

# Singapore gets new prime minister

## Another dynastic succession



HARUN UR RASHID

FOR many years, it has been widely known that Singapore's straight-talking founding Prime Minister 81-year old, Lee Kuan Yew's son, Lee Hsien Loong (52) will become Prime Minister after the present incumbent Goh Chok Tong (63). In fact, it is reported that when Goh became Prime Minister in 1990, many Singaporeans assumed Lee Sr. did a deal with Goh to keep the seat warm until his son was ready for the job. Lee, Jr.'s battle with lymphoma in 1992 may have altered such a plan, although both men deny any such pact.

Therefore, it is no surprise that on August 10, when Prime Minister Goh tendered his resignation letter to

President S.R. Nathan, Lee Hsien Loong took over (although he was formally sworn in on August 12). It seems that the smooth transfer of power is a highly choreographed matter, not lost to people both within and outside Singapore. Interestingly, when the list of Cabinet Ministers was disclosed by the new Prime Minister, Lee Sr. and Goh were included, the first one as "Mentor Minister" and the other as "Senior Minister."

before handing over to his long-anointed deputy, Lee Hsien Loong. On national day last year Goh said that his "immediate priority is to get Singapore out of the economic gloom." By that measure, observers believe that he has accomplished his mission. The economy is again booming. The government has raised its economic forecast tipping annual growth of between 8 per cent and 9 per cent that will be Singapore's best performance

Minister Goh has insisted that the transfer does not represent a dynastic succession reflects the growing concern among some people that dynasty is more important than meritocracy. Lee Jr. has good credentials, having been a product of Cambridge and Harvard universities, with brilliant record, (no wonder his first name means illustrious dragon). He had also a stint in military service and became the youngest Brigadier-

### Challenges for the new Prime Minister

Observers believe that the biggest challenge for the new Prime Minister will be to continue to attract more investment in financial services, pharmaceuticals, tertiary education and the arts -- areas Singapore has reportedly identified as future drivers of growth. It is also believed that he must entice Singapore's younger,

who do not wish to be over-regulated by the government. The new Prime Minister, in an opening address, called for "an open and inclusive Singapore." Ho Khai Leong, a political analyst at the Institute of South-East Asian Studies said: "The ceremony is over and the rhetoric has already been said. It is back to work." Citizens will have the opportunity to gauge the depth of Lee Jr.'s commitment to change when he delivers the National Day Rally speech on August 22. Singapore's version of the US President's annual State of the Union address.

### Conclusion

Singapore, covering a total of 620 square kilometers, with a population of about 4.5 million (Chinese almost 77 per cent), gained self-governing status in 1959 and later became a part of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963. Finally it separated from Malaysia in 1965. Since 1959, the People's Action Party has ruled the country. As Goh said, the party "practices politics of consensus and convergence."

Lee Sr. ruled for 25 years, Goh for 14 years, and how long Lee Jr. will run the nation is largely in his own hands. In Singapore, the three leaders are often irreverently referred to as the Trinity: the father, the son, and the Holy Goh.

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## BOTTOM LINE

Lee Jr. is known to be a no-nonsense character, much like his father. His father got away with it with the older generation and many think that his no-nonsense character needs to be tempered for the young generation who do not wish to be over-regulated by the government

### Goh Chok Tong's tenure

Goh has done a wonderful job as Prime Minister for 14 years. Goh was given a warm farewell by the 60,000 flag wavers who packed Singapore's main stadium. It was also the 39th national day celebrations that went off with smiles all around culminating in a firework display that night.

Goh reportedly insisted he would wait for the economy to turn around

in several years and the highest growth in Asia this year outside China.

### Dynastic succession

Dynastic succession is not uncommon in Asia. It took place in India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Syria, the Philippines, and now in Singapore (in Europe Greece has the unique distinction). It may occur in Egypt and Libya as well.

The very fact that the former Prime

General. However, many believe that it is the perception among people that counts and is important in politics.

It is reported in a poll in the government-controlled *Strait Times* that 47 per cent of Singaporeans believe that being Lee Kuan Yew's son helped Lee Hsien Loong become Prime Minister. The poll also shows that 83 per cent think that he is the best man for the job. Another media report suggests that a local taxi driver, who did not want to be named, put his sentiment in this way: "The father Lee suffered, but the son Lee was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He would not have the job if he was not the son."

### New Cabinet

The new Prime Minister will retain the portfolio of Finance with himself as he did as the Deputy Prime Minister to ensure that economic prosperity remains robust in the island-state. It is not clear what Lee Sr. will be in charge of as "Mentor Minister," although political observers believe that he will have a large advisory role. Lee Sr. reportedly said that he would play the role of an "old political warrior" in his new capacity. Lee Sr. will give up the title "Senior Minister" to former Prime Minister Goh who, as "Senior Minister," will be the head of the Central Bank of Singapore.

## Development and values

ERSHAD KHANDKER

A serious problem in our society happens to be a lack of honesty, and if courage is the DNA for honesty, I think there is also a massive dearth of courage in this country. I hear a chorus of mental murmur, since admission to any sort of lack need courage and you need even more courage to admit that there is a lack of courage itself. No one would admit to cowardice, since manhood and womanhood depends on the vain assumption that one must always maintain a vanity about oneself, a veneer of "I am your equal." This veneer of vanity, that we must always pretend that we are equal to others, would be the haze behind which one of the finest emotion or quality that humans can possess would get hidden and then ultimately vanish. What is that emotion? The ability to admit to one's own fault. You need courage and then honesty to admit that you may have made a mistake. We forget that admitting fault would show courage and give you absolution. Absolution would help you to start afresh, wipe the slate clean and stand before your peers and ask for another chance. You will be born again.

If we all were equal, then who would be the teacher amongst us? How can a leader be equal to a follower, if he or she does not have the ability to convince the follower of the need to follow him because of promise of attaining a certain goal that only he or she can deliver? A natural born leader, is elected or selected naturally by a vote of the followers, when the followers collectively say: "Leader, please show us the path, organise the journey, walk ahead of us because you know the way!" This clearly shows that when the leader knows the way, he knows something more than the follower and hence he or she is not the equal to the follower. You admit to your mistakes and they might even recognise the incredible honesty of that admission, make you the leader, since the ability of admitting a mistake and starting the journey with clean slate is leadership quality, something that is absent in most people. Admit to your mistakes, show courage and honesty, and you shall definitely be leadership material.

The ability to understand oneself, admit to one's mistakes, recognise the truth, take penitence and seek absolution. Human civilisation has shown that a community that fosters such a sequence of national characteristics would be able to march forward and attain glory by education, eradication of poverty and attain national development.

Do we see the existence of such values in our society, in Bangladesh? No, do not think of this question as rhetorical, and related to politics. I am asking you to look unto yourself, and honestly try to remember the last time you admitted your fault (however small) to your friend, or colleague or relative, and above all, to your father or to your

children, with whom you have a certain estrangement, a certain distance. You shall not feel happy and see success if this distance keeps lingering. What way do you have open to yourself? You must say sorry and compromise.

You shall gain absolution, feel successful, and at the end asking for forgiveness from such a loved one as your father or your children, does it belittle you in any way? Is it not that your interests are the same as your loved ones? We should admit to our mistakes, seek forgiveness, should not feel a sense of superiority or a vain sense of equality, understand the value of honesty.

Politics comes in this sequence. Our leaders could do well to understand the need to have courage and honesty. Once you admit to your failings you shall be ready to act and move forward and take the followers and your countrymen with you to happiness of national development. We shall have deliverance from depravity and degradation now in existence in our country. Once we know our innerselefs and wear our values in our day-to-day life, there shall be absolution from poverty, chaos, and lawlessness. Because, your heart will be pure, your head will be clear and your hands would then want to work hard. This is the secret that is hindering our development, our policies are sound, we just don't have the mind to execute those policies and fulfill our destiny to an inevitable rise to the top.

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