

Tributes flow in from NTUC, universities and foreign leaders

A hybrid orchid now bears the name Lee Kuan Yew; ex-US secretary of state and long-time friend George Shultz describes him as 'extraordinary'

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FROM the labour movement to Singapore's oldest university, from old friends to those whom he had never met, tens of thousands in Singapore and around the world on Tuesday continued to mourn the death of Lee Kuan Yew.

At the stroke of noon, the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) observed a minute's silence at its headquarters in Raffles Place, before declaring open a special tribute centre for members of its staff and the public to pen their messages for Singapore's first prime minister, who died on Monday at the age of 91.

Labour chief Lim Swee Say said Mr Lee's efforts to create tripartism – the concept of the government, employers, unions and workers working together – was rooted in his belief that the resulting economic growth was key to improving the lives of workers.

"He came to the conclusion that the only way to harmonise the twin objectives of keeping the economy growing and making social progress was through tripartism," said Mr Lim.

"If not for his vision, leadership and passion in giving his highest priority to social progress and always putting people first, I think we wouldn't be here today."

The NTUC's tribute centre will remain open until Sunday, the day of the state funeral service. The labour movement is also organising a tribute at the Singapore Conference Hall on Friday, an event that more than 800 people, including past and present union leaders and tripartite members, are expected to attend.

Over at the National University of Singapore (NUS), the mood was similarly solemn during a memorial ceremony held at its Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

NUS president Tan Chorh Chuan hailed the late elder statesman for helping to shape higher education in Singapore, in particular the university sector.

"He firmly believed that talent development was not just crucial, but absolutely essential for Singapore's progress and continued success, as Singapore's only resource is its people," he said at the event attended by more than 1,000 students, staff and alumni.

The Nanyang Technological University is holding its own memorial ceremony for Mr Lee on Wednesday afternoon. A group of students will distribute hand-made black ribbon pins to those attending the event.

Meanwhile, more world and busi-



PM Lee Hsien Loong reading a condolence message left outside the Istana. Mr Lee and his wife Ho Ching had dropped in for a visit with the crowds who had gathered outside the Istana. PHOTO: CHEW SENG KIM/THE STRAITS TIMES

ness leaders sent in their condolence messages on the second day of the week-long national mourning period for Mr Lee.

Russian President Vladimir Putin praised Singapore's social and economic development and advances in science and technology under Mr Lee's leadership; he added that Mr Lee had earned "his compatriots' sincere love and respect and won the highest international influence".

In a video message posted on YouTube, former Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono described Mr Lee as a "true friend" of Indonesia.

"He has devoted his whole life to delivering remarkable progress to Singapore and has worked hard to develop close relations with Indonesia," said Dr Yudhoyono, who stepped down last October after 10 years at the helm.

"I consider Mr Lee Kuan Yew a personal close friend, and I know he was a true friend of Indonesia. I always

benefited from my conversations with him. He was wise and his knowledge of international affairs was boundless."

Former United States secretary of state George Shultz, who served in the Reagan administration in the 1980s, wrote a touching letter to express his grief at the loss of Mr Lee, whom he had known for more than 40 years.

"Harry Lee was an extraordinary human being. I have always considered him one of the wisest and most intelligent people I have ever known," said Mr Shultz, referring to the English name many of Mr Lee's friends used. "We met many times, and I was the better for it. I often travelled to Singapore and, with all due respect to the appeal of the city, the real reason was to see Harry Lee."

Outside the main gate of the Istana along Orchard Road on Tuesday, scores of people, including tourists, joined the queue to leave condolence messages.

Both President Tony Tan Keng Yam and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong made a surprise stop there during the day, to greet those who were there.

PM Lee, along with his wife Ho Ching, turned up outside the Istana at about 2pm, and spent about 10 minutes looking at the many hand-made cards, messages and flowers lined up neatly in the area.

During the private wake held at Sri Temasek, the official residence of the prime minister within the Istana grounds, PM Lee was presented with a specimen of the Aranda Lee Kuan Yew, an orchid named after the elder Lee.

The public can view the yellow hybrid in Parliament House from Wednesday to Saturday, when Mr Lee's body will lie in state there.

His coffin will be placed on top of a ceremonial gun carriage and moved to Parliament House on Wednesday at 9am.

After the four-day public wake, all

eyes will turn to the state funeral service on Sunday, scheduled to take place at 2pm at the University Cultural Centre in NUS. This will be followed by a private cremation at Mandai Crematorium.

Many foreign leaders and dignitaries are expected to attend the funeral. Among those who have confirmed their attendance so far are Indonesian President Joko Widodo, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and South Korean President Park Geun-hye.