant.” It resonates, pulled at my heartstrings. Would I want to see it lost? Absolutely not!...

I tell all parents, “Look at your child carefully. Consider how much he can take – one or the other – and decide what you want.” I will give you a series of options. You want Chinese as your master language, go ahead. You want English, how much. And how much Chinese. A series of options. But remember the choice is yours. If you make the wrong decision over your child’s capability, do not blame the Government. ●

# IRs needed for S'pore to keep abreast of the top cities

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In the debate over whether to bring in the integrated resorts and casinos to Singapore, Mr Lee stood up in Parliament on April 19, 2005, to state that he was against gambling. He had initially resisted the move to bring casinos into Singapore but he eventually changed his mind because he saw the benefits that it could bring to the country.



“Mr Speaker, Sir, I am anti-gambling. As a child in primary school, I saw my father become a problem gambler for several years. I watched many quarrels between my father and mother.

He wanted her jewellery to pawn and gamble on “21” or blackjack to win back his losses. Fortunately for us, he gave up gambling. I have never gambled...

On several occasions, my business friends in Hong Kong suggested that Stanley Ho, who ran casinos in Macau, would be happy to start one in Singapore. I ruled it out. I did not want to undermine Singapore’s work ethic and breed the belief that people can get rich by gambling, something that is impossible because the odds are against you. I have not changed my mind nor my basic values.

But I have had to change my attitude to casinos in Singapore when it is part of an integrated resort...

What is important is: Will it be a total plus for the economy and is it worth the price we have to pay in social cost...

Each and every minister has strong personal beliefs and convictions of what is good for his family, for Singapore, for the

kind of society they want. At the same time, you ask yourself, if you say 'no', and this is but one of many steps Singapore must take to keep abreast of the rest of the world, how do you keep ahead of the rest of the region to be a vibrant, exciting, interesting city to visit. We have to decide in this present world whether Singapore should still reject an integrated resort because it has a casino...

I am convinced that (the two) integrated resorts in Singapore must depend on tourists because they cannot survive if they were to depend on Singaporeans. The projects show that potential investors expect, on the average, to earn more than two-thirds of their revenue from foreign tourists.

As people in Asia, especially in China and India, become wealthier, they will travel and visit integrated resorts. Several said that their Singapore integrated resort would be their flagship project in this part of the world.

The reasons are obvious. This is a clean, attractive, well-policed, safe city, a financial centre; no money laundering, no muggings, no thieves, no drugs. And we have to keep it that way.

If we turn down their proposals, surely they will go elsewhere in the region.

The old model on which I worked was to create a First World city in a Third World region – clean, green, efficient, pleasant, healthy and wholesome; safe and secure for everyone. These virtues are valuable but no longer sufficient.

Now we also have to be not just economically vibrant, but also an exciting, fascinating city to visit, with top-class symphony orchestras, concerts, dramas, plays, artists, singers and popular entertainment.

These are lifestyles of international professionals and executives who locate in Singapore, working in multinational banks, finance houses and other MNCs. And we want those companies who manage these entertainment troupes to include Singapore in

their tour of cities around the world.

My question is: Can we make it? I believe, yes, if we are open to change and willing to accept new ideas. This integrated resort is only a small part in the remaking of Singapore.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we live in a different and an ever-changing world. Singapore must become more lively, more exciting, more of a fun place and, at the same time, retain its virtues – clean, green, safe and wholesome.

We can learn to limit the social fallout. In any case, we cannot prevent the outside world from affecting us. Our people travel. If we do not allow an integrated resort with a casino in Singapore, Singaporeans will still become victims frequenting casinos elsewhere...

Singapore has to reposition itself in this world.

If we reject these integrated resort projects, the world's investors and players will mentally scratch us off from the list of countries that will be good for them, for their business, for their leisure and entertainment.

Ask ourselves, every one of us, after all the heart-wrenching stories, and anecdotes, if you are in charge, if you are responsible for Singapore's future, for its well-being, for its vibrancy, for the kind of life Singapore can provide its people in 10, 20 years, can you say 'no'?

That is the question you have to answer.

If I were the Prime Minister, and I was challenged – I was challenged on many issues when I was a younger man and had a lot of energy – I would take every challenger on and set out to convince Singapore that this is right, that the price is high, but the price of not having the integrated resorts is even higher.

This is your choice. Surely we must move forward and keep abreast of the top cities in Asia and the world.” ●

# ‘Equality is an aspiration, it is not reality, it is not practical’

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In a motion to continue to affirm the tenets in the National Pledge when debating government policies, Nominated MP Viswa Sadasivan questioned if it was time for Singapore to move beyond race and treat everyone as an equal. The next day, on Aug 19, 2009, Mr Lee Kuan Yew delivered one of his last major speeches in Parliament and took it upon himself to “bring the House back to earth”. He argued that equality of men is an aspiration rather than the reality.

“Sir, I had not intended to intervene in any debate. But I was doing physiotherapy just now and reading the newspapers and I thought I should bring the House back to earth.

Mr Rajaratnam had great virtues in the midst of despondency after a series of race riots when we were thrown out during Independence.

And our Malays in Singapore were apprehensive that now that we were the majority, we would in turn treat them the way a Malay majority treated us.

He drafted these words and rose above the present. He was a great idealist.

It came to me; I trimmed out the unachievable and the Pledge, as it stands, is his work after I have trimmed it.

Was it an ideology? No, it is an aspiration. Will we achieve it? I do not know. We will have to keep on trying. Are we a nation? In transition.

I want to move an amendment to this amendment that

“acknowledges the progress that Singapore has made in the 50 years since it attained self-government in 1959, in nation building and achieving the aspirations and tenets...”. These were aspirations. This was not an ideology.

Sir, reference was made to the Constitution. The Constitution of Singapore enjoins us to specially look after the position of the Malays and other minorities. It comes under Articles 152 and 153...

We explicitly state in our Constitution a duty on behalf of the Government not to treat everybody as equal.

It is not reality, it is not practical, it will lead to grave and irreparable damage if we work on that principle. So this was an aspiration.

As Malays have progressed and a number have joined the middle class with university degrees and professional qualifications, we have asked Mendaki to agree not to have their special rights of free education at university but to take what they were entitled to; put those fees to help more disadvantaged Malays.

So, we are trying to reach a position where there is a level playing field for everybody which is going to take decades, if not centuries, and we may never get there.

Now let me read the American Constitution. In its Declaration of Independence on 4th July, 1776, adopted in Congress, the Declaration read, in the second paragraph:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. To secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”...

Nowhere does it say that the blacks would be differently treated.

But the blacks did not get the vote until the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s with Martin Luther King and his famous speech “We Dare to Dream”. An enormous riot took place and eventually President Johnson passed the Civil Rights Act, and it took many more decades before the southern states, which kept the blacks in their position, allowed the registration of black voters and subsequently even after that, to allow black students to go into white schools.

It was 200 years before an exceptional half-black American became president.

So, my colleague has put it: trying to put square pegs into round holes. Will we ever make the pegs the same? No.

You suggest to the Malays that we should abolish these provisions in the Constitution and you will have grave disquiet.

So we start on the basis that this is reality. We will not be able to get a Chinese minister or an Indian minister to persuade Malay parents to look after their daughters more carefully and not have teenage pregnancies which lead to failed marriages; subsequent marriages also fail, and delinquents.

Can a Chinese MP or an Indian MP do that? They will say: “You are interfering in my private life.” But we have funded Mendaki and Muis, and they have a committee to try and reduce the number of such unhappy outcomes.

The way that Singapore has made progress is by a realistic step-by-step forward approach.

It may take us centuries before we get to a similar position as the Americans. They go to wars – the blacks and the whites.

In the First World War, they did not carry arms, they carried the ammo, they were not given the honour to fight.

In the Second World War, they went back, they were ex-GIs – those who could make it to university were given the GI grants

– but they went back to their black ghettos (in 1945) and they stayed there. And today there are still black ghettos.

These are realities. The American Constitution does not say that it will treat blacks differently but our Constitution spells out the duty of the Government to treat Malays and other minorities with extra care.

So the basis on which the Nominated Member has placed his arguments is false and flawed. It is completely untrue. It has got no basis whatsoever.

And I thought to myself, perhaps I should bring this House back to earth and remind everybody what is our starting point, what is our base, and if we do not recognise where we started from, and that these are our foundations, we will fail. ●

# What people want is good government

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In a keynote address at the Create 21 Asahi Forum on November 20, 1992, in Tokyo, Lee took on those advocates who argued that human rights and democracy were universal phenomena to be applied to all societies. They added that governments should be pressured into adopting Western standards, which they said Asian authoritarians, such as Lee, were obstructing. He countered these views in this speech, which spelt out his alternative view that what people wanted was good government, not democracy per se.

## **UK and US: Established modern democracies**

In modern times two nations have long and unbroken records for democratic government. First, the United Kingdom, next the United States.

The British trace their democracy to the signing of Magna Carta in 1215, which led to the development of their Parliament. Indeed, up to 1911, the hereditary noblemen in the House of Lords had as much power as the people's representatives in the House of Commons. Women got the vote only in 1928. And extra votes for Oxbridge University graduates and businessmen were abolished only in 1948.

The United States declared independence in 1776. In 1788 the constitution gave the vote only to those who paid property tax

or poll tax, which meant the well-to-do. There were barriers of age, colour and sex. In 1860 income and property qualifications were abolished, but other barriers like literacy tests and poll taxes discriminated against blacks and other disadvantaged groups. In 1920 women got the vote. Only in 1965 did the Voting Rights Act suspend literacy tests and other voter qualification devices which kept the blacks out.

So full democracy was established in the UK in 1948 and in the US in 1965.

## **France**

The French Revolution was in 1789 when they stormed the Bastille. Since then France has had five republics and two monarchs. Equalite, fratemite and egalite in 1789 did not succeed as a democracy until the 20th century.

Is it any wonder then that so many Third World countries, former colonies that have received democratic institutions fashioned after US, British, French, Belgian, Dutch, Portuguese constitutions were not able to make these constitutions work without radically altering their nature, like converting themselves into one-party systems? What the UK, US and France took 200 years to evolve, these new countries, without the economic, educational and social preconditions, were expected to work upon independence, when during all the years of colonial tutelage there were no elections and no democratic government.

## **Western democracy universality presumed but unproven**

The existence of a civic society is a precondition for success in democratic government. What is a civic society? It is a society with the whole series of institutions between family and state to which citizens belong, independent voluntary associations, religious institutions, trade unions, professional organisations, movements to promote specific common interests, whether the Green movement, or the gun lobby, or anti-smoking, and so on.

Professor Seymore Lipset of George Mason University (BBC World Service broadcast April 19, 1991) states the conditions for democracy in a different way: “A large middle class, economically secure, many people having skills, knowledge and security to take part in politics.”

Dr Barbara Goodwin of Brunel University (BBC World-Service broadcast April 29, 1991) said that liberal democracy needs economic development, literacy, a growing middle-class, political institutions supporting free speech and human rights. It needs a civic culture resting on shared values making people with different and conflicting views willing to cooperate. She adds that democracy does not require everybody to be thinking the same but thrives on division or cleavages.

The crucial point is that they must be able to live with their differences, as Professor Werber of Harvard University (BBC World Service broadcast April 29, 1991) says, cultural preconditions where the majority want to live in this community with relatively low conflict, relatively low violence and agree to a set of rule procedures governing collective life, where a set of deep

beliefs and values to their culture is fundamental for democratic government.

If we apply these preconditions to countries in Asia, we will understand why Asian democracy has had such a chequered history.

Take Thailand. In May this year we saw Bangkok's population of about seven to eight million willing to demonstrate its anger against a military regime whose coup it had a year earlier approved of. But it disapproved of General Suchinda becoming the prime minister when he was not elected, or at least that was the ostensible reason. The trouble was that the opposition or outrage of seven to eight million people of Bangkok was not shared by the 50 million other Thais in the countryside. Bangkok opposed Suchinda not because he was not elected, but because they felt that the military were not honest themselves, and that honest government was what they wanted. They wanted to remove the military and get an honest government. When Anand Panyarachun was appointed prime minister, there was widespread support and no protest. But he was not elected. Indeed he had not participated in elections and said publicly that he did not want to. What the people wanted was to get rid not only of the military but also of the corrupt drug traffickers. They have now got rid of the military, but they still have drug traffickers. Narong Wongwan, the man who was named as prime minister after the March elections before General Suchinda became prime minister, was denied a visa to the United States in July 1991 because he was suspected of being involved in drug trafficking. He has won again in the September elections. In due course he will again become a minister. Overall, in the September elections, the four pro-democracy parties only marginally improved their positions, winning 185 seats,

an increase of only 23 seats or six per cent. The traditional big-spending parties maintained their grip in the rural areas of the north and centre. What is needed for democracy to produce good governments are fundamental social and educational changes so that good men like Anand will contest and win elections without vote-buying or intimidation.

Next the Philippines. Six years ago, Mrs Imelda Marcos fled the country (with her husband); so did Eduardo Cojuangco. Yet they were able to return and contest in elections for president. They were among the top four candidates. The president, Fidel Ramos, got 5.3 million votes, Cojuangco got 4.1, and Mrs Marcos 2.3. In other words, had Cojuangco and Mrs Marcos combined, their votes could have beaten Fidel Ramos.

A society where such remarkable events are possible needs a special kind of democracy. In other societies, when a dictator is overthrown, the wife and close collaborators would probably have been mobbed and lynched before they got away, and if they got away would never return.

Take Pakistan. In 1988, after General Zia Ul Haq, the president, was killed in an aircraft explosion, elections were set for October 1988. On August 21, 1988 in Sunday Telegraph, London, the late Professor Elie Kedourie, Professor of Politics at the London School of Economics, who has studied Pakistan, explained that to expect the coming elections to re-establish democracy was a triumph of hope over experience. He wrote: "Civilian, constitutional government was proved to be inept, corrupt, and quite unable to arrange a Third World economy, or deal with the ills and conflicts of a divided society suffering from deep rivalries, mutual fears and

antagonisms ... For such a style of government to be practicable and tolerable, it has to be rooted in attitudes to, and traditions of, governance which are common ground between the rulers and the ruled: the supremacy of law, the accountability of those in power and continuous intercourse with the public from whom they derive their authority; the sturdiness of civil society, and the practical impossibility for any government to ride roughshod for long over its innumerable and multifarious interests and associations. None of this, of course, obtains in Pakistan, or in the Indian subcontinent from which it was carved. Here the ruling tradition was of Oriental despotism where the will of the ruler was law ... May it not be that a regime of elections, parliaments and responsible government is unworkable in countries like Pakistan, and that to persist in attempts to set up or restore such a regime must lead to continual tumults in the body politic, and successive interventions by the armed forces?”

Pakistan held its elections in December 1988. Mrs Benazir Bhutto won and became prime minister. In less than two years, her government was dismissed on allegations of massive corruption. Nawaz Sharif's Islamic Alliance won the elections in October 1990 and he became prime minister. In less than two years, his coalition was under stress. The army was sent in in May 1992 to put down violence and lawlessness in the province of Sind. I know both Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif personally. They are capable leaders and the equals of other leaders in the Third World. But the essential preconditions for democracy in Pakistani society are missing.

Let me mention one simple but fundamental problem. The majority of the voters, both in the Philippines and in Pakistan,

are peasants or farmers. The landlords control their lives and their votes. The majority of members elected into the legislatures of both countries are landlords. They have blocked legislation for land reforms without which there can be no fundamental change in the economy. They have also blocked moves to have the children of their peasants educated. They prefer to have them uneducated but loyal, and beholden to them.

Neither country has a background for democratic government. There are no habits in the people for dissension or disagreement within a restrained and peaceful context. Murders and violence are part of every Filipino election. The lawlessness that is in Sind province, the shootings with heavy weapons and automatics between warring Sindhis, Muhajirs, Pashtuns, Baluchis in Karachi bear witness to the absence of a civic society.

### **Adverse economy breaks down democracy**

There is one phenomenon which poses the question of whether democracy is secure even in the developed countries. Democracies broke down and gave way to dictatorships in Europe during the world depression of the 1930s. The two earliest democracies, UK and US, withstood the Great Depression pressures. They were severely tested. There were general strikes in Britain. But constitutional democracy weathered the storm. A Labour coalition government was formed in which the Labour Party was a minority supported by Conservatives, to accommodate the demands of the workers. But the Labour Party was soon discredited for having taken office in this opportunistic way and produced no results.

In the US, a charismatic leader in Franklin D. Roosevelt brought

in the New Deal. He laid the foundations for the social security programmes that were to be carried to excess in the 1960s.

But in Italy in the 1920s the Depression led to the rise of Mussolini and the Fascist Party. In Germany Hitler and the Nazi Party came to power in 1932. In Japan the military took charge and led Japan first into Manchuria, in 1931, and next into China, in 1937. In 1941 General Tojo took charge openly as prime minister and led Japan into Southeast Asia in December 1941. In Spain, there was the dictatorship of General Franco, in Portugal that of Salazar.

There is no guarantee that the present democracies will survive if there is a prolonged world depression.

### **People want good government**

All peoples of all countries need good government. A country must first have economic development, then democracy may follow. With a few exceptions, democracy has not brought good government to new developing countries. Democracy has not led to development because the governments did not establish the stability and discipline necessary for development. What is good government? This depends on the values of a people. What Asians value may not necessarily be what Americans or Europeans value. Westerners value the freedoms and liberties of the individual.

As an Asian of Chinese cultural background, my values are for a government which is honest, effective and efficient in protecting its people, and allowing opportunities for all to advance themselves in a stable and orderly society, where they can live a good life and

raise their children to do better than themselves. In other words:

(a) People are well cared for, their food, housing, employment, health.

(b) There is order and justice under the rule of law, and not the capricious, arbitrariness of individual rulers. There is no discrimination between peoples, regardless of race, language, religion. No great extremes of wealth.

(c) As much personal freedom as possible but without infringing on the freedom of others.

(d) Growth in the economy and progress in society.

(e) Good and ever improving education.

(f) High moral standards of rulers and of the people.

(g) Good physical infrastructure, facilities for recreation, music, culture and the arts; spiritual and religious freedoms, and a full intellectual life.

Very few democratically elected governments in the Third World uphold these values. But it is what their people want.

When Asians visit the US many are puzzled and disturbed by conditions there:

(a) Law and order out of control, with riots, drugs, guns, muggings, rape and crimes.

(b) Poverty in the midst of great wealth.

(c) Excessive rights of the individual at the expense of the community as a whole; criminals regularly escape punishment because the law which presumes innocence over-protects their human rights.

The United States cannot tackle its drug problem by solving the problem within its country. So it has to try to solve the problem by attacking the drug problem in the drug-producing countries. It has invaded Panama to capture Noriega. It has secretly

kidnapped the Mexican doctor for having tortured and killed a US drug enforcement agent. The United States courts have held these actions as legal. But if put to the International Court at the Hague there can be little doubt that they are clear violations of international law, whether or not they were in accordance with US law.

It is Asian values that have enabled Singapore to contain its drug problem. To protect the community we have passed laws which entitle police, drug enforcement or immigration officers to have the urine of any person who behaves in a suspicious way tested for drugs. If the result is positive, treatment is compulsory.

Such a law in the United States will be unconstitutional, because it will be an invasion of privacy of the individual. Any urine test would lead to a suit for damages for battery and assault and an invasion of privacy. Only members of the US armed forces can be required to have urine tests. That is because they are presumed to have consented when they enlisted. So in the US the community's interests have been sacrificed because of the human rights of drug traffickers and drug consumers. Drug-related crimes flourish. Schools are infected. There is high delinquency and violence amongst students, a high dropout rate, poor discipline and teaching, producing students who make poor workers. So a vicious cycle has set in.

### **Democracy and human rights presumed to lead to good government**

Whilst democracy and human rights are worthwhile ideas, we should be clear that the real objective is good government. That

should be the test for ODA [Overseas Development Assistance]. Is this a good government that deserves ODA? Is it honest and effective? Does it look after its people? Is there an orderly, stable society where people are being educated and trained to lead a productive life?

You may well ask: How do people get a good government in a developing country? I believe we can learn a valuable lesson from the property and educational qualifications the UK and the US had in their early stages of democracy. This can work well in the towns where most people are educated. Moreover it will encourage people to get educated. In the rural areas, the educated are fewer. So more traditional methods of representation, like the village headman or chief, can be the basis of representation. Such an approach can be criticised as elitist, but the chances of getting a good government will be better.

### **Human rights: Progress likely if approach is more realistic**

On the whole, I think it is more difficult to achieve a working democracy than to make some progress in human rights. Greater respect for human rights is a worthwhile objective. The only practical way forward is the step-by-step incremental approach. Standards of what is civilised behaviour vary with the history and culture of a people, and with the level of deterrence or punishment people in a society are accustomed to.

Our common humanity requires us to persuade all peoples and their governments to move towards more humane, open, responsible and accountable government. Governments should

treat their own people, including prisoners, in a humane way. Helmut Schmidt wrote in *Die Zeit* on May 29, 1992, after a visit to China, on the Yellow Emperor: “It seems that the formative force of the Confucian cultural heritage with its tendencies towards vertical meritocracy and hierarchy according to age, with its willingness to learn and to be thrifty, and with the tendency to family and group cohesiveness, does not need Europe’s and North America’s religious ethics, which are based on a totally different spiritual concept, in order to achieve equal economic performance. Perhaps the West must admit to itself that people living in other continents and other cultural groups with firmly rooted traditions can be thoroughly happy even without the democratic structures which Euro-Americans consider indispensable. Therefore we should not ask China to profess democracy, but we should insist on respect of the person, personal dignity and rights.”

And one cannot ignore the history, culture and background of a society. Societies have developed separately for thousands of years at different speeds and in different ways. Their ideals and their norms are different. American or European standards of the late 20th century cannot be universal.

Attitudes are changing. Worldwide satellite television makes it increasingly difficult for any government to hide its cruelties to its own people. By international convention, what a government does with its own people is an internal matter and does not concern foreign governments. This convention is difficult to uphold when people worldwide see and condemn the cruelties and want something done to stop them. On the other hand, Western governments often use public opinion as an excuse to interfere with another government’s actions. But are Western governments

prepared to help financially to ease the severe economic difficulties which are often the cause of upheavals and their suppression by force? Only if they are do they have a moral right to interfere and to be listened to. Eventually the international community will find a balance between non- interference in a country's internal affairs and the moral right to press for more civilised standards of behaviour by all governments. However, I doubt if there will ever be a common universal standard of what is acceptable behaviour.

In the next 20 to 30 years, few societies will be isolated. All will be ever more open to outside contacts, through trade, tourism, investments, TV and radio. These contacts will influence their behaviour, because their values, perceptions and attitudes will change. There will be no convergence to a common world standard. But we can expect more acceptable standards where bizarre, cruel, oppressive practices will become shameful and unacceptable.

We cannot force faster change, unless the advanced countries are prepared to intervene actively. If a target delinquent government collapses and the country breaks down, are the donor countries prepared to move in and put the country together again? In other words, re-colonise and create the preconditions for democracy?

Take the case of Burma. Tough sanctions can break the grip of the military regime. It is better to do it with UN Security Council authority. When the regime breaks down and disorder breaks out in Burma, the UN must be prepared to move in and restore order. Do they move in as peacekeepers or peacemakers? As peacekeepers, they will not be able to control the minorities who are armed and have been fighting the Burmese government since

independence in 1947. The Karens, Kachins and others, all want independence. Should they get their independence? Or should they be put down and incorporated into one Burmese union or made into more autonomous states in a loose federation? Will advanced countries undertake the responsibilities for their fate?

If Japan presses for democracy in return for ODA, is she prepared to undertake the responsibility for the integrity of the state and the people's welfare if a government loses its capability to govern, or otherwise disintegrates?

An analogous dilemma faced the United States in Iraq. Iraqi Republican guards and forces were on the run. President Bush decided not to break the Republican guards. If he brought down the Iraqi government, he would run the risk of the Shi'ites in the south and the Kurds in the north rising up in rebellion against the Sunni Muslims. If President Bush had decided on an imposed democracy, the result would have been difficult. One-man-one-vote means that the Shi'ites who outnumber the Sunnis will become the majority group to the Iraqi government. Then Iraq would get closer to Iran which would be unacceptable to the United States and to Saudi Arabia. Worse and more likely, Iraq would have been broken up into three states, with Kurds in the north, Sunnis in the centre and Shi'ites in the south.

Therefore, for geopolitical reasons, the American mission to convert the world to democracy and human rights had to be put aside. The US allowed Saddam Hussein's dictatorship to carry on. The likelihood of an unsatisfactory geopolitical balance in the Gulf was the reason.

## **Some questionable assumptions**

There are some flaws in the assumptions made for democracy. It is assumed that all men and women are equal or should be equal. Hence one-man-one-vote. But is equality realistic? If it is not, to insist on equality must lead to regression. Let me put it to the test in some theoretical situations. If we had a world government for this small interdependent world, will one-man-one-vote lead to progress or regression? All can immediately see that the developed and educated peoples of the world will be swamped by the undeveloped and uneducated, and that no progress will be possible. Indeed if the UK and US had given universal suffrage to their peoples in the 19th century, then economic and social progress might well have been less rapid.

The weakness of democracy is that the assumption that all men are equal and capable of equal contribution to the common good is flawed. This is a dilemma. Do we insist on ideals when they do not fit into practical realities of the world as we know it? Or do we compromise and adjust to realities?

# My birthday wish

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Over the years, Lee has kept his private life mostly private. He has not, for example, been one to celebrate his birthdays in public. Among those which he did was his 60th birthday, on September 16, 1983. On that occasion, celebrated at the Mandarin Hotel, he made this speech.

“ I have had only one birthday publicly celebrated. It was in September 1973, 10 years ago. Devan Nair, then Secretary-General of the NTUC, wanted to organise one to mark the occasion. After reflection, I agreed because I hoped it would serve a wider purpose of bringing the different segments of our society together rather than simply be an occasion for luxuriating in felicitations and congratulations. In the same way, I hope this dinner will serve more significant needs than those of my personal joy and satisfaction.

A momentous event took place on my 40th birthday 20 years ago. On September 16, 1963, Malaysia was proclaimed and Singapore became part of it. I celebrated my 40th birthday by going to Kuala Lumpur to attend the formal declaration of Malaysia at the Stadium Negara and returned the same evening to continue a crucial general election in Singapore.

The original date fixed for Malaysia Day had been August 31, 1963. Sukarno had raised objections and the United Nations observers were sent to Borneo to ascertain the wishes of the people of North Borneo and Sarawak. Hence the date was postponed.

When the date September 16, 1963 was fixed, the Tunku did not know it was my birthday, nor did he intend it as recognition for the work that I had done to help bring about the Federation of Malaysia.

Eight was his lucky number. Since the United Nations report was not expected to be ready by the 8th he fixed it for the 16th: 2 times 8. It is as well that I am not a believer in lucky numbers, or other charms. Otherwise, when Singapore parted from Malaysia, I would have suffered an immense psychological blow, believing my birthday date is inauspicious.

Well, what have I done in the 10 years since 1973 ? I hope I have helped to consolidate Singapore's advance in economic growth and social development. More important, I have got together a core group of younger ministers who can make for continuity of honest, effective, and responsive government.

What have I learned since 1973? Some more basic unchangeables about human beings and human societies, the ways in which they can be made to do better, and the ever present danger of regression and even collapse, as in Cambodia.

I realise how very fragile a civilised society is, especially in Southeast Asia, in this historic period of rapid change and revolutions. I have also come to understand the insignificance of personal achievements. For at 60, more than at 50, comes the realisation of the transient nature of all earthly glories and successes, and the ephemeral quality of sensory joys and pleasures, when compared to intellectual, moral or spiritual satisfactions.

I consider the last 10 years in office as less eventful and significant compared to my first 10 years: 1959-69. Then it was a matter of life and death, not only for my colleagues and me but for most people in Singapore.

First, we battled against the communists, a battle we did not look like winning, until the referendum to join Malaysia on September 1, 1962, and September 21, 1963, when we won a second term at the general elections. Then followed our troubles with the communalists. In the two years we were in Malaysia, until separation on August 9, 1965, we went through the agonies of intimidation, and the fear of irrational or mindless communal killings.

Next, in November 1967 came the devaluation of the British pound, followed, in January 1968, by the British government announcement of their decision to withdraw from their bases in Singapore. 1959-69 were 10 tumultuous, exciting and exhausting years. They were also years during which we laid the foundations for national stability, unity and development. Had I been older, say 55 instead of 35, when I started in 1959, I would not have had the sheer physical stamina and vigour nor the emotional zest and enthusiasm needed to meet the daunting difficulties and threats.

I have wondered how much of what I am is nature and how much was nurture. Would I have been a different person if I had not been tempered through the crucible of struggle? In moments of whimsy, I have asked myself: what would have happened to my identical twin, if I had one and he had been brought up, say, in Hongkong? He would have become totally different in his values, attitudes, and motivations. After reading the studies on

identical twins, I have to concede that in his physical, mental and emotional makeup, my twin must be like me.

However, I think it impossible that he could have my attitude to life without my experiences. Placed in Hongkong, where the only outlet for his energies would be the pursuit of wealth, he must have acquired a different set of values and have set himself different goals in life. For these studies showed that identical twins sometimes do have different habits. Some smoke, some do not. If being a smoker is out of conscious choice, an act of will, then there are many areas where human beings are not totally preprogrammed.

My Hongkong twin might have wanted to rebel against the British, but he would have found himself frustrated. He would then set out to make money, a useful activity, and exciting for the successful. But after the trials and tribulations I went through in the '50s and '60s I would find this an arid life. Having taken life-and-death decisions and gone through one acute crisis after another, my perspectives, ambitions and priorities have undergone a fundamental, and I believe, a permanent transformation. I may not have changed in my physical, mental and emotional makeup, the hardware side. But the software side, my responses to God, glory or gold, have been conditioned by my experiences. In other words, however capacious the hardware (nature) without the software (nurture), not much can be made of the hardware.

Would I like to know the future, to know what Singapore will be like ten, twenty years from now? Yes, of course. So would all of us. But we do not have this privilege. Perhaps as well, for that makes us strive all the more to secure the future. My experiences

have left me with some indelible lessons, and a set of ingrained habits. Both the experiences and the habits force me to ensure that the precious gains we have made will not be lost because the base on which our security and prosperity rest is so narrow. Hence my ceaseless search for younger men of ability and dedication.

Most Singaporeans below 25 take for granted what were only dreams when they were born two decades ago: the well-paid jobs available, the strength of the Singapore dollar which buys the homes they own, or soon will, the furniture and furnishings, TV, home appliances, the smart clothes and shoes, motorcycles and cars. They do not remember a Singapore which was not an orderly society, where the environment was not clean and green, and when life for most was a hard struggle for bare existence. Those who have travelled abroad know that full employment, annual increase in purchasing power, and a healthy environment - these are not the natural order of things. They require social discipline and the will to work and to achieve.

There are times when I get glimpses of the challenges facing the next generation. We are on our own, responsible for our own defence and survival. There are no safety nets like the British-Australian-New Zealand forces. We have to weave our regional net of relationships to help maintain stability and security. Otherwise economic development is impossible. There are many imponderables. The present leaders of Asean are in accord and harmony because they share common objectives. They all have strong memories of the last war and of the insurrections that followed when communist insurgents attempted to seize power. By the 1990s, Asean leaders will come from a generation that did not have this common experience. Therefore, we must make

these personal experiences into a part of Asean's institutional memories so that not too much will have to be learned all over again, and at too high a cost.

I would like to conclude by recounting one unforgettable social encounter. On May 8, 1973, I was in Nagasaki. My wife launched a 240,000 ton oil tanker, the Neptune World, at the Mitsubishi Shipyards that morning. After lunch, my Japanese host took me out to the golf course. After 9 holes he asked if I wanted to go on. It was wet and windy. He was a slim, wiry man, some 6-8 cm shorter than me. He looked some ten years older than me. I told him I would play the second nine. He went on to play a lively game on a hilly course.

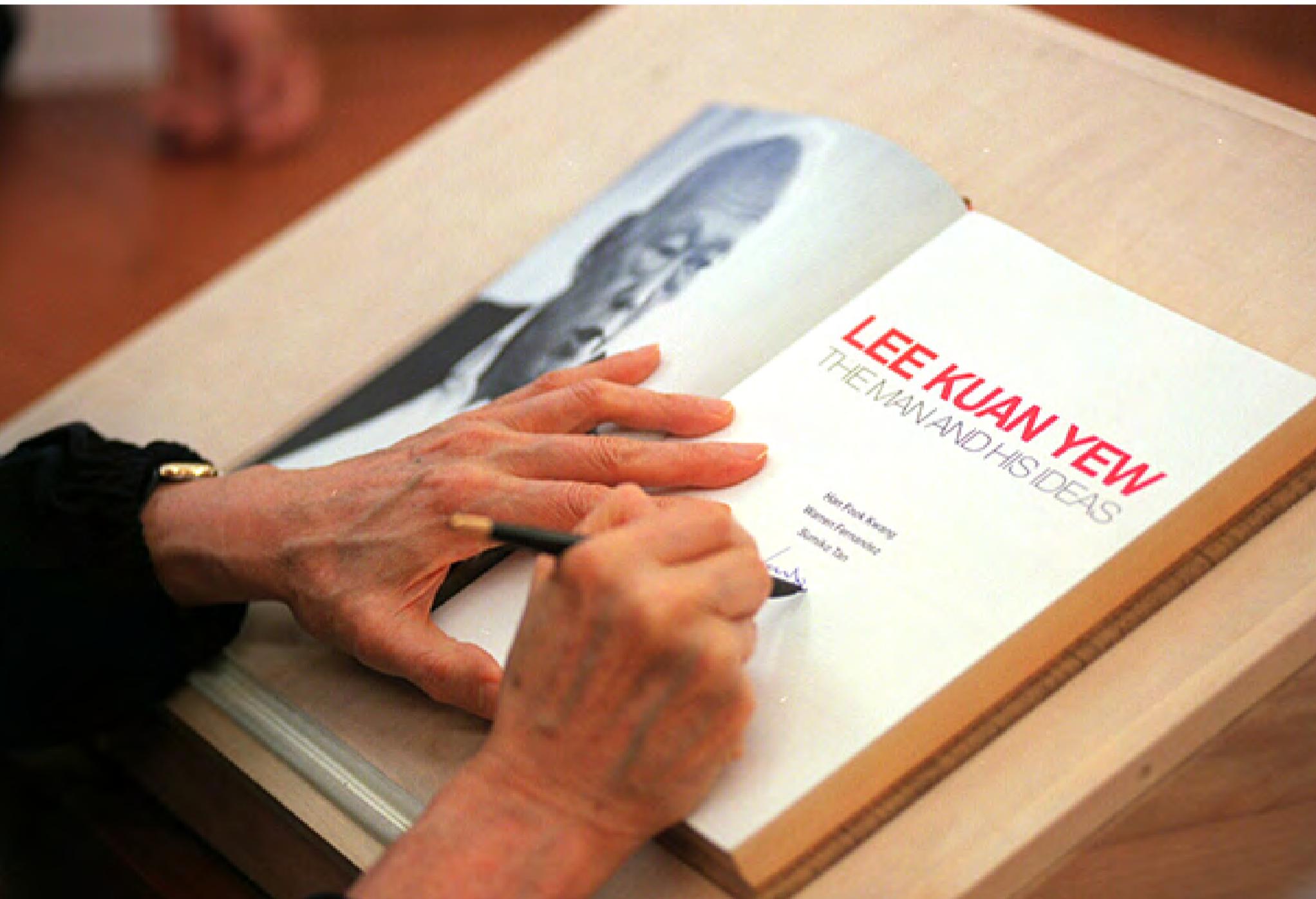
That night he gave us dinner. As he relaxed on the tatami with food and sake, he turned to me on his right and said, "Today, I am a grand senior." I asked him what it meant. He said "Today is my 70th birthday. In Japan you are a grand senior at 70." I gasped. He was actually 20 years older than me. And he had played 18 holes on a hard course to please me. Then he recounted how he was born, been schooled, and had married in Nagasaki. He had several children. And on August 9, 1945, as he was coming home from a journey outstation, he saw an intensely brilliant flash and a mushroom cloud over Nagasaki. He was on the other side of the mountain. Later that day, when he got on to the ridge, he saw Nagasaki devastated. His home, his wife and his children had been obliterated.

He spoke without bitterness, only deep sorrow. Then he regained his bounce to reassure me that he had remarried and started another family. That 70th birthday was a day of fulfilment

for him, a life rebuilt, a new ship launched, and 18 holes of golf to celebrate his vigour. He was satisfied with his 70 years. How much of that was in his nature, how much was due to his nurture, the culture of the Japanese and their tradition of fatalism and unremitting effort to rebuild after each earthquake, each typhoon, each tidal wave, I shall never know.

I have been spared such a devastating experience. Ten years hence, barring the unexpected, I hope I shall have cause for a celebration dinner. For it will be satisfying to know that what my colleagues and I are trying to do in the next few years will not have been in vain. I would like to be able to sit back, if only for the day I become a grand senior, to survey a thriving Singapore, with a younger prime minister and his Cabinet well established, in a relationship of trust and confidence with the people of Singapore, and on top of the many problems that come with high growth and rapid change.

The past 24 years were not preordained. Nor is the future. There will be unexpected problems ahead, as there were in the past. They have to be met, grappled with, and resolved. For only a people who are willing to face up to their problems and are prepared to work with their leaders to meet unexpected hardships with courage and resolution deserve to thrive and to prosper. In responding to the toast, may I express the hope that Singaporeans will be such a people. ●



Autographed copies of Lee Kuan Yew: The Man And His Ideas raised more than \$2 million for charity. Mr Lee signed the books at the Istana on Sept 16, 1997. Two hundred special copies with his signature were priced at \$10,000 each with the proceeds going to nine charities.







ND HIS IDEAS

LEE KUAN YEW

THE  
MAN  
AND  
HIS  
IDEAS



Singapore  
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The book was launched on Oct 3, 1997 at the Mandarin Hotel. From left: Straits Times editor-in-chief Cheong Yip Seng, Mr Lee, Singapore Press Holdings executive chairman Lim Kim San and president and CEO of Times Publishing Kua Hong Pak.

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