



# SAGE, SHREWD STATESMAN

## World hails Singapore's founding father



**LEE KUAN YEW**  
(SEPT 16, 1923-  
MARCH 23, 2015)

AFP, SINGAPORE

The United States and China yesterday led global acclaim for Lee Kuan Yew, the Singaporean statesman whose shrewd and sometimes caustic views on world affairs were much sought by his fellow leaders.

Lee is credited with transforming Singapore from a sleepy British imperial outpost into one of the world's wealthiest societies as leader from 1959 to 1990.

"He was a true giant of history who will be remembered for generations to come as the father of modern Singapore and as one of the great strategists of Asian affairs," US President Barack Obama said.

Lee's views "were hugely important in helping me formulate our policy of rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific", Obama

said in a statement.

During his rule, Lee positioned Singapore as a key plank of America's regional security architecture. And in a Forbes interview in 2011, he rejected the notion that Washington was doomed to "second-rate status".

He cited America's track record of economic innovation, its willingness to attract foreign talent and the fact that English is the world lingua franca -- all strengths he exploited in Singapore's own rise.

But Lee was also an early proponent of the view that China would become a force to be reckoned with, recounting in one of his books a meeting with newly emerged paramount leader Deng Xiaoping in 1978.

Lee, the ethnic-Chinese leader of a largely ethnic-Chinese nation, wrote that he told Deng: "Whatever we have

done, you can do better because we are the descendants of the landless peasants of south China.

"You have the scholars, you have the scientists, you have the specialists. Whatever we do, you will do better."

As they opened China up after 1978, Deng and his Communist colleagues cast a keen eye on Lee's model of rule -- marrying economic liberalisation with rigid political control.

President Xi Jinping praised Lee as an "old friend of the Chinese people" and said he was "widely respected by the international community as a strategist and a statesman".

After the British withdrew, Lee created modern Singapore out of a short-lived and stormy political union with Malaysia. Their ties remained turbulent down the years.

But in mourning Lee, Malaysian

Prime Minister Najib Razak lauded his "determination in developing Singapore from a new nation to the modern and dynamic city we see today".

Lee's political vision was forged in World War II, when Japan routed British and Australian troops to occupy Singapore. He studied law at Cambridge University in the years after, returning home convinced that Asians must be masters of their own destiny.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called Lee "one of the greatest leaders of modern times that Asia has ever produced" and said: "He was highly revered all over the world."

British Prime Minister David Cameron noted that Lee was "sometimes a critical" friend of Britain but stressed his "place in history is assured, as a leader and as one of the modern world's foremost statesmen".

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi also reflected on Lee's legacy, tweeting: "A far-sighted statesman & a lion among leaders, Mr Lee Kuan Yew's life teaches valuable lessons to everyone."

One lesson that Lee sought to impart was delivered in a sharp-tongued warning in 1980, when he said that Australians risked becoming "the poor white trash of Asia" unless they opened up their economy.

"Our region owes much to Lee Kuan Yew," Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott said, adding that "today we mourn the passing of a giant of our region".

In recognition of his outsized standing on the international stage, Lee was sometimes spoken of as a potential UN secretary-general. Ban Ki-moon, who holds the job today, called him a "legendary figure in Asia".

### LEE'S WORDS

#### SPLIT FROM MALAYSIA

There is nothing to be worried about it. Many things will go on just as usual. But be firm, be calm. We are going to have a multi-racial nation in Singapore... Everybody will have his place: equal; language, culture, religion.

August 9, 1965, after Malaysia voted to expel Singapore

#### PRESS FREEDOM

Freedom of the press, freedom of the news media, must be subordinated to the overriding needs of the integrity of Singapore, and to the primacy of purpose of an elected government.

Address to the General Assembly of the International Press Institute at Helsinki on June 9, 1971

#### ROLE OF THE STATE

I am often accused of interfering in the private lives of citizens. Yes, if I did not, had I not done that, we wouldn't be here today. And I say without the slightest remorse, that we wouldn't be here, we would not have made economic progress, if we had not intervened on very personal matters - who your neighbour is, how you live, the noise you make, how you spit, or what language you use. We decide what is right.

Speech to the National Day Rally in 1986

#### THE WEST

Let me be frank; if we did not have the good points of the West to guide us, we wouldn't have got out of our backwardness. We would have been a backward economy with a backward society. But we do not want all of the West.

Interview with Foreign Policy, 1994

#### POLITICAL OPPONENTS

Everybody knows that in my bag I have a hatchet, and a very sharp one. You take me on, I take my hatchet...

Talking about an opposition lawmaker

#### THE SINGAPORE MODEL

We knew that if we were just like our neighbours, we would die. Because we've got nothing to offer against what they have to offer. So we had to produce something which is different and better than what they have. It's incorrupt. It's efficient. It's meritocratic. It works.

Interview with the New York Times, August 29, 2007

#### FUTURE CHALLENGES

If you forget that this is a small island which we are built upon and reach a 100 storeys-high tower block and may go up to 150 if you are wise. But if you believe that it's permanent, it will come tumbling down and you will never get a second chance.

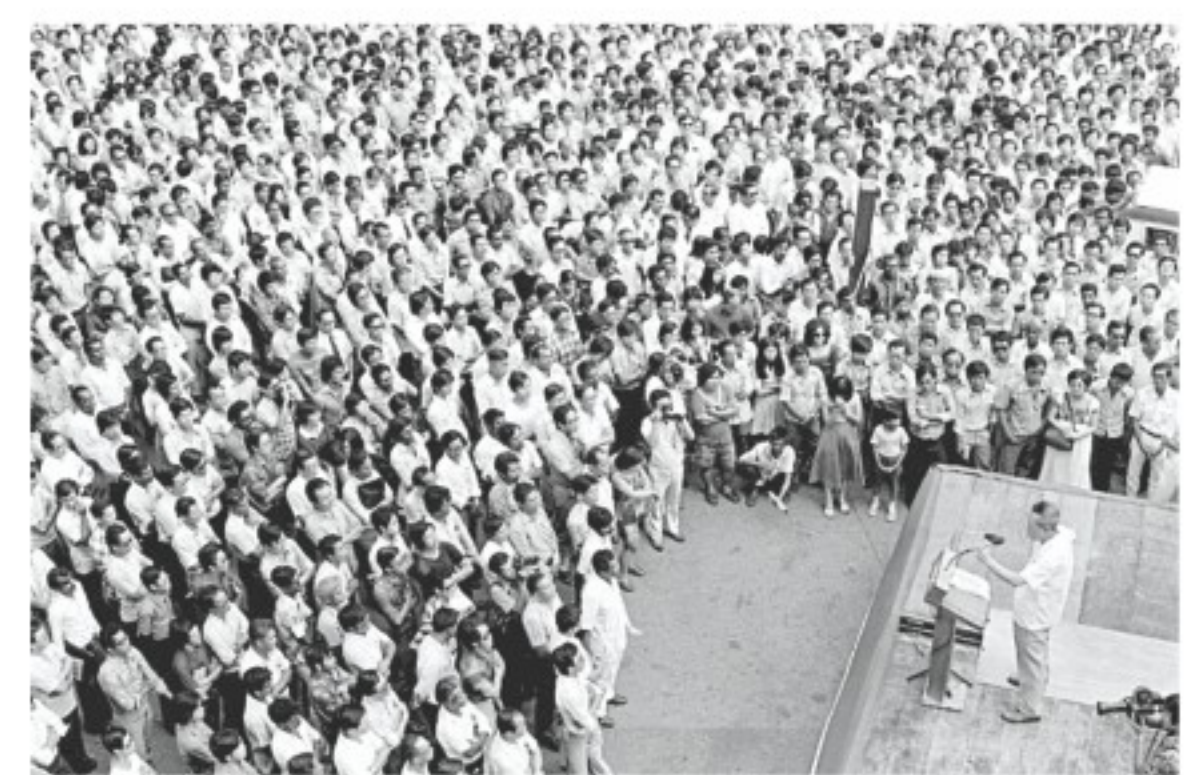
Interview with the New York Times on Sept 13, 2010

#### OWN LEGACY

The final verdict will not be in the obituaries. The final verdict will be when the PhD students dig out the archives, read my old papers, assess what my enemies have said, sift the evidence and seek the truth. I'm not saying that everything I did was right, but everything I did was for an honourable purpose.

Interview with the New York Times in 2010

SOURCE: BBC ONLINE



## A life with no regrets

Lee Wei Ling, daughter of Lee Kuan Yew, wrote the following article in *The Sunday Times* on Aug 5, 2012. She is the director of the National Neuroscience Institute.

About 20 years ago, when I was still of marriageable age, my father Lee Kuan Yew had a serious conversation with me one day. He told me that he and my mother would benefit if I remained single and took care of them in their old age. But I would be lonely if I remained unmarried.

I replied: "Better lonely than be trapped in a loveless marriage."

I have never regretted my decision.

Twenty years later, I am still



single. I still live with my father in my family home. But my priorities in life have changed somewhat.

Like my mother did when she was alive, I accompany him so that I can keep an eye on him and also keep him company. After my mother became too ill to travel, he missed having a family member with whom he could speak frankly after a long tiring day of meetings.

At the age of 88, and recently widowed, he is less vigorous now

than he was before May 2008 when my mother suffered a stroke.

He is aware that he can no longer function at the pace he could just four years ago. But he still insists on travelling to all corners of the Earth if he thinks his trips might benefit Singapore.

As I am writing this on Thursday, we are in New York City where he has a dinner and a dialogue session with the Capital Group tonight, and Government of Singapore Investment Corporation meetings tomorrow.

After that, we will spend the weekend at former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger's country home in Connecticut. Influential Americans will be driving or flying in to meet my father over dinner on Saturday and lunch on Sunday.

Even for a healthy and fit man of 88, the above would be a formidable programme. But my father believes that we must carry on with life despite whatever personal setbacks we might suffer. If he can do something that might benefit Singapore, he will do so no matter what his age or the state of his health. For my part, I keep him company when he is not preoccupied with work, and I make sure he has enough rest.

Though I encourage him to exercise, I also dissuade him from over exerting himself.

The irony is I did not take my own advice at one time and it was

he who stopped me from over-exercising. Once, in 2001, while I was recovering from a fracture of my femur, he limited my swimming. Now the situation is reversed. But rather than finding it humorous, I feel sad about it.

Whether or not I am in the pink of health is of no consequence. I have no dependants, and Singapore will not suffer if I am gone. Perhaps my patients may miss me, but my fellow doctors at the National Neuroscience



Institute can take over their care. But no one can fill my father's role for Singapore.

We have an extremely competent Cabinet headed by an exceptionally intelligent and able prime minister who also happens to be my brother. But the life experience that my father has accumulated enables him to analyse and offer solutions to Singapore's problems that no one else can.

Both my father and I have had

our fair share of luck, and fate has not been unfair to us. My father found a lifelong partner who was his best friend and his wife.

Together with a small group of like-minded comrades, he created a Singapore that by any standards would be considered a miracle. He has led a rich, meaningful and purposeful life.

Growing old and dying occurs to all mortals, even those who once seemed like titanium. When all is said and done, my father -



and I too, despite my bouts of ill health - have lived lives that we can look back on with no regrets.

As he faces whatever remains of his life, my father's attitude can be summed up by these lines in Robert Frost's poem *Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening*:

*The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.*