

# **Eulogy for Mr Lee Kuan Yew**

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Mr Lee Kuan Yew, our founding father of modern Singapore, was a firm and benevolent man.

A few years ago when US President Barack Obama welcomed Mr Lee to the White House, he cited Mr Lee as "one of the legendary figures of Asia in the 20th and 21st centuries", acknowledging him with vital responsibility for the Asian economic miracle.

Mr Heng Swee Keat, Minister for Education, who was the Principal Private Secretary to Mr Lee from mid 1997 to early 2000s, described Mr Lee's uncanny ability to offer views that are "so coherent, rigorous and fresh, and how he put his agile mind in the service of the Singapore cause."

Our loss of such an outstanding and multi-talented man, and our memories of Mr Lee Kuan Yew – be it as a leader, as a politician, and as a believer that Singapore can make it, will continue to live in our souls, our books and our Lion City.

Singapore, under Mr Lee Kuan Yew's visionary leadership, has accomplished many triumphs which may seem too good, and too easy to be true.

His selflessness can be seen even during the early days of Singapore when she was still under British colonial rule. Despite being admitted to the English Bar, Mr Lee returned to Singapore in 1950 to practise law, fighting for the lowly represented trade unions and associations, earning significantly less than what he could have as a lawyer. At times, when he felt that the cause was worthy and the clients were needy, he would waive his fees entirely.

Struggles arose after World War II; frustrations were mounting under the British rule; and Singapore was abuzz with talk of constitutional reform and independence in the 1950s. It was during this time that Mr Lee envisioned the formation of People's Action Party to challenge the British on governing a Singapore free from colonial powers.

The events that took place after he pushed ahead with his plan, is now history.

Mr Lee led the Party to victory in the 1959 general elections. This was the first of eight such victories that saw him taking up the leadership as Prime Minister of Singapore amid turbulent times. Without Mr Lee's resilience, Singapore would not have been the self-governing state which merged with Malaysia in 1963.

Following the separation from Malaysia, the challenges that Singapore faced in 1965 are commonly known by us. Mr Lee believed that for a small city-state to survive and prosper, it has to stay open and interconnected with nations and economic powerhouses the world over. More importantly, Singapore has to stay strong and united, as our people are the main resource. The threats of insufficient natural resources, limited defence capability, poor housing and rising unemployment were real tangible issues which Mr Lee had to grapple with in the fledgling nation. Yet, undeterred, Mr Lee put forth his bold plan in action and set forth the direction towards a prosperous and self-reliant Singapore.

Building Singapore as an economic hub with a strong business orientation would not be possible without Mr Lee's push for strong institutional support and training of dedicated middle-class workforce. I quote Minister Heng Swee Keat "Mr Lee's most significant achievement is to show the way forward in building a nation. There were and still are no textbook answers for achieving this. Mr Lee and his team analysed the issues from first principles and had the courage and conviction to do what was right and what would work for Singapore. Mr Lee is an activist. He and his team would try, adapt and experiment, to get on with the job of making Singapore a better home for all."

Mr Lee was Prime Minister for 31 years — making him one of longest-serving prime ministers in the world. Even after he stepped down in 1990, he remained active in political and social issues as Senior Minister and later Minister Mentor. He continued to engage generations of Singaporeans and world leaders alike, sharing the lessons he had learnt during his years in office, and the “hard truths” that he believed Singaporeans must confront to maintain the stability and prosperity they enjoy today. Such was his dedication, passion and commitment to Singapore.

Beyond Mr Lee’s extraordinary achievements, he has been and always will be a true inspiration for both the NUS and wider community. He had dedicated his entire life in service of his people and country. While we are constantly reminded of our constraints as “a little red dot in the world”, his passion and leadership continue to give us hope and a sense of “why we are here together right now”, qualities that inspire all of us to excel further for the future of our Singapore.

As students and future leaders of our country, we are thankful for Mr Lee’s dedicated leadership and engagement with various stakeholders which helped build the strong foundations of Singapore today.

Mr Lee once said he had sung four different national anthems in his lifetime. Today we are fortunate to uphold one national anthem in this very uncertain world we live in. For one who had experienced the harrowing days of war, the dominance of foreign rule; the upheaval of Communist insurgency and racial riots; and the long uphill task to secure Singapore’s independence, this short speech certainly falls short of all the sacrifices that Mr Lee had made in his entire life.

Today, Singapore has lost our founding father, and we stand firm in solidarity on the grounds of Singapore, remembering one of our greatest leaders in our time.