The tributes to the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew continue to flow as life returns to normal at a market at Toa Payoh Lorong 8 on Wednesday, three days after the State Funeral Service.

PHOTO: WEE TECK HIAN
REMEMBERING LEE KUAN YEW

This past week, things have been, how shall we say ... different in Singapore.

These were the Quiet Hours. After a frenzied week, when Singapore careened from grief to the need to say thanks, and then back to mourning and grief again, life has settled back into more familiar rhythms.

The national colours have fluttered proudly atop flagpoles again, black ribbons have been taken down from Facebook profiles, Parliament House and the Padang have fallen quiet.

And yet ...

When Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong appeared on national television at 8am on Monday, March 23, to announce that Mr Lee Kuan Yew had died a few hours earlier, he said: "I am grieved beyond words at the passing of Mr Lee Kuan Yew. I know that we all feel the same way."

I think the Prime Minister expected many Singaporeans to mourn the loss, but even he must have been surprised by just how many did.

As of the last telling, close to two million people headed to Parliament House and the various tribute centres set up around the island to pay their respects and to remember the founding Prime Minister of Singapore in their own ways. How many more did so at temples, mosques, churches or at home, with friends and family or alone, we'll never know.

The seemingly-endless queues gave rise to their own ecosystem of Good Samaritans who spontaneously turned up to give out water, food, umbrellas and other creature comforts to make the wait, which ran into as long as 10 hours for some, more bearable. Servicemen and other volunteers went about their duties quietly, efficiently, even as officials worked to revise plans that had to be adjusted after their first contact with a grieving nation.

Last Sunday, about 100,000 people lined the streets to bid Mr Lee goodbye as he embarked on his final journey, despite the buckets that rained down. Many more were glued to TV screens, wherever they could find them, to watch the funeral procession and service. It seemed as if an entire nation came to a halt when the Singapore Civil Defence Force sounded the alert for a minute of silence to be observed.

Now, the official mourning period is over, and there is that enemy of the grieving to contend with: Time. After the frenzy of activity, Singapore now has time to catch its breath and ponder the week that was. As anyone who has been through the hell that is the funeral of a loved one can tell you, the hardest part comes next, when the frenzy of activity that has kept the mind busy is over.

Alone, without the necessary and fortifying distractions of a period of mourning in the company of others, we now have to collect our thoughts, make sense of what exactly it is that we have lost, and figure out how to move on from here.

So, what now?

If we can learn anything from the reams of newspaper copy put out over the seven-day period of national mourning, from the blanket coverage on television and radio, the endless chatter in the digital ether, it is this: Mr Lee was an exceptional man, and he built an exceptional country.

But — and there is always a but — this fact presents its own set of challenges.

For someone like me, who grew up in
early Singapore, the startling changes that have taken place have not seemed as phenomenal as they ought to be. It has been more of a process of osmosis — a skyscraper comes up here, a new rail station there, ungainly Hawker Hunters blossom into sleek F15SG Eagles soaring over National Day Parades, one generation of able leaders morph into the next, policies debated in one term are brought to fruition in the next, even if the debate has become sharper, more cantankerous.

This is the natural order of things, is it not? Growing up in a Catholic school, I had hantam bula buddies of every conceivable stripe. Folks of my generation have an easy familiarity with “Selamat Hari Raya”, “Happy Deepavali”, Mus林ian say a cheery “Merry Christmas” to Christians, who reciprocate with gifts of fare, carefully prepared to ensure non-halal ingredients are avoided. We gather on weekends, a veritable GRC of huddles, similar despairs and differences, engaging in the raucesuent hunter that only the sharing of a single tongue would allow.

Girlfriends and boyfriends, husbands and wives, children, more and more, families and lovers look different from the way they did in the past. But there are no second looks, no raised eyebrows when a newspaper columnist describes his children as “Chindians”.

This is the natural order of things, is it not?

At school, in army camps, at work, no one bothers if you grew up in a two-room flat in Tanglin Halt, as I did, or a six-room bungalow in Namly Drive, as a primary school classmate did. There are so many scholars whose parents are hawkers and taxi drivers, that these stories have become boring, routine, not worth a mention in the news. Whether you drive a Ford or a Ferrari, you will be ticketed if you break the law; and you don’t jump queue simply by telling me who your father or mother is, because all are equal in the eyes of the law.

Again: This is the natural order of things, is it not?

It was former foreign minister George Yeo, perhaps, who summed up most succinctly Mr Lee’s contributions to Singapore. Quoting from the monument to Sir Christopher Wren in London, he said when asked about the founding Prime Minister’s most important contribution to Singapore: We should just look all around us.

Look around you. And I mean, really look, not just at the towering achievements on these shores, but beyond as well.

Look at the newspapers and at the reports of the howls of protest after a report about the leader of a neighbouring country who had the gall to turn up at a religious celebration in the garb of another ethnic group. Find out about the lawmakers in a faraway land who invited the leader of another country to speak in direct opposition to a plan by their own president to strike a nuclear deal with Iran. Debate how it came to be that a nominee for the post of national police chief, outed as a suspect in a bribery case, was later cleared of charges by a court, while the leader who nominated him faces questions about why the candidate was dropped.

Look all around you.

Look at the pictures in the following pages that show kings, a former Arabian President and the sitting leader of a nation of over a billion people in attendance for the funeral of a man who once — in an almost distant time — led a tiny nation of just five million. Look around you the next time you are in the middle of an airport queue at an airport in Australia or the United States, and ask yourself what right you have to be in the line for automated clearance.

That is the great Myth of Singapore Exceptionalism, that this is the natural order of things.

It is the vision of one man, and the hard work of those he led, that has given rise to this. It is too easy to be complacent to think that things have always been this way, and that they will remain so no matter what we do. Too easy to think the world owes us living. That we’re so small but tough, that those ads we show in sports are a good indicator of how muscular our prowess is. Half-time of the football game are enough to keep Singapore where it is, and that it’s perhaps time we took our collective foot off the gas pedal, because, well, look how far we’ve come!

In the Quiet Hours, let your thoughts drift to where complacency will lead us, because if it was one thing Mr Lee kept reminding us of, it is that we have no right to be here. We’ve crashed the party. Now, we have to keep proving that we belong.

Look around you.

There is one other thing our minds should drift to in the Quiet Hours, before the new day is born in the days after March 23, 2015 fade into grey, before we once again get caught up in the consuming endeavour that is life, before consigning events to an archive we will revisit every once in a while — times too few and far between to serve any useful purpose beyond nostalgia.

There is a common thread that ties together the speeches made by the Prime Minister in the week that was — a word to the wise, if you will. That they came from a man so obviously wracked by grief at times should give us further pause and engender some thoughtfulness of what is expected of us in the days, months and years ahead. These are the years we will have to navigate “without the light that has guided us” since the earliest days of the Republic.

The Prime Minister’s words on March 23, said: “Let us dedicate ourselves as one people to building on his foundations, strive for his ideals, and keep Singapore exceptional and successful for many years to come.”

The refrain, at the funeral service at the University Cultural Centre on March 29: “We come together not only to mourn. We come together also to rejoice in Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s long and full life, and what he has achieved with us, his people, in Singapore. We come together to pledge ourselves to continue building this exceptional country.

“Let us shape this island nation into one of the great cities in the world, re-creating the ideals he stood for, realising the dreams he inspired, and worthy of the people who have made Singapore our home and nation.”

For Mr Lee, many of the Old Guard leaders, and policies debating in one term are brought to fruition in the next, even if the debate has become sharper, more cantankerous. But deep down, we know life has gotten better year by year. In the vernacular of today’s generation, we have moaned about First World problems. Champion grumblers, indeed.

But for those for whom the events of the week of national mourning were their first personal brush with the history that Mr Lee created, the words of the Prime Minister should resonate more. A gauntlet has been thrown down. Will it be picked up?

For many who were in the queues, at tribute centres, lining the streets on the day the gun carriage of the beloved SG50 will be but a waystation on a longer journey. For most of those who are in school now, or just being enlisted, or just starting work, for the couples who will put last week behind them and experience joy as they exchange wedding vows this weekend and the next, and the one after that — because yes, life must go on — SG50 will be an even more meaningful milestone.

The rest of us will turn the future over to you soon. How will you follow the prescription dispensed by the Prime Minister for moving on from the grief? How to build on Mr Lee’s foundations, strive for his ideals and keep Singapore successful for many years to come?

Perhaps for you, in these Quiet Hours, the proper tonic is a good, perhaps for the Prime Minister should resonate more. A gauntlet has been thrown down. Will it be picked up?

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The seven-day period of national mourning for former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew drew an unprecedented outpouring of emotion from Singaporeans. In this special edition, we take a look back at a historic week for Singapore and present our reports from those seven days as a keepsake. This special edition divides the events into two parts, beginning with a chronological retelling of the mourning period, from the private wake at Sri Temasek, through the days of massive queues at Parliament House, and on to the private cremation at Mandai. The back of the book comprises pages from our special edition on that fateful Monday, March 23, 2015.

“The first among our founding fathers is no more.”
Mr Lee Kuan Yew: His life and times, 1923 - 2015

Sept 16, 1923
Mr Lee Kuan Yew was born to Mr Lee Chin Koon and Mdm Chua Jim Neo

1936 to 1942
Graduates from Telok Kurau English School attends Raffles Institution and Raffles College before studies are interrupted by WWII

1942 to 1945
Japanese Occupation of Singapore, during which Mr. Lee worked as a clerk and transcriptionist for the Japanese, and ran his own businesses on the side.

1947
Enters Cambridge after briefly attending London School of Economics

Dec 23, 1947
Marries fellow law undergraduate Kwa Geok Choo in secret in England. Official wedding was held on Sept 30, 1950

June 21, 1949
Graduates from Cambridge with rare double-starred First-class honours

Feb 10, 1952
His first son, Mr. Lee Hsien Loong, who will become Singapore’s third Prime Minister, is born

Nov 21, 1954
Elected Secretary-General of the People’s Action Party, which he founded with Toh Chin Chye, S. Rajaratnam, among others

April 2, 1955
Wins seat in Tanjong Pagar, which he retains until 1981, in the first General Election; Mr Lee named Secretary-General of the PAP

May 1957
Leads PAP to historic win of 43 out of 51 seats in Legislative Assembly, becomes Singapore’s first Prime Minister

May 30, 1959
Leads PAP to historic win of 43 out of 51 seats in Legislative Assembly, becomes Singapore’s first Prime Minister

May 4, 1961
Campaigns for Singapore to merge with Malaya

Sept 16, 1963
Singapore joins Malaya as an autonomous state after declaring independence from British Mandatory government.

Aug 9, 1965
Chokes back tears while announcing Singapore’s expulsion from Malaysia

Aug 9, 1966
First National Day Parade held at Padang

1966– early 1970s
Launched bilingual policy where all students have to learn their Mother Tongue as a second language. Conscription begins after strong lobbying by Mr Lee. Family planning polices encouraging people to have small families – culminating in the Stop at Two campaign – also introduced

Sept 7, 1979
Visits China and two years later, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping returns the visit, setting in stone decades of bilateral cooperation with China

Oct 21, 1981
PAP loses monopoly of Parliament when Workers’ Party’s JB Jeyaretnam wins the Anson by-election

Dec 22, 1984
PAP loses Potong Pasir seat to Mr Chiam See Tong in the General Election; Mr Lee Hsien Loong is elected into Ang Mo Kio GRC

Oct 9, 1985
Addresses the US Congress during an official visit to the US

1988
Introduces the Group Representation Constituency scheme to ensure minority representation in Parliament. But scheme has been criticised by Opposition as hindering electoral competition

Nov 28, 1990
Steps down as Prime Minister, handing over leadership to Mr Goh Chok Tong. Becomes Senior Minister. That same year, Mr Lee Hsien Loong is appointed Deputy Prime Minister

Nov 5, 1992
Steps down as PAP secretary-general, a post he held for 38 years. In the same year, Mr Lee Hsien Loong is diagnosed with cancer

Jan 1994
Proposes in Parliament that formal benchmarks be introduced to link ministers’ and senior civil servants’ salaries to private sector. White Paper published later that year and approved by Parliament

Aug 12, 2004
Mr Lee Hsien Loong is appointed Prime Minister, while Mr Lee assumes newly created role of Minister Mentor

Oct 2003
Mrs Lee suffers a stroke while in London with Mr. Lee. She would go on to have another two strokes before she passed away in 2010

March 23, 2015
Mr Lee passes away at SGH. He was 91.

2010
Mrs Lee’s JB passing away

May 2, 2011
PAP loses a GRC to an opposition party – the Workers’ Party – for the first time

May 14, 2011
Announces retirement from Cabinet with Mr Goh Chok Tong after General Election to give Mr Lee Hsien Loong a “fresh clean slate”. Also revealed he had peripheral neuropathy, a disease affecting the nerves

2012 to 2013
Public concerns over Mr Lee’s health mount. He misses his constituency’s Chinese New Year dinner for the first time in 2013 but makes an appearance at the National Day Parade

Nov 7, 2014
Celebrates the PAP’s 60th anniversary at Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall, where he receives a standing ovation

Feb 5, 2015
Mr Lee is admitted to Singapore General Hospital (SGH) after falling ill with severe pneumonia

June 23, 2015
Mrs Lee’s JB passing away at SGH. He was 91.

Photos: Reuters, AP
Singapore and the world mourn Mr Lee

Thousands send condolences, global leaders pay tribute to a ‘lion among leaders’

LOH CHEE KONG
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The Republic lost its founding Prime Minister on Monday, March 23, and the world mourned the death of a global statesman.

The announcement in the wee hours of the morning — Mr Lee Kuan Yew died at 3.18am, and the Prime Minister’s Office announced his death a little after 4am — left many at a loss for words, coming as it did at the end of a week during which Singaporeans feared the worst after a series of statements chronicling his failing health made the front pages of local newspapers on successive days.

Over the course of the day, tens of thousands continuously thronged sites across the island — including the Istana main gate, Parliament House, Tanjong Pagar Community Club and the Singapore General Hospital, where Mr Lee had been warded — to pen their tributes and condolence messages.

Singaporeans from all walks of life also took to social media to pay tribute to Mr Lee, whose death came only months before Singapore’s 50th National Day.

The Republic’s embassies and consulates across Asia saw streams of Singaporeans hard. As the hearse made its way to Sri Temasek, the official residence of the Prime Minister within the Istana grounds, where a two-day private wake was held, many members of the public who gathered outside the Istana main gate could not contain their emotions.

Cries of “Mr Lee! Mr Lee!” erupted.

Just hours after the announcement of the death, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong addressed Singaporeans in a live broadcast. In a voice choked with emotion, and a visage etched with grief, the Prime Minister said: “I am deeply saddened to tell you that Mr Lee Kuan Yew passed away peacefully this morning at the Singapore General Hospital... The first of our founding fathers is no more. He inspired us, gave us courage, kept us together, and brought us here. He fought for our independence, built a nation where there was none, and made us proud to be Singaporeans. We won’t see another like him.”

He added: “To many Singaporeans, and indeed others too, Lee Kuan Yew was Singapore. As Prime Minister, he pushed us hard to achieve what had seemed impossible. After he stepped down, he guided his successors with wisdom and tact. In old age, he continued to keep a watchful eye on Singapore. Singapore was his abiding passion. He gave of himself, in full measure, to Singapore... I am grieved beyond words at the passing of Mr Lee Kuan Yew. I know that we all feel the same way.”

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe hailed Mr Lee’s “uncomparable leadership and unparalleled insights” and praised him for playing a key role “not only in achieving Singapore’s remarkable economic growth and prosperity, but also in securing peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region and the world”.

Regional leaders including Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak and Indonesian President Joko Widodo also paid tribute to Mr Lee’s leadership. Corporate bigwigs here and abroad also expressed their condolences, as did some of his political adversaries. Even football clubs in Germany and England took to social media to offer their condolences.

While Mr Lee had been in ill health for more than a month, his death hit Singaporeans hard. As the hearse carrying his body made its way to Sri Temasek, the official residence of the Prime Minister within the Istana grounds, where a two-day private wake was held, many members of the public who gathered outside the Istana main gate could not contain their emotions.

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Other members of the Cabinet were also despondent, as they wrote heartfelt tributes to the man who had been so influential in their political careers. Education Minister Heng Swee Keat, who was once Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s principal private secretary, said he did not have the words to express his gratitude for everything that he had done for Singapore, while Manpower Minister Tan Chuan-Jin expressed a similar sentiment: “One is at loss for words in moments like this. How does one fully articulate a nation’s grief or pay tribute?”

Law and Foreign Minister K Shanmugam said: “Mr Lee is no more. I am tearing as I write this. What is there to say about Mr Lee Kuan Yew that has not already been said?”

He added: “Each time I think about him now, I tear. Each time I read a tribute to him, I choke. It is difficult to describe in words, the grief I feel.”

With flags flying at half-mast, and students in all public schools observing a minute of silence during morning assemblies, the Republic began its week-long mourning period. Moments after the Prime Minister’s Office announced details of where Singaporeans could sign condolence books and pen their
Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong posted on Facebook an image of a flag at half-mast at the Istana on March 23 following Mr Lee’s death. PHOTO: MCI

Tributes, long queues started to form.

Mr S N Pillai, 50, was among the first in line at the Istana. The security guard is a long-time resident in Mr Lee’s Tanjong Pagar ward, and recalled how Mr Lee had told him to study hard some four decades ago.

Another Tanjong Pagar resident, Mr Loke Wai Tong, 76, said Mr Lee had taken care of everything the residents needed. “We lost somebody who fought for us against the British, fought for our rights,” Mr Loke said.

Tanjong Pagar GRC Member of Parliament Indranee Rajah told reporters how Mr Lee always had the interests of the common man at heart despite the weighty job of steering the nation. “One thing which struck me or last-ed as a memory was during the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) period ... One question that he asked during that period was: What about the taxi drivers? How is this affecting their ability to earn a living? Because he knew at that time ... people were reluctant to go on public transport or to take public taxis. His immediate concern ... was for their welfare,” said Ms Indranee. “In the midst of all the big picture planning, he did not forget the common man.”

Young Singaporeans also joined in the expressions of grief, with many saying they learnt about Mr Lee from their parents. One, student Christopher Lim, 15, said: “He is a great man, someone who has helped Singapore accomplish a lot. My parents always told me how grateful we should be to him.”

On the first day of the private wake, some 1,200 visitors, including Cabinet ministers, MPs, Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka-shing and SGH nurses, paid their last respects at the private wake at the Istana. Many could not hold back their emotions, and emerged tearful. Mr Ho Nami Hua, 67, had left a message last Sunday at Teck Ghee Community Club for Mr Lee. He was back again the day Mr Lee’s death was announced and he intended to pay his respects at Parliament House the next day.

“My child said he was late because I woke up late,” said Mr Ho. “(On Sunday), I came here to leave a message ‘Mr Lee, get well soon’. Today, I wrote ‘Mr Lee, please go well’.”
From a trickle of visitors into snaking lines

As the hearse bearing the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s body pulled up to the Istana’s Main Gate at around 1pm on Monday, March 23, a hush fell, broken only by frenzied triggering of camera shutters as the vehicle drove through, before a chorus of cries — some calling out Mr Lee’s name — pierced the air.

A private family wake was held at Sri Temasek, the official residence of the Prime Minister, for Mr Lee until March 24, and the Main Gate of the Istana was the chosen gathering point for many members of the public seeking to pen condolences and express their appreciation for Mr Lee and his lifetime of public service.

By evening, the trickle of visitors spotted at daybreak had transformed into sombre, snaking lines. Many in the queue were older Singaporeans who had met Mr Lee in the past, during his visit to their neighbourhoods, or other such community activities.

Teary-eyed, they clutched bouquets of orchids, white lilies, white roses — one visitor brought blooms in muted shades of clothing.

The scene at the Istana was replicated in other areas that had been set up to allow Singaporeans to pay tribute to the nation’s founding prime minister, and the mood elsewhere across the island was one of quiet, sometimes tearful, grief. From sunrise, when state flags at government buildings, schools, community centres and elsewhere were unfurled and raised to half-mast, to late in the evening, as workers made detours from their commutes home to pay respects, it was near impossible to venture into any corner of the island where Mr Lee Kuan Yew did not loom large in thought or conversation.

Outside the Istana, elderly folk came hand in hand with their grandchildren and told them stories of Mr Lee’s contributions to Singapore. At Monday morning assembly in schools, Majulah Singapura rang out loud and proud. In Bishan, coffee shop patrons ignored the beverages at hand and sat glued to television screens recounting the news of the day, and the life and times of Mr Lee.

Later in the afternoon, the Istana turned into a hive of activity as guests attending the private wake, including Deputy Prime Ministers Tharman Shanmugaratnam and Teo Chee Hean, tycoon Li Ka Shing and foreign dignitaries, began arriving.

At Tanjong Pagar Community Club, meanwhile, the mood was solemn among visiting residents and grassroots volunteers. Visitors, several of whom struggled to keep their emotions in check, were guided and assisted by grassroots volunteers who wore white shirts, black pants and tags with black lanyards. A few who held their composure until then broke down after depositing flowers and other keepsakes before moving on to view photos of Mr Lee’s public appearances from the 1950s to his final years, which were on display. A documentary of Mr Lee’s contributions to Singapore was also played on repeat. In the early afternoon, students in school uniform began arriving after lessons ended. Some took pictures of the photo display, and parents also spent some time talking to their young children about Mr Lee.

Teck Ghee Community Club began to draw visitors in the morning, and by afternoon, residents were also making their way to Ang Mo Kio Central Stage as soon as it had been set up. As a video of Mr Lee played on stage, wreaths and bouquets began arriving.

Over at Parliament House, a mix of curious tourists and working professionals on their lunch breaks dropped by, and despite the sunny weather, the mood was sombre. Many came and went quietly, but by 4.15pm, officials stationed there said almost 1,000 notes had been left there.

The Singapore General Hospital, where well-wishers first began gathering the previous Friday, was another spot of choice for those who wanted to pay tribute to Mr Lee. At the Quad outside Block 7, young and old alike arrived steadily throughout the day, and placed flowers, cards and letters beneath a large black sign with the words: “We Remember with Gratitude.”

Wherever they went, and whether they left flowers, balloons, cards or offered a silent prayer, the grief was palpable, and the sentiment was the same. Mrs Choo Heng, 68, a retiree, summed up the thoughts of many, saying in Mandarin: “I don’t think there’s going to be another (leader) like Mr Lee Kuan Yew ... I always tell my grandson to respect him because he must be respected for doing all those things that he had done for Singapore ... It was so difficult in the past but he made things better.”
Mr Lee a giant among men: Ministers

Senior leaders at a private wake speak glowingly of Mr Lee’s commitment, which enabled Singaporeans to live a better life

Cabinet Ministers — former and present — paid tribute to founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew at Sri Temasek at the Istana on Monday, March 23, where a private wake was held.

Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam said: “We have lost Lee Kuan Yew, but Singapore will live on and better still, because of Mr Lee Kuan Yew. The foundations that he built up are the foundations for the future — everything, education, housing ownership, multi-racialism, tripartism, clean government — everything that was Lee Kuan Yew is what will hold us for the future.”

Present to receive the visitors were Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and his wife Ho Ching.

Other senior leaders that visited the Istana include Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen, Education Minister Heng Swee Keat, Law and Foreign Affairs Minister K Shanmugam, and Communications and Information Minister Dr Yaacob Ibrahim. Former Cabinet Ministers Othman Wok and S Dhanabalan came to give their condolences to the Lee family as well.

Also present was Minister for Social and Family Development Chan Chun Sing, who described the outpouring of support for the Lee family as a “private wake”.

“I think that speaks a lot of how Mr Lee has touched the lives of so many residents in Tanjong Pagar. We have people who are old, people who are on crutches, coming to pay their respects to Mr Lee,” he said. “And I think over the last so many years, he has done so many things for the Tanjong Pagar residents, especially the older generation will remember him fondly.”

Writing on his Facebook page earlier in the day, Dr Ng said Mr Lee’s vision and commitment “enabled poor families like mine to move up and give my children a better life today. I owe him a debt of gratitude”.

On her Facebook page, Senior Minister of State for Health and Manpower Amy Khor said: “Mr Lee invites superlatives. He was a giant among men. I can only marvel at his razor sharp intellect, his astute political judgment, his debating skills, his discernment of global and regional trends, his far-sighted vision, and most of all, his devotion to the cause of Singapore.

“As a woman, I also feel that Mr Lee has done much for the advancement of women in Singapore. He in fact laid the foundations for women, like myself, to freely pursue our aspirations when he provided equal access to education and economic opportunities for all.”

We have lost Lee Kuan Yew, but Singapore will live on and better still, because of Mr Lee Kuan Yew. The foundations that he built up are the foundations for the future — everything, education, housing ownership, multi-racialism, tripartism, clean government — everything that was Lee Kuan Yew is what will hold us for the future.

Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam
Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister

Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office Grace Fu also spoke of Mr Lee’s role in uplifting the role of women in Singapore, pointing to the establishment of the Women’s Charter.

“That a regular Singapore woman like me, born, bred and educated in Singapore, could assume a CEO position in a local MNC which invested in many countries, is testament to what Mr Lee had done for women in Singapore. He gave us the opportunities to realise our dreams and the privilege of choosing our own destiny — to be educated, to pursue a career, to build a family and to be what we want to be.”

His relationship with his wife and the role she played in his life — in both private and official capacities — also inspired many women in Singapore, said Ms Fu, whose father was press secretary to Mr Lee Kuan Yew from 1972 to 1993.

With tears in his eyes, labour chief and Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office Lim Swee Say, who was at the community tribute site at the Bedok Town Centre, said: “We are sad because Mr Lee is no longer with us. We are grateful because he changed our lives for the better. Obviously we’re going to miss him a lot. Even though he will no longer be living with us in this world, I’m sure for most of us, if not all of us, Mr Lee will forever be living in our hearts. May he rest in peace.”

The outpouring of support from his residents, who were looking forward to having the opportunity to pay their last respects, also made him appreciate that Singapore was “fortunate” to have had a leader like Mr Lee, he added.
A time of profound sadness and grief

From relatives, friends, and the nurses from SGH who took care of him, to Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament and Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, some 1,200 attended the private wake of Mr Lee Kuan Yew on Monday, March 23. Many of them could not hold back their emotions at the wake held at Sri Temasek, the official residence of the Prime Minister within the Istana grounds.
Clockwise from above: SGH nurses who looked after Mr Lee; former Cabinet Minister Mr Othman Wok; Brunei’s Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah and wife, Queen Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Hajah Saleha; and Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong and his family all came to pay their respects to Mr Lee at the private wake.

Facing page bottom left: Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka-shing and his son Richard with Ms Ho Ching.

Bottom left: Transport Minister Lui Tuck Yew.
Mr Lee’s red box

Mr Lee Kuan Yew had a red box. When I worked as Mr Lee’s Principal Private Secretary, or PPS, a good part of my daily life revolved around the red box. Before Mr Lee came in to work each day, the locked red box would arrive first, at about 9am.

As far as the various officers who had worked with Mr Lee could remember, he had it for many, many years. It is a large, boxy briefcase, about 14cm wide. Red boxes came from the British government, whose ministers used them for transporting documents between Government offices. Our early ministers had red boxes, but Mr Lee is the only one I know who used his consistently throughout the years. When I started working for Mr Lee in 1997, it was the first time I saw a red box in use. It is called the red box, but it is more a deep wine colour, like the seats in the chamber in Parliament House.

This red box held whatever Mr Lee was working on at any one time. Through the years, it held his papers, speech drafts, letters, readings and a whole range of questions, reflections and observations. For example, in the years that he was working on his memoirs, the red box carried multiple early drafts back and forth between his home and the office, scribbled over with his and Mrs Lee’s notes.

For a long time, other regular items in Mr Lee’s red box were the cassette tapes that held his dictated instructions and thoughts for later transcription. Some years back, he switched to a digital recorder.

The red box carried a wide range of items. It could be communications with foreign leaders, observations about the financial crisis, instructions for the Istana grounds staff or even questions about some trees he had seen on the expressway. Mr Lee was well known for keeping extremely alert to everything he saw and heard around him. When he noticed something wrong, like an ailing rain tree, a note in the red box would follow.

We could never anticipate what Mr Lee would raise — it could be anything that was happening in Singapore or around the world. But we could be sure of this: It would always be about how we could affect Singapore and Singaporeans, and how we had to stay a step ahead. Inside the red box was always something about how we could create a better life for all.

We would get to work right away. Mr Lee’s secretaries would transcribe his dictated notes, while I followed up on instructions that required coordination across multiple government agencies. Our aim was to do as much as we could by the time Mr Lee came into the office later.

While we did this, Mr Lee would be working from home. For example, during the period when I worked with him (from 1997 to 2000), the Asian Financial Crisis ravaged many economies in our region and unleashed political changes. It was a tense period, as no one could tell how events would unfold. Often, I would get a call from him to check certain facts or arrange meetings with financial experts.

In the years that I worked for him, Mr Lee’s daily breakfast was a bowl of dou hua (soft bean curd) with no syrup. It was picked up and brought home in a tiffin carrier every morning, from a food centre near Mr Lee’s home. He washed it down with room temperature water. Mr Lee did not take coffee or tea at breakfast.

When Mr Lee came into the office, the work that had come earlier in the red box would be ready for his review and he would have a further set of instructions for our action.

From that point on, the work day would run its normal course. Mr Lee read the documents and papers, cleared his emails and received official calls by visitors. I was privileged to sit in on every meeting he conducted. He would later ask me what I thought of the meetings — it made me very attentive to every word that was said and I learnt much from him.

Evening was Mr Lee’s exercise time. Mr Lee had described his extensive and disciplined exercise regime elsewhere. It included the treadmill, rowing, swimming and walking — with his ears peeled to the evening news or his Mandarin practice tapes. He would sometimes take phone calls while exercising.

He was in his 70s then. In more recent years, being less stable on his feet, Mr Lee had a simpler exercise regime. But he continued to exercise. Since retiring as Minister Mentor in 2011, he had been more relaxed during his exercises. Instead of listening intently to the news or taking phone calls, he shared personal stories and joked with his staff.

While he exercised, those of us in the office would use that time to focus on the day’s work for Mr Lee to take home with him in the evening. Based on the day’s events and instructions, I tried to get ready the materials that Mr Lee might need. It sometimes took longer...
I have taken some time to describe Mr Lee's red box. The reason is that for me, it symbolises his unwavering dedication to Singapore so well. The diverse contents it held tell us much about the breadth of his concerns: from the very big to the very small; the daily routine of the red box tells us how his life revolved around making Singapore better, in ways big and small.

return to the hospital at the end of the night. But he asked his security team if they could take him to the Singapore River instead. It was late in the night and Mr Lee was in mourning. His security team hastened to give a bereaved husband a quiet moment to himself.

As he walked slowly along the bank of the Singapore River, the way he and Mrs Lee sometimes did when she was alive, he paused. He beckoned a security officer over. Then he pointed out some trash floating on the river and asked: “Can you take a photo of that? I'll tell my PPS what to do about it tomorrow.” Photo taken, he returned to the hospital.

I was no longer Mr Lee's PPS at the time. I had moved on to the Monetary Authority of Singapore to continue with the work to strengthen our financial regulatory system that Mr Lee had started in the late 1990s. But I can guess that Mr Lee probably had some feedback on keeping the Singapore River clean. I can also guess that the picture and the instructions were ferried in the red box the next morning to the office. Even as Mr Lee lay in the hospital. Even as Mrs Lee lay in state.

The security officers with Mr Lee were deeply touched. When I heard about these moments, I was also moved.

I have taken some time to describe Mr Lee's red box. The reason is that, for me, it symbolises his unwavering dedication to Singapore so well. The
Mourning moves into public phase

Thousands gather to pay their respects as the casket is moved to Parliament House

The seven-day period of mourning for Singapore’s founding Prime Minister moved into a more formal phase on Wednesday, March 25, when the body of Mr Lee Kuan Yew was transferred from Sri Temasek — the Prime Minister’s official residence on the Istana grounds — to Parliament House, where it lay in state until Saturday, March 28.

Mr Lee’s casket was carried on a ceremonial gun carriage in a solemn procession that saw it traverse the lawns of the Istana, before it made its way through parts of the Central Business District.

In doing so, it afforded Singaporeans, who had thus far travelled in droves to the various tribute centres nationwide, a way to pay their last respects in person to a man who had touched many lives.

Preparations for the lying-in-state began on the Tuesday, with barricades for queues and tentages for people to go through security scans set up outside Parliament House. A huge turnout was expected, with organisations and companies making plans to ferry their members and employees, respectively, to the venue. Credit Suisse and DBS, for example, were understood to have chartered buses to provide transport for employees from their offices.

Several firms, including BNP Paribas Singapore, Standard Chartered
national where there was none, pursued a vision for Singapore and built a first-class country that every Singaporean should be proud of. For a man who had done so much for Singapore, this is the least that we can do.”

A BNP Paribas Singapore spokesperson said: “Mr Lee was instrumental in building Singapore into the key financial hub it is today and we believe that it is important for our employees to have the chance to pay their last respects to the founding father of this successful nation.”

StanChart Singapore CEO Neeraj Swaroop added: “Mr Lee Kuan Yew had dedicated himself to building a nation where there was none, pursued a vision for Singapore and built a first-class country that every Singaporean should be proud of. For a man who had done so much for Singapore, this is the least that we can do.”

Bank Singapore and law firm Rajah & Tann, also allowed their staff to take time off from work to pay their respects. Staff of the National Trades Union Congress could also request for time off, subject to work exigencies, its spokesperson said.

At 9am on March 25, a coffin-bearer party — led by Brigadier-General Ong Tze-Chin, Commander 3rd Division, and comprising eight officers from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Police Force — draped the State flag over Mr Lee’s casket, the highest State honour accorded to a leader. The coffin bearers then carried the casket and made their way to the gun carriage waiting just outside the entrance of Sri Temasek.

Eight pallbearers, made up of people who had worked for Mr Lee at the Istana and in his Office, were behind the carriage as part of a 70m foot procession. The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) Band played Beethoven’s Funeral March No 1 during the procession, which was led by his family members including Mr Lee’s three children — Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Dr Lee Wei Ling and Mr Lee Hsien Yang — and seven grandchildren.

The carriage passed by a military line of honour comprising 48 personnel from the SAF Military Police Command, and 20 representatives from Mr Lee’s Tanjong Pagar ward and Mr Lee Hsien Loong’s Teck Ghee ward.

After the foot procession, the carriage proceeded towards The Istana main building, making its way past a garden. A dozen Istana landscape technicians and horticulturists were lined up along the entrance to the garden. At The Istana Plaza, President Tony Tan and Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong offered their respects, along with the President’s Office, and the Ministry of Finance’s Office, and 24 Ceremonial Guards. As the carriage came to a stop, a bag piper from the Singapore Gurkha Contingent played Auld Lang Syne.

The carriage then made its way out of the Istana grounds. By then, a sea of office workers, parents with young children in tow, retirees and youth — some of whom had streamed in three hours earlier — had gathered at the Istana’s main gate, alongside a contingent of journalists, including some from international media outlets.

One of the crowd, administrative officer Aminah Harun, 51, said she took time off from work to witness the historic moment. “He is the father of Singapore. No matter how, we must come,” she said.

Along the funeral procession route that passed through Orchard Road, Bras Basah Road and North Bridge Road, crowds thickened as the minutes ticked away.

From staying updated by tuning in to news reports on the radio and live webcast, to fiddling with their cameras and smartphones, the crowd waited in hushed anticipation until the blares of Auld Lang Syne played on a bagpipe emanated from the Istana grounds.

Moments later, the gun carriage bearing Mr Lee’s casket emerged at 9.38am, trailed by his immediate and extended family — barring his daughter, Dr Lee Wei Ling, who was unwell. Clapping, and cheers such as “We will miss you, Mr Lee” and “Good job, Mr Lee”, erupted from teary-eyed mourners, while others tossed flower bouquets in the direction of the gun carriage as it made its five-minute journey to Parliament House.

At Parliament House, the casket was received by the Chief of Defence Force Ng Chee Meng, Commissioner of Police Hoong Wee Teck, Speaker of Parliament Halimah Yacob, as well as the Prime Minister and the rest of the family.

Unlike previous State funerals for the country’s leaders, the State funeral for Mr Lee saw, for the first time, the tri-service chiefs — Chief of Army Perry Lim, Chief of Navy Lai Chung Han and Chief of Air Force Hoo Cher Mou — being part of the first Vigil Guards, which also consisted of Lieutenant-General Ng and Chief of Staff Joint Staff Chia Choon Hoong. The traditional mounting of Vigil Guards during the lying-in-state period symbolises the highest form of respect accorded to the deceased.

Mr Lee’s friends and former colleagues also held vigil at Parliament House. They were joined by representatives from various national agencies, as a reflection of his diverse contributions to nation-building, the Government said.
A last trip around lush Istana

For the last time, Mr Lee Kuan Yew left Sri Temasek on Wednesday, March 25, with a send-off by eight personal staff who had served and worked closely with him. At 9am, after a private farewell from his family, Mr Lee’s casket was placed on a gun carriage and the funeral procession began. Posing the garden, the procession was met by President Tony Tan and Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong at the Istana Plaza, where they said their goodbyes, along with staff from the President’s Office and the Prime Minister’s Office, as well as Ceremonial Guards. From there, the procession passed through the main gate, beginning its journey towards Parliament House.
THROUGH ORCHARD ROAD, BRAS BASAH ROAD AND NORTH BRIDGE ROAD

History comes to the Historic District

Exiting the Istana main gate, the procession was greeted by a sea of office workers, parents with young children in tow, retirees and youth. Passing through Orchard Road, Bras Basah Road and North Bridge Road at a gentle pace, the procession was accompanied by occasional cries from the crowd calling Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s name.
Final arrival at Parliament House

Arriving at Parliament House, Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s casket was received by eight pallbearers representing the three branches of Government: The Executive, the Legislative, and the Judiciary. Among them were Mr Benny Lim, Permanent Secretary (National Development, National Security and Intelligence Coordination and the Prime Minister’s Office); Mr Aaron Maniam, director of the industry division at the Ministry of Trade and Industry; and Mr See Kee Oon, Presiding Judge of the State Courts. Once the casket was placed in Parliament House, the first Vigil Guards — a first for a State funeral — began their watch, among them the Chiefs of the Army, Navy and Air Force.
Lying in state

Visitors were ushered into Parliament House in groups of 30 to 40. Initially told to pause before Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s casket and then bow, visitors were later told to file past the casket instead before they were led out, so the queues could move more quickly. Joining the public were Cabinet ministers and foreign dignitaries, including ASEAN Secretary-General Le Luong Minh and Sultan Ibrahim of Johor, as well as President Tony Tan and his wife.
An emotional Parliament House bids teary farewell

Members of Parliament share heartwarming tales of Mr Lee in special sitting of Parliament.

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A packed House came together on Thursday, March 26, in a historic sitting to pay tribute to the Republic's founding Prime Minister. A dozen Members of Parliament (MPs), including Speaker Halimah Yacob, rose to pay tribute to the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew, in front of a public gallery filled with, among others, civil servants, former MPs and members of the Old Guard such as Mr Othman Wok, Mr Ong Pang Boon and Mr Jek Yeun Thon, who had fought many political battles with Mr Lee.

The absence of Mr Lee was keenly felt. A bouquet of white flowers occupying an empty seat was conspicuous amid a full house in Parliament. It was where Mr Lee used to sit.

Several of the MPs struggled to keep their emotions in check, wiping away tears as they spoke. The solemn mood was punctured by heartwarming accounts of Mr Lee. Leader of the House Ng Eng Hen quipped that he could hear Mr Lee's reprimand in his ear for the long wait that Singaporeans had to endure to pay their last respects to Mr Lee in Parliament House. "I am sorry that they had to wait so long," Dr Ng said to Mr Lee. "My Cabinet colleagues walked through the crowds thanking our people for their patience. Singaporeans smiled, replied that the wait was little compared to what you have done for them.

One by one, the MPs paid tribute to different aspects of Mr Lee's life—from his unbridled passion for the country and his conviction as a politician, to his ability to make unpopular but necessary decisions. They also recounted how much they learnt from him as a mentor, and his caring and sensitive side underneath a tough exterior.

Mr Lee may have had his critics. Even at the special Parliamentary sitting, Opposition leader Low Thia Khiang showered Mr Lee with praise but took a jibe at People's Action Party policies, which Mr Low claimed society "has paid a price for". But going by the overwhelming adulation from Singaporeans for Mr Lee since the news of his death broke, Dr Ng declared that the public has pronounced the "final judgment" of his life's work.

Alluding to Mr Lee's famous stance that he did not care too much about how history would judge him, Dr Ng told the House: "Today, we have the opportunity to tell Mr Lee if he could hear us and I believe he can. Mr Lee, we would like to tell you that Singaporeans have decided."

He added: "They did so spontaneously, an outpouring of gratitude and admiration for what you have done for their lives. Singaporeans, young and old... have pronounced the final judgment of your life's work. It is a great work that has surpassed all expectations."

Nominated MP Chia Yong Yong admitted that she was critical of Mr Lee's policies as a young adult, and noted that many have also accused Mr Lee as being "arrogant" and "ruthless".

But she said: "I am convinced that if I were born in Singapore in an earlier era, or if I were born in a similar era, but in another Asian country, I would not, being a girl with disability coming from a poor family with no connections, I would not have been able to go to school, enter a profession and serve the community today."

Mr Low hailed Mr Lee as an "extraordinary political leader born of a turbulent and uncertain era" whose outstanding wisdom and courage steered the country out of extreme challenges. Acknowledging Singapore's leap from Third World to First within one generation, Mr Low said the success "arose not only from Mr Lee's extraordinary fighting spirit and tenacity, but also from his sincerity"

He said: "However, I don't think the People's Action Party's one-party rule is the key to Singapore's fast economic development, strong social cohesion and unity. It is because not an insignificant number of Singaporeans were sacrificed during the process of nation-building and policymaking and our society has paid a price for it. This is why Mr Lee is also a controversial figure in some people's eyes."

Dr Ng said that Mr Lee had his critics and took unpopular decisions in the early years of independence, such as extending working hours and slashing the number of public holidays. "(But) Mr Lee would often warn voters against politicians with silver tongues purveying sweet promises, empty promises. He gained a fearsome reputation as one who eschewed the easier, more popular but ultimately wrong paths," he said.

Several speakers also shared anecdotes that illustrated Mr Lee's character. Dr Ng recounted that the MPs planned to celebrate Mr Lee's 90th
Flowers on the seat occupied by the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew in Parliament, placed by Dr Yaacob Ibrahim before the special sitting on Thursday, March 26.

PHOTO: MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION

birthday last year at a time when he had become frail and needed intravenous nutrition. The celebrations were called off when Mr Lee health took a turn for the worse, but he surprisingly showed up. “I found out later that he overruled his doctors, saying he must attend Parliament because he had given his commitment,” said Dr Ng. “At age 90, frail and hydrated, Mr Lee kept his word to be here.”

Dr Ng also noted how in 2009, Mr Lee unexpectedly joined a debate on a motion about equality in Parliament after reading news reports about it. “An 86-year-old gentleman, doing physiotherapy, reading newspapers. Lesser mortals would have thought of other things, but Mr Lee said, ‘I’ve to make a speech in Parliament’,” he said.

Former Deputy Prime Minister Wong Kan Seng shared how Mr Lee had nagged him to go home and recommended doctors to him after learning that he was diagnosed with transient ischaemic attack (TIA). It turned out that Mr Wong did not have TIA.

“I was relieved and I believe he was very relieved too,” Mr Wong said. “Mr Lee’s physical health declined in recent years, although he was still mentally sharp. It pained me each time I saw him appearing in public attending to the call of duty. I would have preferred to remember him when he was much fitter physically and not so gaunt and frail.”

Mr Wong, who stepped down from Cabinet in 2011, called the day of the special Parliamentary sitting “one of the saddest days in my life”.

He said: “No words can truly ascribe or reflect his contributions and the great impact he made on the lives of millions of Singaporeans, including mine. His policies enabled me, son of hawker parents, to become a Deputy Prime Minister. Many poor families’ children have done well too. Many in this House came from humble beginnings. Social mobility is not an abstract theory in Singapore.”

The sitting concluded with everyone in the House — including members of the public and the Old Guard in the public gallery — rising to observe a minute of silence, with their heads bowed.
In grief, we have become more united as S’poreans

On Thursday, March 26, 12 Members of Parliament rose to pay tribute to Mr Lee Kuan Yew. Two of their speeches are reproduced here.

HALIMAH Yacob Speaker

On behalf of this House and with a heavy heart, I wish to place on record the demise of Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the Honourable Member of Parliament for Tanjong Pagar GRC and founding Prime Minister of Singapore, on March 23, 2015.

Mr Lee’s demise is a great loss to Parliament and the people of Singapore, and it is with great sadness that this House pays tribute to the man we know as the founding father of Singapore. Mr Lee was an outstanding parliamentarian and his speeches in this House were never dull or inconsequential. It was in this House that he fought many battles and shaped numerous policies to set Singapore on the right trajectory.

Mr Lee founded the People’s Action Party in 1954 and took part in the landmark 1955 Singapore Legislative Assembly election. At the age of 31, Mr Lee secured the seat of Tanjong Pagar — a seat he held for 14 successive General Elections and one by-election. His parliamentary career spanned nearly 60 years, earning him the honour of being the longest-serving Member of Parliament in Singapore and, undoubt-edly, the most illustrious of them all.

Mr Lee became the first Prime Minister of Singapore after the People’s Action Party secured 43 of the 51 seats in the Legislative Assembly during the General Election of 1959. He took the reins of leadership for 31 years and led the then fledgling Singapore through a most uncertain time. He gave the founding generation hope and a clear sense of direction, especially when Singapore was taking its first, tentative steps as an independent nation. This was just what our forefathers needed.

Mr Lee was a “conviction politician”. When asked in his memoirs what it took to be a politician, he said: “You must have convictions.” Mr Lee, himself, did not set out with the aspiration to be a politician. In his memoirs, he recounted that he returned to Singapore from his overseas studies to be a lawyer. But he was driven to assume public office by two convictions: One, he wanted a Singapore without a colonial master; and two, he wanted a system that focused on meritocracy.

In Parliament, Mr Lee set very high standards for himself and expected the same from all the other Members of Parliament too. In a speech to Parliament in 1999, Mr Lee said that he wanted Members of Parliament whose “instincts are immediately for Singaporeans”. He reminded us that “Parliament as an arena for the contest of wits and wills over matters of policies will always remain important because of our system of parliamentary democracy”, but that we must “make no mistake... In this Chamber, we are playing for keeps. The future of Singapore and its people... is not a question for light-hearted banter.”

Mr Lee never flinched from taking hard decisions, many of which were taken in this august Chamber. In 1968, when speaking on the Employment Bill, he said: “We will be judged as a government by results. These results depend, among other things, upon the morale and enthusiasm of the people, and the pace set by their leaders in Parliament and outside.”

Mr Lee’s abiding concern was the interest and welfare of the people, even if there were painful adjustments to be made in the short term. People respected and followed him because of one very important element and that is trust. They trusted that he did not make decisions for his own self-aggrandisement or personal benefit, but truly for the benefit of Singapore.

Mr Lee’s personal leadership and his style and values helped shape the tone and the kind of Parliament that we have inherited today. Deeply committed to Singapore, passionate to ensure not just Singapore’s survival, but also its success, he was a leader par excellence. He had devoted his entire life to make the life of all Singaporeans better. Mr Lee has left a deep impact on this House and we will feel the vacuum. The least that we as parliamentarians can do now is to uphold the values that he held dear when he was alive.

In 1999, when we moved to this Chamber from the old Parliament House, Mr Lee said: “The importance of this Chamber did not, and does not, depend on its size and its grandeur, but upon the quality of men and women who occupy it as representatives of the people. By the standards of other public and private buildings in Singapore, it is modest by comparison. But that is a virtue. Behind the understatement lie great strengths of character, integrity and determination. That is what will see Singapore through, not the grand statements and monuments in brick and mortar or steel and concrete, with which so many other new nations try to impress themselves and their followers.” Mr Lee could very well have described himself and his own life when he made that statement.

Mr Lee reminded us that, “Nobody believed that we could make it, but we have. But there is no reason to believe that we will continue to make it. We will continue to make it only if there are tough-minded people who know the difference between the froth and the substance.”

Honourable Members, it now falls upon us as Members of this House to ensure that we continue Mr Lee’s legacy of a responsible and effective Parliament, a duty we owe to the people of Singapore.

The House records with deep regret the passing of the Honourable Member of Parliament for Tanjong Pagar GRC and founding Prime Minister of the Republic of Singapore, Mr Lee Kuan Yew. On behalf of all Members, I wish to express our deepest sympathy and condolences to the family of the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

I also wish to thank the thousands that have braved the hot sun to pay their last respects to Mr Lee for your support and sympathy. In this moment of grief, we have become even more united as Singaporeans. Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s death is indeed a grievous loss to Singapore and this House.
Aspiring to his example is greatest tribute

DR NG ENG HEN
Minister for Defence and Leader of the House

For such a monumental life, any eulogy will fall short and I seek your pardon. But to honour his memory and remind us what he stood for, I propose to capture the essence of Mr Lee through his speeches — the very words he shared in this Parliament.

Even at the dawn of his political career, Mr Lee identified closely with the hopes and aspirations of common Singaporeans. In his first election in 1955, he told the voters of Tanjong Pagar that out of 25 divisions, he wanted to represent “workers, wage earners and small traders, not wealthy merchants or landlords”. This was why he “chose Tanjong Pagar, not Tanglin”. The residents of Tanjong Pagar believed and trusted him and elected him by a handsome margin. Astonishingly, Mr Lee would be returned as their MP for 13 subsequent elections. He would serve as Member of Parliament for Tanjong Pagar for 60 years, from 1955 to 2015, and is the only MP that Tanjong Pagar has ever had since elections started in Singapore, predating our independence. I doubt this record will ever be broken in our parliamentary history.

But Mr Lee and his Government did not get re-elected time and time again because they dispensed sweet words. Indeed, Mr Lee would often warn voters against politicians with silver tongues purveying sweet promises. He gained a fearsome reputation as one who eschewed the easier, more popular path of callous empty promises. He kept a constant watch over Singapore’s well-being, and leaders that determined a nation’s chances of success.

When Parliament moved in 1999, Mr Lee refused to intervene in any debate. But I was sure that Singapore remained well positioned for the future.

In 2009, Mr Lee, at 86 years, unexpectedly joined a debate on a motion about equality in this House. He said: “Sir, I had no intention to intervene in any debate. But I was doing my physiotherapy just now and reading the newspapers and I thought I should bring the House back to earth ... and remind everybody what is our strength, what is our base, and if we do not recognise where we started from, and that these are our foundations, we will fail.” An 86-year-old gentleman doing his physiotherapy, reading his newspaper — a lesser mortal would have thought of other things — but Mr Lee said: “I’ve to make a speech in Parliament.”

Mr Lee went on to explain why the Government of Singapore is not the same (the Government) to specifically look after the position of the Malays and other minorities”. Our Constitution states expressly that it is a duty of the Government not to treat people of different races in an equal. It is not reality, it is not practi
cal, it will lead to grave and irreparable damage if we work on that principle”.

Mr Lee refused to be swayed by ideology that could not work. He dubbed these as “high falutin ideas that misled Singaporeans”. As a result today, many countries come to Singapore to study how we have maintained our harmony in a multiracial society.

Above all, Mr Lee believed that ultimately it was in the quality of its people and leaders that determined a nation’s chances of success.

When Parliament moved in 1999, Mr Lee but believed in the size of the Chamber and its grandeur. He believed that with the understatement lies great strength, character, integrity and determination, and that is what will see us through.

Great strength of character, determination and integrity. Mr Lee Kuan Yew had all of these qualities and more. He kept his promises. What he said he would do, he would do more — whether it was for individuals or an entire nation.

As we honour his memory, we resolve to learn from his example to be men and women, individually and collectively as a nation, to have that great strength of character, determination and determination. These values, as Mr Lee emphasised, would see us through difficult times. We must maintain the, as he put it, “restless minds, forever probing and testing, seeking new and better solutions to old and new problems, (so) that we have never been, and I trust never shall be, tried and found wanting”.

We must aspire to these qualities that Mr Lee asked of us, because that would be the greatest tribute to the memory of Mr Lee Kuan Yew, of what he stood for, fought for and desired for Singapore and Singaporeans. THIS IS AN EDITED EXCERPT FROM DR NG’S SPEECH

Members of Parliament holding vigil at Parliament House before attending a special parliamentary session to pay tribute to Mr Lee Kuan Yew. PHOTO: MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION

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And the crowds just kept on coming

More than 450,000 people — 6,500 an hour — queued over 82 hours at Parliament House

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Over the four days of the lying-in-state phase, Singaporeans turned up in full force to pay their last respects to Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

Despite repeated advice from the authorities to not join the queue but to head to the tribute centres spread across the island instead, the crowd grew relentlessly, prompting the authorities to temporarily suspend the queue on Friday, March 27, a day before the lying in state was to end.

By the time the queue was temporarily halted, the estimated waiting time to enter Parliament House had reached more than 10 hours. Barricades were put up to prevent people emerging from City Hall MRT station from crossing the road to get to the Padang.

Apologising for the temporary suspension, the State Funeral Organising Committee said in a statement that it sought the public’s understanding that the decision was taken to “protect the safety and well-being of those wishing to pay respects to Mr Lee Kuan Yew”.

The committee noted that there had been a sharp increase in the daily number of visitors since the lying in state began on the Wednesday.

By 10pm on the first day, some 57,000 people had paid their last respects at Parliament House. The number spiked to almost 148,000 a day later. As of 1pm on Friday, more than 290,000 people had paid their respects to Mr Lee at Parliament House.

“We would like to accommodate as many as possible in this overwhelming outpouring of respect and love for Mr Lee Kuan Yew. However, to ensure safety of individuals due to the large crowds and to limit the physical discomfort of the long wait, especially for the elderly and young children, the queue line will be temporarily suspended,” the committee said on Friday.

Earlier in the day, it was announced that a live video feed of the lying in state was set up, but it did little to quell the desire of Singaporeans seeking to pay their respects in a “meaningful way”, as one of them put it.

The huge crowd prompted at least one national leader to express his concern over public safety and the well-being of those in the queue. Thanking Singaporeans for their patience and understanding in enduring the long wait, Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean said the authorities were concerned for the “health and safety of the people who have to wait for a very long time, particularly those who may be a little older, those with children and so on”.

After the temporary suspension lasting about seven hours, the queue resumed at 6.15am on Saturday. In all, 454,687 people — an average of 6,500 visitors per hour — paid their respects at Parliament House during the lying-in-state phase.

As a result of the overwhelming response, the number of Singapore Armed Forces personnel involved in the State Funeral was doubled from about 2,900, said the State Funeral Organising Committee. A total of about 300 tents and 1,000 barricades were set up to manage the queues.

Mr Ng Guan Cheong, 27, and his family were the last in the seemingly never-ending streams of people who had thronged Parliament House, but for him, being last was a blessing in itself. Speaking to Channel NewsAsia after they left Parliament House at about a quarter to midnight on Saturday, Mr Ang said: “According to Chinese tradition, it is actually a great honour to be the last person to pay respects. It’s symbolic and of great importance. So my family is ... blessed to be given this opportunity, because it was totally unplanned.”

His father, Mr Henry Ang, 62, added: “We were very, very fortunate that we did not need to wait six to seven hours. Everybody knows Mr Lee is the greatest man.”

The huge turnout and massive outpouring of grief had caught the authorities off guard. On the first day of the lying in state, the State Funeral Organising Committee had to change plans and extend visiting hours twice in the span of just over three hours.

The visiting hours for Mr Lee’s lying in state were initially set at 8am to 8pm daily until Saturday. So exceptional was the number that showed up on the first day that the authorities announced barely two hours after the public were allowed in to pay their respects that closing hours would be pushed to midnight for the first day. When crowds continued to thicken, an announcement was made at about 2.45pm that Parliament House would remain open for 24 hours until 8pm on Saturday.

In tandem, public transport operators also extended their service hours to around the clock for two days.

Singaporeans of all ages and races, and from all walks of life halted their daily activities as the nation entered the public mourning phase for Mr Lee, in a display of the extent to which the Republic’s founding Prime Minister had touched their lives.

From witnessing the procession carrying his casket to Parliament House, to attending the lying-in-state ceremony, they came in droves — schoolchildren, housewives, seniors, disabled people and even foreigners. In particular, the chance to pay their last respects to Mr Lee at close quarters drew droves of mourners and caused confusion on the first day over where queues started — snaking lines stretched to at least eight hours’ wait at times — even after many had thronged the numerous tribute sites set up since Mr Lee’s death.

As a result, the authorities had to improvise plans, diverting queues to several places including Hong Lim Park, Fort Canning, Clarke Quay and New Bridge Road.

While there were confusion on the first day over where the entrances were and grousing about the multiple queues forming up, tempers largely remained cool. By the second day, the queue was more orderly, with the Padang being used as a holding area.

Nevertheless, the crowds were too much to bear for some, with ambulances spotted arriving at various times over the four days.

Many people were stirred into spontaneous acts of kindness to bring a measure of respite from the piercing mid-day sun or long wait. Individuals prodded the old and handicapped to proceed to the front of the queues, while banks, restaurants and hotels in the vicinity of the lines gave away cartons of water and snacks, for instance.

Others came up with gestures of appreciation for Mr Lee. Artistic des Fleurs, a florist at Raffles Exchange, gave out white roses to those heading to Parliament House, with the owner, who declined to be named, saying only that “Lee Kuan Yew is a great man and we’re doing this to show our respect”.

The choir from St John’s College, from Mr Lee’s alma mater Cambridge University, also attended the lying-in-state ceremony to perform a moving rendition of the popular 1998 National Day Parade song, Home.

Although many had to wait for several hours for their chance to pay their respects to Mr Lee, they were unperturbed. Madam Yu Soo Sing, 75, said: “We should be grateful for what he has done for us, putting in place policies that give us this comfortable environment to live in. He’s not perfect and he’s not alone in building up this nation, but we can’t deny his sacrifices and contributions.”

Commenting on the “absolutely overwhelming” response shown by Singaporeans, Environment and Water Resources Minister Vivian Balakrishnan told TODAY: “I think people are finally realising what a huge impact he had on our lives as individuals, as families and as a country — we wouldn’t have a country and citizenship, and we wouldn’t have had all the opportunities we’ve had. He has literally made this country and made us one united people.

“All around, you see people ... prepared to wait for eight hours or more. I think that just shows you the depth of feeling and appreciation Singaporeans have. This is once in a lifetime.”
Thousands battle heat to pay respects

For hours on Wednesday, March 25, thousands waited in the sun until it was finally their turn to take a few precious minutes to say their final farewell to Mr Lee Kuan Yew. Undeterred by estimated waiting times that extended as long as eight hours, visitors formed long lines that snaked through the Central Business District, encouraged by simple acts of kindness provided by individuals along the way. Drinks, fans and snacks were among the items handed out and, by the evening, portable toilets were set up at Hong Lim Park.
Facing page, counter-clockwise from top: A massive line formed at noon from the underpass leading to Clarke Quay from Parliament House; Members of the public queuing at Hong Lim Park to enter Parliament House; The long queue snaked all the way to the Padang at about 7pm.

This page, top: Undeterred by the sweltering heat, thousands lined up at Empress Place and on Cavenagh Bridge. Right: As day gave way to night, people continued queuing at Empress Place for a chance to pay their respects to Mr Lee.

PHOTOS: RAJ NADARAJAN, KOH MUI FONG, ROBIN CHOO, WEE TECK HIAN, MUGILAN RAJASEGERAN
No let-up as crowds continue to swell

The confusing lines that threaded through the Central Business District on the first day of Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s public wake gave way on the second day, March 26, to a tidier state of affairs, as tents and barricades were lined up with military precision on the Padang, bringing more order to the queues. Waiting times shortened for many, and clearer signs and more ushers lessened the confusion. But the crowds swelled at nightfall, leading ushers to once again warn of seven-hour waits while more tents and barricades were brought out to accommodate the numbers.
Counterclockwise from top: The queue from Parliament House where Mr Lee Kuan Yew lies in state stretched to the Asian Civilisations Museum.

Tents were put up at the Padang to shelter those queuing from the heat, as seen from Swissotel The Stamford.

At dawn, Social and Family Development Minister Chan Chun Sing greeted people waiting in line at the Padang to gain entry into Parliament House to pay their respects to Mr Lee.

Members of the public waited in line at the Padang crossing at Saint Andrew’s Road in front of the Singapore Recreation Club at daybreak.

At dusk, the crowd outside the Asian Civilisations Museum swelled.

PHOTOS: JASON HO, WEE TECK HIAN, DON WONG, WONG PEI TING
Wave after wave of Singaporeans turned up at Parliament House to pay respects to founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, undaunted by hours of waiting in the sweltering heat. Here, some share with TODAY why the fleeting minutes spent in the presence of Mr Lee's casket are well worth the wait.

I got some time off earlier from work today and decided to make this trip with my family. There are six of us; I think three of them should be in Parliament House by now. After paying our respects, we will be having a family dinner.

Mr Lawrence Lim (with flowers), 40
WITH (FROM LEFT) WIFE MOON YEO, 38, AND SISTER-IN-LAW YEO ZILIN, 24

Mr Joshua Gopal Sundram, 38
WHO WORKS IN THE SINGAPORE ARMED FORCES, WITH WIFE
ANGELINE LIM, 38, AND DAUGHTER
KAYLA JOY SUNDRAM, 3

Mr Preston Samuel, 20, an ITE College East student, volunteering his time with the CD Lionhearters by distributing drinks to those waiting in line at the Padang. He clocked in 12 hours yesterday, starting at 7am. He is looking forward to a good shower when his shift ends today. PHOTO: DON WONG

To see more, go to www.todayonline.com/rememberinglky
He is our founding father and, as part of the pioneer generation, I know the difficulties in the past. But today, there are so many benefits. Now, when I visit the doctor, it’s so much cheaper. Really grateful to him.

Ms Lam Siew Kiew, 65

I brought my grandson to pay our last respects because it is a special day, history in the making. He has done so much good for us. I remember shaking his hand at an election rally a long time ago. He’s a very sincere and fair man.

Mr Teo Ho Peng, 73

He is our founding father and, as part of the pioneer generation, I know the difficulties in the past. But today, there are so many benefits. Now, when I visit the doctor, it’s so much cheaper. Really grateful to him.

Ms Lam Siew Kiew, 65

Mr Lee Kuan Yew is a very great man. He’s the best Prime Minister we have ever known. Without him, Singapore wouldn’t be so successful and prosperous. We are very grateful for all his efforts, for what he has done for us in terms of (the economy) and in terms of how (he) changed Singapore into a modern city, from a Third World country into a First World country.

Ms Estella Yeo, 26

We never expected to join to the queue. We were thinking of paying our respects somewhere outside, near Parliament House. But we thought about it and decided we didn’t want to regret later and so we’re in line.

Nicole Ong (third from left), 16

PAYA LEBAR METHODIST GIRLS’ SCHOOL (SECONDARY) STUDENT
Mr Lee’s death was also seen as the world’s loss, as 170 foreign dignitaries came to pay tribute

JASON TAN
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T he outpouring of tributes to Mr Lee Kuan Yew from world leaders and the steady stream of foreign dignitaries who flew here to pay their last respects to him spoke of Mr Lee’s reputation as a respected statesman whose loss will be felt as keenly around the globe as in Singapore.

In the words of his son, Mr Lee raised Singapore’s standing on the global stage far above what anyone might have reasonably expected from such a small state.

“At crucial turning points, from the British withdrawal ‘East of Suez’ to the Vietnam War to the rise of China, his views and counsel influenced thinking and decisions in many capitals,” said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in his eulogy at the University Cultural Centre (UCC) on March 29.

The global respect that the late Mr Lee commands was evident in the continuous stream of condolence messages and tributes that poured in throughout the week of official mourning.

A statement released shortly after the announcement of Mr Lee’s passing, United States President Barack Obama said he appreciated Mr Lee’s wisdom, including discussions they held during his trip to Singapore in 2009 when he was formulating his Asia-Pacific policy.

“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,” Mr Obama said.

China’s President Xi Jinping called Mr Lee an “old friend of the Chinese people”, adding that the late leader was the “founder, pioneer and promoter of China-Singapore relations”.

Closer to home, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, who visited Parliament House to pay respects to Mr Lee on March 26, said Mr Lee’s “achievements were great, and his legacy is assured”.

Even former PM Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who often did not see eye to eye with Mr Lee, was moved to pen a tribute on his blog.

“At the Singapore Embassy in Bangkok, seven former Thai prime ministers — Prem Tinsulanonda, Anand Panyarachun, Chuan Leekpai, Banharn Silapa-arecha, Sornchai Wongwat, Abhisit Vejjajiva and Yingluck Shinawatra — turned up to sign the condolence book.

“He was one of my very good friends while we worked together. We were both Prime Minister at the same time,” said Mr Prem, who called on Singaporeans never to forget Mr Lee. “We were very close and helped each other often. If there was no Lee Kuan Yew, I believe there would be no Singapore.”

Dozens of world leaders past and present attended the state funeral service.

In all, 170 foreign dignitaries from 27 countries, regions and international organisations attended the four-day lying in state for Mr Lee.

Many countries also mourned the late leader in their capitals, with Bhutan and New Zealand flying their national flags at half mast on March 29 to mark the state funeral service.

India did the same, while also declaring a national day of mourning with no official entertainment across the country.

Australia and New Zealand passed parliamentary motions to mark his passing.

“Mr Lee did not just lead his country, he also made his country,” said Australian PM Tony Abbott in his parliament motion. “In the mid 1950s, when he first came to prominence in Singapore, his country was poor and friendless.

Today, it is rich and well connected.”

Mr Abbott was among the two dozen world leaders who attended the state funeral service at the UCC on March 29, along with the Sultan of Brunei Hassanal Bolkiah, former US President Bill Clinton, Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe and Narendra Modi of Japan and India, as well as President Joko Widodo of Indonesia.

Alongside 2,200 guests, the foreign leaders listened in rapt attention for more than two hours as speaker after speaker, led by PM Lee, recounted the legacy and life of Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

“Mr Lee was not just a perceptive observer of world affairs, but a statesman who articulated Singapore’s international interests and enlarged our strategic space,” said PM Lee in his eulogy. “In the process, he built up a wide network of friends and acquaintances, in and out of power. He knew every Chinese leader from Mao Zedong and every US president from Lyndon Johnson.

“He established close rapport with President Suharto of Indonesia, one of our most important relationships. Others included Deng Xiaoping, Margaret Thatcher, Helmut Schmidt, George Shultz, as well as President Bill Clinton and Henry Kissinger, who are here this afternoon.”

“They valued his candour and insight. Hence despite being so small, Singapore’s voice is heard, and we enjoy far more influence on the international stage than we have any reason to expect.”

As the funeral service came to an end, a minute of silence was observed, followed by a recitation of the Pledge and a stirring rendition of Majulah Singapura.

As the casket was carried out of the hall before its final journey to Mandai Crematorium, the world leaders stood with their heads bowed, a poignant farewell to a man mourned by many Singaporeans in the hall and across the globe.
Clockwise from above: Former Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and his wife paying their respects on Friday, March 27; Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak and wife Rosmah Mansor on Thursday, March 26; Israeli President Reuven Rivlin with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and his wife Ho Ching behind him on March 27; Former US Secretary of State Dr Henry Kissinger with Madam Ho Ching on Saturday, March 28.
‘The heavens opened and cried for him’

Thousands gather to view the funeral procession in heavy rain and to watch the funeral service

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I

n his eldest son’s words, the heavens opened and cried for him. But he

doomsday did not deter the tens of thousands of Singaporeans from lining
the streets and spending hours under the rain on Sunday, March 29, to send off their founding Prime Minister

on his final journey.

“From all walks of life and regardless of age, race or creed, they were there to witness Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s cortege making its way from Parliament House, where his body had been lying in state for the previous four days, to the National University of Singa
gapore’s University Cultural Centre (UCC) for a funeral service attended by 2,000 guests.”

Among them were Old Guard members who fought shoulder-to-shoulder with Mr Lee in the Republic’s tumultuous early years and foreign dignitaries such as former United States President

Bill Clinton, former US Secretary of State and Mr Lee’s close friend Henry Kissinger, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Australian Prime

Minister Tony Abbott, and other regional leaders.

Across the island, people gathered to watch the service, which lasted more than two hours, at coffeeshops, shopping malls and community centres, among other places.

The service, which was telecast live on television and the Internet, was also watched by Singaporeans living overseas and people around the world, with screenings organised in several countries including China, Hong Kong, Canada, South Korea, Japan, Malaysia and Thailand.

As a mark of respect, countries such as New Zealand, India and Bhutan flew their flags at half mast.

At the solemn service, Prime Min

ister Lee Hsien Loong was the first of 10 speakers to deliver eulogies. The others included President Tony Tan Keng Yam, Emeritus Senior Minis
ter Goh Chok Tong, Mr Ong Pang Boon, one of the few surviving members of the Old Guard, former Cabinet Minister S Dhanabalan and unionist

G Muthukumarasamy.

In parting, he reminisced on Mr Lee’s impact on Singapore, the Prime Min

ister touched on Mr Lee’s role in turn

ing Singapore’s vulnerability in water security into a strength. He recalled how Mr Lee personally managed all aspects of the Republic’s water talks with Malaysia.

“He launched water-saving campa

igns, built reservoirs and turned more and more towards water catchment to collect the rain to process to use. He cleaned up the Singapore River and Kallang Basin,” he said. “He dreamed of the Marina Barrage long before it became feasible and persevered for decades — and he lived to see it become a reality.”

PM Lee noted that today, Singapore has moved towards self-sufficiency in water, and become a leader in water technologies. “So perhaps, it is appropriate that today, for his State Funeral, the heavens opened and cried for him,” he said, choking back his tears.

Mr Lee’s second son, Mr Lee Hsien Yang, gave the final eulogy at the UCC. Two wreaths were then laid by PM Lee and President Tan, in that order, and a lone bugler from the Singapore Armed Forces military band sounded the Last Post.

As the service drew to a close, sirens from the Singapore Civil Defence Force’s Public Warning System rang out across the country at 4:35pm — the cue for a minute of silence to be observed as a mark of respect to Mr Lee. The nation fell silent and came to a standstill.

At MRT stations, trains pulled to a stop and commuters stood still and bowed their heads. Similar scenes were played out at places such as Changi Airport, cruise and ferry terminals, and shopping malls. Flight landings and take-offs were suspended for a short period. And the despatch of buses from interchanges was halted. Checks at the Tuas and Woodlands check points were also stopped.

The service ended with those gath

ered at the UCC, as well as tens of thousands around the island, reciting the Pledge with hand on heart and singing a rousing rendition of the Na

tional Anthem.

Despite the torrential rain that day, the State Funeral Organising Commit

tee estimated that more than 100,000 people lined the streets along the funeral procession route. It added that almost 2,000 police officers were deployed to ensure the cortege and the ac compan

ying convoy had a smooth passage.

The 15.4km funeral procession saw Mr Lee’s cortege making its way past significant landmarks such as Old Parliament House, City Hall and the Padang, where Mr Lee oversaw the country’s first National Day Parade 50 years ago, and from where a battery of ceremonial guns boomed out a 21-gun salute that reverberated across the downtown area.

The procession also passed the NTUC Centre and Trade Union House, as well as the housing estates of Tanjong Pagar, Bukit Merah and Queenstown.

The heavy rain — coupled with the low clouds over the Padang — led to the Republic of Singapore Air Force’s Black Knights scrapping plans to fly a “Missing Man Formation”, where one aircraft would leave the four-aircraft flying formation as an aerial salute. Nonetheless, a four-aircraft flypast was flown by the RSAF Black Knights to honour Mr Lee.

The entire funeral procession route was lined by crowds, and while some organisations such as the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau and the labour movement gathered their members to pay tribute, most who turned up were driven by a spontaneous desire to bid a final farewell to a founding father. Cries of “Lee Kuan Yew”, and “Thank you, Mr Lee” erupted, and people broke down in tears as Mr Lee’s cortege drove past.

By the time the funeral service at the UCC ended, hundreds of Singaporeans had also made their way to the roads leading to the Mandai Cre

atorium and Columbarium, where a private ceremony was held by PM Lee and his family.

Sembawang resident Yeo Bee Kheng was among those who wanted to be there at Mr Lee’s “final destination”, as Mr Yeo put it. The 51-year-old retiree said he cycled 10km from his home to Mandai Road, cutting through forest paths.

He, like Mr Lawrence De Silva, 42, and his wife, who made their way there from Yishun, echoed what a nation united in grief had offered as an explana

tion for an unprecedented outpouring of tributes over the previous week. “It was the least we could do.”

At the Mandai Columbarium, the state flag that covered the casket was presented to PM Lee.

About 300 people attended the pri

vate funeral service, where Mr Lee’s three children and two of his grand

children delivered moving eulogies and provided glimpses of what Mr Lee was like away from the public eye. Following this ceremony, Mr Lee was cremated.

PM Lee, who spoke first, shared how his father had been there for him when he learnt how to ride a bicycle. “Once, when I was just getting the hang of balancing on two wheels, he pushed me off from behind to get me started.”
I pedalled off across the field, thinking he was still supporting and pushing me. Then I looked back and found that, actually, he had let go and I was cycling on my own! He was so pleased and so was I.”

He also thanked the people who had played a role in caring for his father, such as the late Mr Lee’s niece Kim Li and other friends, who would take turns to accompany his father on outings, as well as Mr Lee’s medical team and his security team.

Mr Lee Hsien Yang, in his eulogy, shed light on his father’s preference for Chinese names. “He was given the name Harry at birth. But he soon felt it did not fit him and the fact that he was a son of Singapore. When Papa was 10, his youngest brother Suan Yew was born. Papa persuaded his parents that it was not a good thing to give Suan Yew a Western name. Decades later, when Papa entered politics, he also found his name Harry a political liability,” he said. When the late leader’s three children were born, they were given only Chinese names.

Dr Lee Wei Ling, revealing that her father developed Parkinson’s disease three years ago, paid homage to his fighting spirit, saying that the “astonishing outpouring of emotion” in the previous week was because people knew he would always fight for them. “They knew he was ready to fight for them till his last breath,” she said.

His grandson, Mr Li Hongyi, said his grandfather’s charisma “came not from showmanship, but from pure substance”. “Yeye showed me you could make a difference in this world. Not just that you could make a difference, but that you could do it with your head held high,” he said.

Mr Li Shengwu, who is Mr Lee Hsien Yang’s eldest son, recounted the talks he would have with his grandfather about politics and the state. “As you might guess, we didn’t always agree. But, at the dining table, he never argued opportunistically, he never took a position he didn’t believe for tactical advantage,” he said.

ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY XUE JIANYUE
The final farewell

After a week that saw more than a million people paying their respects to Singapore’s founding Prime Minister, more than 100,000 lined the streets for Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s last trip past several landmarks that represent milestones in his career. Despite the downpour, they stood with their flags and banners for the fleeting moment when his cortege went past to say their final goodbyes.
A stately and solemn farewell

About 2,200 guests were present at the University Cultural Centre for the State Funeral Service, including members of the late Mr Lee’s family, President Tony Tan, Cabinet ministers, the judiciary and foreign leaders — among them former United States President Bill Clinton, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Some members of the public were also invited for the service, during which Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and his brother Hsien Yang delivered eulogies, as did members of the Old Guard and Dr Tan.
Let’s pledge to continue building this exceptional nation

Building a Nation

From the ashes of Separation, he built a nation. The easiest thing to do would have been to appeal to Chinese voters alone. After all, Singapore had been expelled from Malaysia because we were majority Chinese.

Instead, Mr Lee went for the nobler dream of a multiracial, multi-religious nation. Singapore would not be based on race, language or religion, but on fundamental values — multiracialism, equality, meritocracy, integrity and rule of law. Mr Lee declared: “This is not a country that belongs to any single community; it belongs to all of us.”

He checked would-be racial chauvinists and assured the minorities that their place here was secure. He insisted on keeping our mother tongues, even as English became our common working language. He encouraged each group to maintain its culture, faith and language, while gradually enlarging the common space shared by all. Together with Mr S Rajaratnam, he enshrined these ideals in the National Pledge.

He kept us safe in a dangerous and tumultuous world. With Dr Goh Keng Swee, he built the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) from only two infantry battalions and one little wooden ship into a well-trained, well-equipped and well-respected fighting force.

He introduced National Service (NS) and personally persuaded parents to entrust their sons to the SAF. He succeeded, first because he led by example — his two sons did NS just like every Singaporean son. And, in fact, my brother and I signed up as regulars with the SAF, and went in on SAF scholarships. Second, people trusted Mr Lee and believed in the Singapore cause. Hence, today, we sleep peacefully at night, confident that we are well protected.

Mr Lee gave us courage to face an uncertain future. He was a straight
talker and never shied away from hard truths, either to himself or to Singaporeans. His ministers would sometimes urge him to soften the tone of his draft speeches, saying they would sound less unyielding to human frailties. And often, he took in their amendments, but would preserve his core message. As he said: “I always tried to be correct, not politically.”

He was a powerful speaker: Moving, inspiring, persuasive, in English and Malay and, by dint of a lifelong hard slog, in Mandarin and Hokkien. MediaCorp has been broadcasting his speeches this week, and it is clear that his was the original Singapore Roar: Passionate, formidable and indomitable.

Above all, Mr Lee Kuan Yew was a fighter. In crises, when all seemed hopeless, he was resourceful, endlessly resourceful, firm in his resolve and steadfast in advancing his cause.

Thus he saw us through many battles — the Battle for Merger against the communists; the political turmoil which most people thought the non-communists would lose; the fight when we were in Malaysia against the communists, when his own life was at risk; Separation, which castastrophe into the lives of millions; then the withdrawal of British military forces from Singapore, which threatened the livelihoods of 150,000 people.

Because he never wavered, we did not falter. Because he fought, we took courage and fought with him, and prevailed. And thus, Mr Lee took Singapore from Third World to First.

In many countries, anticolonial fighters and heroes would win independence and assume power, but then fail — fail at nation building because the challenges of bringing a society together, growing an economy and patiently improving people’s lives are very different. Mr Lee understood the challenges of fighting for independence, mobilising crowds, getting people excited and overthrowing a regime. But Mr Lee and his team succeeded at nation building, together with the people.

Just weeks after Separation, he boldly declared: “Ten years from now, this will be a metropolis. Never fear!” And indeed, he made it happen. He instilled discipline and order, ensuring that, in Singapore, every problem got fixed. Heededucated our young. He transformed labour relations from strikes and confrontation to tripartism and cooperation. He campaigned to upgrade skills and productivity, calling this effort a marathon with no finish line.

He enabled his economic team — Goh Keng Swee, Hon Sui Sen, Lim Kim San — to design and carry out placettes, to sound the economy and create prosperity and jobs. As he said: “I settled the political conditions so tough policies ... could be executed.”

But Mr Lee was also clear that while “the development of the economy is very important, equally important is the development of the nature of our society”. So he built an inclusive society where everyone enjoyed the fruits of progress. Education became the foundation for good jobs and better lives. HDB new towns sprang up one after another to house our people — Queenstown, Toa Payoh, Ang Mo Kio — to be followed by many more. We had the transformation of homeownership. With Devan Nair in the NTUC, he transformed the union movement into a positive force, cooperating with employers and the Government to raise the lot of workers.

Mr Lee cared for the people whom he served — the people of Singapore. When SARS struck in 2003, he worried about taxi drivers, whose livelihoods were affected because tourists had died off and forexed us to find ways to help them.

Mr Lee also cared for the people who served him. One evening, he rang me up. Just a few years ago, one of my mother’s WSOs (woman security officers) was having difficulty conceiving a child and he wanted to help her. He asked me whether I knew how to help her adopt a child. He was concerned for her personal well-being, rather than just formally, but also personally and individually.

Internationally, he raised Singapore’s standing in the world. Mr Lee was not only a perceptive observer of world affairs, but also a statesman who understood the dynamics and moved Singapore’s voice heard and we enjoy far more than our fair share of attention. The world listened to our views, valued his participation in international decision-making, and respected his insights.

He was a master of the international stage. He got all the right people to come here, more than any of our water talks with Malaysia. He launched water-saving campaigns, built reservoirs and turned most of the island into water catchment to collect the rain to process to use. He opened up the Singapore River and Kallang Basin. He dreamed of the Marina Barrage long before it became feasible and persevered for decades until, finally, technology caught up and it became feasible and it became a reality.

And he lived to see it become a reality. When PUB invented NEWater and when desalination became viable, he backed the new technologies enthusiastically. The result today is Singapore has moved towards self-sufficiency in water, become a leader in water technologies and turned a vulnerability into strength. So perhaps, it is appropriate that today, for his State Funeral, the heavens opened and cried for him.

Greening Singapore was another of his passions. On his travels, when he came across trees or that might be missed, he would stop and admire them. He would pick up the fallen petals and seeds, and hand-carry them home. He used the Istana grounds as a nursery and would personally check on the health of the trees. Not just in general, but (also) individual, particular trees. If they had names, he would know their names. He knew their scientific names. Singapore’s Prime Minister was also the Chief Gardener of the City in a Garden.

He was a relentless drive to improve and continued to learn well into his old age. At 70, to write his memoirs, he started learning how to use his computer. Every so often, he would call me for investments, and if he didn’t think I was bright enough, I would give him a phone consultation, talking him through the steps — how to save a file, how to find a document that had vanished somewhere on his hard drive. And if he hadn’t found me, he would consult my wife.

He made a ceaseless effort to learn Mandarin over decades. He listened to his teachers’ talk, conversing with him every day, in the morning while shaving at home, in the evening while dinner...
Let's pledge to continue building this exceptional nation

Some other Prime Ministers told me they couldn't imagine what it was like to have two former PMs in my Cabinet. But I told them it worked, both for me and for our people.

For all his public duties, Mr Lee also had his own family. My mother was a big part of his life. They were a deeply loving couple. She was his loyal spouse and confidante — going with him everywhere,fussing over him, helping with his speeches, and keeping home and hearth warm. They were a perfect team and wonderful parents. When my mother died, he was bereft. He felt the devastating loss of a lifetime partner who, as he said, had helped him become who he was.

My father left the upbringing of the children largely to my mother. But he was the head of the family and cared deeply about us, both when we were small and long after we had grown up. He wasn't very demonstrative, much less touchy feely. So, not new age, but he was deeply loving.

After my first wife Ming Yang died, my parents suggested that I try meditation. They gave me some books to read ... I read the books, but I didn't make much progress. I think my father had tried meditation too, him becoming legal adviser to so many trade unions and was excited by the hubbub in Oxley Road when elections happened, and our home became the centre of opposition offices.

I remember when we were preparing to join Malaysia in the early 1960s, going along with my father on constituency visits — the “fiang won” tours that he made to every corner of Singapore.

For him, it was back-breaking work, week after week, every weekend, rallying the people’s support for so adamantly important a decision about Singapore’s future. For me, these were not just Sunday outings, but also an early political education.

I remember election night in 1963, the crucial General Election when the PAP defeated the pro-communist Ba’asan Sosialis. My mother sent me to bed early, but I lay awake in bed to listen to the election results until the PAP had won enough seats to form the Government again. And then I think I fell asleep.

I remember the day he told me, while we were playing golf at the Istana that should anything happen to him, he wanted me to look after my mother and my younger brother and sister.

I remember the night the children were preparing for me to relax, still his mind and let go, he replied: “But what will happen to Singapore if I let go?”

When Hardlyymphoma, he suggested that I try meditation more seriously.He thought it would help me fight the cancer. He found me a teacher and spoke to him personally. With a good teacher to guide me, I made better progress.

After my second wife datasong died, my father started meditating again and this time with help from Ng Kok Song, whom he knew from GIC. Kok Song brought a friend to see my father. The friend was a Benedictine monk who did Christian meditation.

My father was not a Christian, but was happy to learn from a Benedictine monk and even called me to suggest that I meet the monk, which I did. He probably felt I needed a religion of some sort, really. I think my father, who was a Benedictine monk, was a Benedictine monk and his religious experience, and quietly helped build up Mr Goh’s authority.

He knew how to guide without being obtrusive, to be watchful while letting the new team develop on its own, his authority. He described himself as a “mascot”, but everyone knew how special this mascot was and how lucky we were to have such a mascot.

It was likely after data song took over. Mr Goh became Senior Minister and Mr Lee became Minister Mentor, a title he felt reflected his new role ... Increasingly, he left policy issues to us, but would share with us his reading of world affairs and his advice on major problems that he saw over the horizon.

We come together not only to mourn. We come together also to rejoice in Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s long and full life, and what he has achieved with us, his people, in Singapore.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong
Mandai, the final stop

Founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's casket made its final stop at Mandai Crematorium, where a private funeral service was held before the cremation. The flag that was draped over his casket was folded and presented to his eldest child Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. Eulogies were then delivered by two of the late Mr Lee's grandsons, as well as his children Mr Lee Hsien Loong, Dr Lee Wei Ling and Mr Lee Hsien Yang.
Farewell, Papa
I will miss you

This is an excerpt of the eulogy by Dr Lee Wei Ling at the private service held at Mundai.

A fter Mama died in October 2010, Papa's health deteriorated rapidly. The past five years have been challenging. But as always, Papa was determined to carry on as normal as possible, as best as he could.

He developed Parkinson's disease three years ago, which severely limited his mobility. He had great difficulty standing and walking. But he refused to use a wheelchair or even a walking stick. He would walk, aided by his security officers (SOs).

Papa was also plagued by bouts of hiccupps that could only be controlled by medication which had adverse side effects. Over and above the frequent hiccupps, his ability to swallow both solids and liquids was impaired, a not uncommon problem in old age.

Papa searched the Internet and tried a wide variety of unorthodox hiccup therapies. For example, he once used rabbit skin and then chicken feathers to induce sneezing, so as to stop the hiccupps. Although the sneezing sometimes stopped his hiccupps, it did not do so consistently enough. Papa also tried reducing his food intake, because he felt that eating too much could precipitate hiccupps; hence, he lost a lot of weight, and appeared thin and gaunt.

Papa was stubborn and determined. He would insist on walking down the steps at home, from the veranda to the porch where the car was parked. Ho Ching had a lift installed so Papa could not negotiate the steps. But when he was aware and alert, he refused the lift though it was a struggle for him to walk down those steps even with three SOs helping.

But the lift was not installed in vain. On several occasions when he was ill and needed to be admitted to Singapore General Hospital (SGH), he did not protest when the SO guided him into the lift. Still, even when ill, if he was conscious, he would say: “Seniors need not negotiate the steps.” But when he was aware and alert, he refused the lift though it was a struggle for him to walk down those steps even with three SOs helping.

But the lift was not installed in vain. On several occasions when he was ill and needed to be admitted to Singapore General Hospital (SGH), he did not protest when the SO guided him into the lift. Still, even when ill, if he was conscious, he would say: “Seniors need not negotiate the steps.” But when he was aware and alert, he refused the lift though it was a struggle for him to walk down those steps even with three SOs helping.

Papa’s spirit was very vibrant. In his last days, he was extremely talkative, even to his nurses andSOs. For example, he would ask his nurses about their own family and how they were managing their own lives.

Papa had a unique sense of humour. He would often tell jokes and make other staff laugh. He enjoyed entertaining the staff with amusing stories.

Papa was very close to his family. He loved his children and grandchildren. He was very involved in their lives and would provide them with lots of love and affection.

Papa’s presence was felt in his last days. He was surrounded by family and friends, who came to visit him regularly.

Papa was a fighter who would always fight for his family and friends. He was a man of principle and integrity, and always did what was right, even when it was difficult.

Papa passed away on 23 October 2015, after a long battle with illness. He was 91 years old.

I will miss you, Papa. Rest in peace.
Your work is done, your rest is richly deserved

This is the full eulogy of
Lee Hsien Yang at the private service held at Mandai.

Papa was born in 1923 when Singapore was part of the British Empire, the Straits Settlements flag fluttered over Government House, and the people of Singapore sang God Save the King. He was given the name Harry at birth.

But he soon grew to feel that it did not fit him and the fact that he was a son of Singapore. When Papa was 10, his youngest brother Suan Yew was born. Papa persuaded his parents that it was not a good thing to give Suan Yew a Western name. Decades later, when Papa entered politics, he also found his name Harry a political liability. In truth, two decades before, he had already felt it was not right for him.

When Loong, Ling and I were born, Papa gave us only Chinese names, and used the Wade Giles romanisation system to spell the names. As Papa was from a Peranakan household, he sought the help from the court interpreter Mr Wong Chong Min in the choice of names. Two years ago, Loong while walking around Queenstown met the son of Mr Wong — the man who had named the three of us.

The names parents choose for their children embody the hopes, aspirations and dreams they have for them. Chinese names in particular, with their many possible wonderful layers of meaning, allegory and poetry, lend themselves well to this.

For their eldest son, Papa and Mama chose the name 显龙 (Hsien Loong). It meant “illustrious dragon”. It was an appropriate and auspicious name for a boy, especially one born in the Year of the Dragon.

“For my sister, they chose the name 瑾玲 (Wei Ling), which means ‘the beautiful sound of tinkling jade’. I suppose Mama thought that that was an appropriate and feminine name for a daughter, although I don’t think it in any way circumscribes Ling’s development!”

For me, they chose the name 显扬 (Hsien Yang). Some people think that since I’m named Yang, I was born in the Year of the Goat, which is not the case.

Instead, my name had more literary origins, and was derived from a quote from the three letter classics (三字经). Mama used to tease me when I was young that my name meant “illustrious show-off”. In fact, the phrase it was derived from, 显名扬, 显父母 means “to do good deeds, in order to bring honour to one’s parents”.

I am sure many Singaporeans travelling abroad have received compliments on Singapore and its transformation over the last 50 years. Usually the conversation would quickly acknowledge the role of Lee Kuan Yew.

I would not acknowledge my relationship — I would just nod and say, yes, it’s been a remarkable journey.

Unsolicited compliments like this are the most authentic and heartfelt.

Keeping private my family connection only served to enhance the pleasure. Sadly, as I developed a more visible public profile, it has become harder not to be recognised as Lee Kuan Yew’s son. I have taught my children never to mention or launt their relationship with their grandfather, that they needed to make their way in the world on their own merits and industry. I have suggested to them that they be asked whether they might be related to Lee Kuan Yew, that a good answer was to say their name was spelt ‘Li’, not ‘Lee’ ... This response which I suggested was not meant to mislead and obfuscate; it is born out of a desire to be recognised for who we are as individuals and not for whom we are related to. We are immensely proud of Papa and his achievements, and yet perhaps it is part of our DNA to seek our own way in life. I am sure that Papa would not have wanted it otherwise.

I have suggested to them (my children) should they be asked whether they might be related to Lee Kuan Yew, that a good answer was to say their name was spelt “Li”, not “Lee”. “Li” is one of the most common Chinese surnames in the world.

This response which I suggested was not meant to mislead and obfuscate; it is born out of a desire to be recognised for who we are as individuals and not for whom we are related to.

We are immensely proud of Papa and his achievements, and yet perhaps it is part of our DNA to seek our own way in life. I am sure that Papa would not have wanted it otherwise.

Papa, thank you for a lifetime of service to the people of Singapore. You made this little red dot the nation all of us are proud to call home.

Papa, thank you for being a wonderful husband and companion to Mama. For loving her completely and caring for her illness and during your lives together.

Papa, thank you for being my own special father. Always there to guide, counsel and advise me, every step of the way, but also prepared to step back and to let me find my own wings and make my own way.

Papa, thank you for loving my wife, and my children, Shengwu, Huanwu and Shaowu. You have been a loving grandfather to each of them, sharing small pleasures, enjoying their companionship.

Papa, it is hard to say goodbye. Your work is done and your rest is richly deserved. In our own different and diverse ways, my family and I will continue to honour you and your memory in all that we do.
1923-2015

Lee Kuan Yew
Architect of modern Singapore

“As for me, I have done what I had wanted to do, to the best of my ability. I am satisfied.”
A nation, led by PM Lee Hsien Loong, mourns — ‘the first of our founding fathers is no more’

CARL SKADIAN, Deputy Editor, and LOH CHEE KONG, Associate Editor

Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore’s visionary founding Prime Minister and architect of the country’s rise from a fledgling island nation expelled from Malaysia to one envied worldwide for its rapid economic progress, far-sighted political leadership and all-round efficiency, died this morning.

He was 91.

Mr Lee’s death came a few months shy of the 50th anniversary of the Republic’s independence on Aug 9.

In a brief statement announcing his death, the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) said Mr Lee, whose health had been deteriorating over the past two years, died peacefully at the Singapore General Hospital at 3.18 this morning.

“Mr Lee had been warded at SGH since Feb 5 after coming down with severe pneumonia. Despite a later statement that his condition had improved, he never recovered. His condition worsened progressively last week, statements from the PMO said, and a final update on his deterioration which arrived on Sunday afternoon said his condition had “weakened further”. At 4:05am today, the announcement that Singapore had been bracing itself for and dreading for more than a month was made.

The Republic now enters a seven-day period of national mourning — from today to Sunday — for its founding leader, a man who inspired awe and was regarded as an intimidating presence at the start of his tenure as Prime Minister in 1959, but who later became synonymous with Singapore’s success and was widely viewed with respect and admiration — even if it was grudging in some quarters.

As a mark of respect to Mr Lee, State flags on all Government buildings will be flown at half-mast during the week of mourning.

A private family wake will be held today and tomorrow at Sri Temasek—the Prime Minister’s official residence on the Istana grounds. From today to Sunday, condolence books and cards will be placed at the Istana’s main gate for the public to pen their tributes to Mr Lee. Condolence books will also be opened at all overseas missions.

Mr Lee’s body will lie in state at Parliament House from Wednesday to Saturday, for the public to pay their respects. A State Funeral Service will be held at 2pm on Sunday at the National University of Singapore’s University Cultural Centre.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, the eldest of Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s three children, addressed the nation this morning via live television.

With his voice choking with emotion at times, he spoke in English, Mandarin and Malay. In his English speech, he said: “The first of our founding fathers

Continued on Page 46
is no more. He inspired us, gave us courage, kept us together, and brought us here. He fought for our independence, built a nation where there was none, and made us proud to be Singaporeans. We won’t see another like him.

He added: “I am griefed beyond words at the passing of Mr Lee Kuan Yew. I know that we all feel the same way. But even as we mourn his passing, let us also honour his spirit. Let us dedicate ourselves as one people to build on his foundations, strive for his ideals, and keep Singapore exceptional and successful for many years to come. May Mr Lee Kuan Yew rest in peace.”

Across a grieving nation, which had been bracing itself for bad news since it announced a little more than a month ago that Mr Lee had been warded and subsequently put on a mechanical ventilator, grief gave way slowly to tributes for a man regarded as a modern-day titan, not just in Singapore, but in much of the world.

On the Internet, where his legacy was a more divisive subject than it was elsewhere, an unprecedented outpouring of condolence messages ensued, even though the news broke in the wee hours. Tributes from the public and political leaders began streaming in soon after the announcement.

Said Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, who succeeded Mr Lee as Prime Minister in 1990, on Facebook: “My tears welled up as I received the sad news. Mr Lee Kuan Yew has completed his life’s journey. But it was a journey devoted to the making of Singapore.

“He has bequeathed a monumental legacy to Singaporeans — a safe, secure, harmonious and prosperous independent Singapore, our Homeland. He was a selfless leader. He shared his experience, knowledge, ideas and life with us. He was my leader, mentor, inspiration, the man I looked up to most. He made me a proud Singaporean. Now he is gone. I mourn but he lives on in my heart. On behalf of Marine Parade residents, I offer our profound condolences to PM Lee Hsien Loong and his family.”

President Tony Tan said: “Mary and I are deeply saddened by the passing of Mr Lee Kuan Yew. We extend our deepest condolences to his children Mr Lee Hsien Loong, Ms Lee Wei Ling and Mr Lee Hsien Yang, and their families.”

In his three-page condolence letter to the Prime Minister, Dr Tan paid tribute to Mr Lee’s achievements, such as how he rallied Singaporeans together after forced separation from Malaya in 1963. “Many doubted if Singapore could have survived as a nation but Mr Lee rallied our people together and led his cabinet colleagues to successfully build up our armed forces, develop our infrastructure and transform Singapore into a global metropolis,” Dr Tan wrote.

Condolescences from world leaders also streamed in, with Australia Prime Minister Tony Abbott and New Zealand Prime Minister John Key among the first to pay tribute to Mr Lee.

United States President Barack Obama said he was deeply saddened to learn of Mr Lee’s death. Offering his condolences on behalf of the American people, Mr Obama described Mr Lee as a remarkable man and 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”.

Mr Obama said his discussions with Mr Lee during his trip to Singapore in 2009 were “hugely important” in helping him to formulate the US’ policy of rebalancing to the Asia Pacific. “(Mr Lee’s) views and insights on Asian dynamics and economic management were respected by many around the world, and no small number of this and past generations of world leaders have sought his advice on governance and development,” he added.

Obituaries also appeared on the websites of international media, including The New York Times, The Financial Times, The Economist, the BBC and the South China Morning Post.

The outpouring of grief reflected the stature of a man who led a team of able and equally visionary leaders and oversaw Singapore’s rise by formulating policies aimed at overcoming the myriad challenges faced by a tiny nation set amid what he described at the outset as a “volatile region”.

His ideas spanned the gamut, from Singapore’s place in the larger world, the defence of an island just 50km across, housing, education and economic policies, to the seemingly mundane: “I will get up.”

“As he put it himself memorably: “Even from my sick bed, even if you are going to lower me into the grave and I feel something is going wrong, I will get up.”

His visionary leadership drew praise from all over the world, and the success of Singapore gave it a relevance and weight in global affairs that few small states ever achieve. Former US President Bill Clinton, for example, called him “one of the wisest, most knowledgeable, most effective leader in any part of the world for the last 50 years”.

Other world leaders were similarly effusive in their praise, and many, including heavyweights such as China’s Deng Xiaoping and Britain’s Margaret Thatcher, eagerly sought his views as they themselves sought to transform their countries.

To be sure, Mr Lee had his share of detractors. He went after what he deemed political “duds” with a vengeance, resorting sometimes to surprisingly sharp language: He once described how he carried a figurative hatchet in his bag, a weapon he would use against “troublemakers”.

His use of lawsuits against political opponents and Western media outlets which were accused of meddling in Singapore politics drew much criticism, as did his iron grip on the local press — he insisted at the outset that there was no “Fourth Estate” role for it, and that its business was as a nation-building entity.

Mr Lee also waded into areas citizens deemed private, such as his ventures into social engineering via the Graduate Mothers’ Scheme or the Speak Mandarin And Not Dialects campaign, and drew flak as a result. Policies such as the banning of chewing gum, meanwhile, drew criticism and ridicule internationally.

Her remained unapologetic, however, insisting that whatever he did was in the better interests of Singapore. He stood by his belief, which he explained starkly in an interview published by National Geographic magazine in 2010, that the role of a leader “one must understand human nature. I have always thought that humanity was animal-like. The Confucian theory was man could be improved, but I'm not sure he can. He can be trained, he can be disciplined”.

It was a theme he touched on several times, including as early as 1987, when he shrugged off criticism of Singaporeans thus: “I am often accused of interfering in the private lives of citizens. Yes, if I did not, I had 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 noises you make, how you spit, or what language you use. We decide what is right. Never mind what the people think.”
EARLY YEARS

Mr Lee Kuan Yew was born on Sept 16, 1923, the eldest child of Mr Lee Chin Koon and Madam Lim Boon Neo. The relatively prosperous family included three brothers, Dennis and Freddy Lee, Lee Suan Yew, and a sister, Monica.

A natural at school, he topped the standard sixth as a Junior Cambridee, an exam among students in British Malaya, which included Singapore, and went on to Raffles Institution, but World War II interrupted his progress. After the war, armed with sterling grades, he went to London and earned a law degree from Cambridge. The war years and his time in London stirred a political awakening in the young Mr Lee.

Upon his return in 1946, Mr Lee and his wife — the love of his life and the woman he once described as smarter than he, Madam Kwa Geok Choo — set up the law firm of Lee & Lee. His law career was short-lived, however, and after a few years, he turned his gaze towards politics.

A brief but necessary retelling of this period, shorn of much of the complexity of those times, saw him set up the Singapore People's Action Party (PAP) — successfully — for self-government from the British and enter into merger with Malaya. It was what he firmly believed was necessary for the survival of a tiny island with no natural resources to speak of.

The merger ultimately collapsed, undone by sharp differences in political and economic policies between the ruling parties on both sides, which boiled over into racial unrest between the Chinese and Malays. It was a powerful testament to the anguish that separation wrought in him.

For a nation suddenly cut adrift, uncertain of what the future would bring — or, indeed, if there was one — Mr Lee was, viewed first and foremost, as a pragmatist whose firm ideas of what would work and what would not were unencumbered by theories. In an interview with AFP, then White House Press Secretary Tom Brady, Mr Lee said:

“The government can create a setting in which people can live happily and succeed and express themselves, but finally it is what people do with their lives that determines economic success. Again, we were fortunate we had this cultural backdrop, the belief in thrift, hard work, filial piety and loyalty in the extended family, and, most of all, the respect for scholarship and learning.”

He added: “There is, of course, another reason for our success. We have been able to create economic growth that was faster than that which existed while we moved from an agricultural society to an industrial society. We had the advantage of knowing what the end result should be by looking at the West and seeing where we were, and we knew where we had to go. We said to ourselves, ‘Let’s hasten, let’s see if we can get there faster’.”

As Singapore’s success rounded into view, Mr Lee was often praised for his farsightedness. Less well-known, but just as important, was his obsession with detail, which ranged from how buttons should work down to the state of cleanliness of the toilets at the airport.

His prescriptions for excellence across all areas rapidly filtered down to the citizenry and, together with what has come to be known as the Pioneer Generation, Mr Lee and his team delivered a country that is, in an idealistic fashion that the term “miracle” has routinely been used to describe the transformation of the country — without a trace of hyperbole.

Mr Lee’s leadership in this transformation, however, Mr Lee had his eye on the future, specifically, an orderly and smooth transfer of power; it was something he viewed as critical to Singapore’s future success, and which was practically unheard of in the region and much of the developing world.

His intentions were telegraphed early, and moves were put in place after the 1984 General Elections. Much discussion of a handover ensued, and by the time of the country’s 20th birthday as Singapore’s second Prime Minister on Nov 28, 1990, the momentous event was viewed as routine.

Mr Lee was then appointed Senior Minister, and in a role akin to that of sage, and one which afforded him the opportunity to give his thoughts and advice on the issues confronting Singapore, though, by his own admission, he was keen to let the second generation leadership run things and make the key decisions.

His views were also sought on matters beyond Singapore. Many leaders around the world, as well as leading media commentators, considered him an oracle of sorts on geopolitics, one to be tapped for his wellspring of insights into global affairs.

Much of what he thought of the world was captured by expressions such as this: “I am not great on philosophy and theories. I am interested in them, but my life is not guided by philosophy or theories. I get things done and leave others to extract the principles from my successful solutions. I do not work on a theory.”

“Instead I ask: what will make this work? ... So Plato, Aristotle, Socrates — I am not guided by them. I read them cursorily because I was not interested in philosophy as such. You may call me a ‘utilitarian’ or whatever. I am interested in what works.”

With the template for the transfer of power in Singapore set, the nation underwent a similar process on Aug 12, 2004, when Mr Lee Hsien Loong was sworn in as the country’s third Prime Minister. Mr Lee Kuan Yew was subsumed the mantle of Senior Minister. His views were also sought on matters beyond Singapore. Many leaders around the world, as well as leading media commentators, considered him an oracle of sorts on geopolitics, one to be tapped for his wellspring of insights into global affairs.

Mr Lee had this cultural backdrop, the belief in thrift, hard work, filial piety and loyalty in the extended family, and, most of all, the respect for scholarship and learning.

During his years as Minister Mentor, Mr Lee’s preoccupation was the well-being of Singapore’s people. When he stepped down, he expressed the wish that Singapore’s future generation — under Mr Goh, had the less obvious but equally challenging task of building a nation of peace, comfort and growing prosperity. Mr Lee and his government must engage the young on external and domestic issues which affect their future, update policies to reflect the aspirations of a younger generation of Singaporeans and adapt their style to stay in tune with the times.”

“Singapore was never meant to be sovereign on its own. To survive, we had to be different, indeed exceptional.”

Mr Nathan added: “The political changeover also marks a generation-change. Mr Lee Kuan Yew led the generation of change, a generation of independence and made Singapore succeed. The second generation, under Mr Goh, had the less obvious but equally challenging task of building a nation of peace, comfort and growing prosperity. Mr Lee and his government must engage the young on external and domestic issues which affect their future, update policies to reflect the aspirations of a younger generation of Singaporeans and adapt their style to stay in tune with the times.”

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President Tony Tan’s condolence letter to PM Lee Hsien Loong

Our thoughts are with you, wrote President Tan.

Mr Lee leaves behind his sons Hsien Loong and Hsien Yang, a daughter, Wei Ling, as well as seven grandchildren.

plained in a letter that they felt “the time has come for a younger generation to carry Singapore forward in a more difficult and complex situation”. The letter added: “After a watershed general election, we have decided to leave the Cabinet and have a completely younger team of ministers to connect to and engage with this young generation.”

Mr Lee continued to remain in politics after this; he held on to his office as Member of Parliament for Tanjong Pagar GRC, but while he remained active behind the scenes, recurring bouts of ill-health took their toll, and he gradually receded from view, if not in influence, and made fewer and fewer appearances in public.

On Feb 5 this year, he was warded in hospital with severe pneumonia, but it was only two weeks later, on Feb 21, that Singaporeans learnt of the severity of his illness, when a statement from the Prime Minister’s Office announced that he was in the Intensive Care Unit of the Singapore General Hospital and was on mechanical ventilation. Despite a later statement that his condition had improved, he never recovered.

Mr Lee leaves behind his sons Hsien Loong and Hsien Yang, and a daughter, Wei Ling, as well as seven grandchildren.

in the Cabinet and was the world’s longest-serving Prime Minister when he stepped down in 1990. Through Mr Lee, Singapore earned international recognition and established cooperative relationships with many countries affecting our region. Mr Lee was one of the first to recognize China’s potential under Deng Xiaoping’s reforms. Mr Lee’s brilliant intellect and candour of opinion led many international leaders and foreign diplomats to seek his views on developments in the region and around the world. Widely revered as a senior statesman, Mr Lee was conferred numerous international accolades throughout his political career.

Many aspects of our lives bear Mr Lee’s imprint — be it our HDB estates, our gardens, or the SAF. Without his remarkable foresight and relentless pursuit of Singapore’s development, the Singapore that we know today would not exist. Singapore was his passion and he continued serving Singapore till the last days of his life.

Singaporeans owe an eternal gratitude to Mr Lee Kuan Yew. The greatest tribute that Singaporeans can pay him is to treasure and build upon the legacy that Mr Lee and his team have left us, and make Singapore an even better home for our future generations.

Our thoughts are with you at this time of sorrow.”
I am deeply saddened to tell you that Mr Lee Kuan Yew passed away peacefully this morning at the Singapore General Hospital ...

The first of our founding fathers is no more. He inspired us, gave us courage, kept us together, and brought us here. He fought for our independence, built a nation where there was none, and made us proud to be Singaporeans. We won’t see another like him.

Tommy Singhaporeans, and indeed others too, Lee Kuan Yew was Singapore. As Prime Minister, he pushed us hard to achieve what had seemed impossible. After he stepped down, he guided his successors with wisdom and tact. In old age, he continued to keep a watchful eye on Singapore.

Singapore was his abiding passion. He gave of himself, in full measure, to Singapore.

As he himself put it towards the end of his life and I quote: “I have spent my life, so much of it, building up this country. There’s nothing more that I need to do. At the end of the day, what have I got?” A successful Singapore. What have I given up? My life.

I am grieved beyond words at the passing of Mr Lee Kuan Yew. I know that we all feel the same way. But even as we mourn his passing, let us also honour his spirit. Let us dedicate ourselves as one people to build on his foundations, strive for his ideals, and keep Singapore exceptional and successful for many years to come. May Mr Lee Kuan Yew rest in peace.

ESM Goh leads leaders’ tributes to Mr Lee

The Republic’s leaders paid tribute on social media to Mr Lee Kuan Yew, with Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, who succeeded Mr Lee as Prime Minister in 1990, leading the tributes.

Mr Goh wrote on Facebook: “My tears welled up as I received the sad news. Mr Lee Kuan Yew has completed his life’s journey. But it was a journey devoted to the making of Singapore.

“He has bequeathed a monumental legacy to Singaporeans — a safe, secure, harmonious and prosperous independent Singapore, our Homeland. He was a selfless leader. He shared his experience, knowledge, ideas and life with us. He was my leader, mentor, inspiration; the man I looked up to most. He made me a proud Singaporean.

“Now he is gone. I mourn but he lives in our hearts and in our minds. Our memories of the late Mr Lee at the official website, http://www.rememberingleekuanyew.sg.

Today we lost a founding father of Singapore. I hope Mr Lee is able to be with Mrs Lee once again, and that they may rest in peace together. In this moment of grief, please join me in expressing our deepest condolences to Mr Lee’s family.

“I do not have the words to express my gratitude for everything that Mr Lee has done for Singapore. Our lives have been transformed because Mr Lee had a vision of a better life for all Singaporeans, and dedicated his entire life to this mission. Mr Lee and his team built a deep rapport with our pioneer generation, and together, they achieved what many thought was impossible.

“Mr Lee has lived a full and meaningful life. Let us come together as one people to express our appreciation, reflect on what we have gone through together as a people, and resolve to build on the legacy that Mr Lee has left us.”

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“Mr Lee has lived a full and meaningful life. Let us come together as one people to express our appreciation, reflect on what we have gone through together as a people, and resolve to build on the legacy that Mr Lee has left us.”
Leaders around the world mourn a giant

Describing Mr Lee Kuan Yew as a giant figure and paying tribute to his influence on the world stage, past and present world leaders mourned his death.

United States President Barack Obama said he was deeply saddened by the news. He called Mr Lee a remarkable man and “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”.

A visionary who led his country from Singapore’s independence in 1965 to build one of the most prosperous countries in the world today, he was a devoted public servant and a remarkable leader,” Mr Obama said. “(Mr Lee) was a tough taskmaster. Yet, I never failed to learn valuable lessons from each encounter. Having watched his every move and听过 him formulate US’ policy of rebalancing to the Asia Pacific. Mr Obama’s predecessor, Mr George W Bush, called Mr Lee the “father of today’s Singapore” who transformed his country and helped usher South East Asia into the modern era. “The Singapore he leaves behind is an influential force for stability and prosperity and a friend to the United States,” Mr Bush said.

United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron said that Mr Lee “personally shaped Singapore in a way that few people have any nation”. Mr Cameron said: “He made his country into one of the great success stories of our modern world. That Singapore is today a prosperous, secure and successful country is a monument to his decades of remarkable public service.”

He added: “When the dust of his life is settled and the definitive books of his hour of service.”

He built Singapore into the success story it is today by intelligence, wisdom and determination in equal measure. As a result Singapore has a respect and admiration far above its size.”

Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott said his country mourned the passing of “a giant of our region”. “Fifty years ago, Lee Kuan Yew led a vulnerable, fledgling nation to independence,” he said. “Today, thanks to his vision and determination, Singapore is one of the world’s most prosperous countries, a financial powerhouse, and one of the world’s easiest places to do business.” Mr Abbott said the region owes much to Mr Lee. “Here in Australia and beyond, leaders sought and learned from his wise counsel,” he added.

New Zealand Prime Minister John Key said Mr Lee’s courage, determination, commitment, character and ability made him a “formidable leader who held the respect of Singaporeans and the international community alike”. He added: “I had the honour of meeting Mr Lee in 2007 during his last official visit to New Zealand. He was well known for his insights and foresight but what struck me most was his unwavering determination to see Singapore succeed.”

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon said Mr Lee was “a legendary figure in Asia, widely respected for his strong leadership and statesmanship”.

“During his three decades in office, he helped Singapore to transition from a developing country to one of the most developed in the world, transforming it into a thriving international business hub,” said Mr Ban. “As Singapore marks its 50th anniversary of independence this year, its founding father will be remembered as one of the most inspiring Asian leaders.”


Singaporeans laud ‘one of the greatest leaders of the 20th century’

On the People’s Action Party’s Facebook page, over 1,000 people had commented by 8.45am announcing the elder Mr Lee’s death, comments began appearing on the page.

The labour movement and various organisations also issued statements expressing their condolences, while the People’s Association announced that 18 community sites would be set up for members of the public to pay tribute to Singapore’s founding Prime Minister. By March 24, six of the planned sites will be ready. The six sites are in Ang Mo Kio GRC, Tampines GRC, East Coast GRC, Chua Chu Kang GRC, Jurong GRC and Tampines GRC.

Wrote Mr Sebastian Lim Keng on Mr Lee Hsien Loong’s Facebook page: “The man who gave us a better life in Singapore has finally gone to his well-deserved resting place... but I shall not mourn his loss but instead celebrate his life. He had spent his entire lifetime making sure that all of us would not suffer the impoverished conditions that our forefathers who came here did... May your spirit be always around this nation, especially in our hour of need.”

Ms Cheryl Tay wrote: “Let’s honour the passing of a great man by treasuring our country and leaving it a better place for the next generation as Mr (Lee Kuan Yew) has.” By 8am, more than 8,500 people had commented on the post, and it was shared more than 28,000 times.

He had spent his entire lifetime making sure that all of us would not suffer the impoverished conditions that our forefathers who came here did... May your spirit be always around this nation, especially in our hour of need.

My Sebastian

Writing on Mr Lee Hsien Loong’s Facebook page

Swee Say and NTUC president Diana Chia in the statement. The Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry hailed Mr Lee as a "statesman extraordinaire", and expressed appreciation for his concern for the development of the Chinese community, as well as his encouragement of local enterprises to invest in China and neighbouring countries.

The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) said the late Mr Lee helped the Malay-Muslim community grow by, for example, facilitating the formation of MUIS as a statutory body. "He will also always be remembered for his strong support for the introduction of the Mosque Building Fund Scheme in 1975, which helped the community to rally together and strengthen this key community institution during Singapore’s period of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation", MUIS said.

Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (NUS), Professor Kishore Mahbubani, who spent 33 years with Singapore’s period of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation, said: “Mr (Lee) was a tough taskmaster. Yet, I never failed to learn valuable lessons from each encounter. Having watched him interact with several global leaders, including Reagan, Thatcher, Miterrand and Koh, I saw first-hand how they were blown away by his breadth of vision, acute geopolitical analyses and wise policy solutions.”

He added: “When the dust of his history settles and the definitive books are written on twentieth century history, Mr Lee will emerge as one of the greatest leaders of the century.”

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.

United States President Barack Obama
He also wrote in his memoirs: “It struck me as manifestly fair that everybody in this world should be given an equal chance in life, that in a just and well-ordered society there should not be a great disparity of wealth between persons because of their position or status, or that of their parents.”

That governance of a vulnerable state sitting in a volatile region had to be neutral in terms of race, language and religion was buttressed by the deep misgivings the Republic’s first-generation leaders had with the Malaysian government’s politics of communalism during the brief, unhappy merger between the two from 1963 to 1966.

On independent Singapore’s founding on 9 August 1965, multiculturalism was written into the Constitution—the first post-colonial state to do so.

It was the only way to forge a sense of nationhood for a people of mostly settler stock, Mr Lee knew, and this togetherness was critical for a tiny island with a Chinese-majority population sitting amid far larger Malay neighbours.

“We took some drastic decisions at the beginning and shuffled the people together. Had we not done this, it would have led to a different Singapore,” he recalled in the book Hard Truths To Keep Singapore Going, referring to his Government’s dispersal of racial enclaves among various kampongs through balloting into public housing estates. Inter-racial mingling was key if the people were to identify themselves not only by their race, but also by their nationality, he decided.

“There must be a sense of self, a sense of identity, that you are prepared to die for your country, that you’re prepared to die for one another,” he added.

But diminishing the tendencies of communities to revert to communal-ly-influenced behaviours was always going to be an arduous task: Racial enclaves again congregated in the various housing estate subsequently and a trend of voting along racial lines emerged in the 1980s.

Reflecting his resolve to entrench multiracialism in Singapore, Mr Lee introduced ethnic quotas for Housing and Development Board (HDB) blocks in 1989 and pushed through the Group Representation Constituency in 1988 to enhance minority representation in Parliament, despite vociferous criticisms of these moves. Among other things, opponents said the quota constraints warped property transactions and also made the system counter-intuitive to meritocratic ideals.

Mr Lee was unmoved. “In Singapore, what will identify a Singaporean with the changing circumstances? An acceptance of multiracialism, a tolerance of people of different races, languages, cultures, religions, and an equal basis for competition. That’s what will stand out against all our neighbours.”

The clearest testament to his multiracial, and meritocratic principles towards governance was in the choice of “race-neutral” English as Singapore’s lingua franca, although Malay, as the language of the indigenous peoples, was retained as the national language.

“What motivated me? Internal stability and peace. We treat everybody equally. We judge you on your merits. This is a level playing field. We do not discriminate our people on race, language, religion. If you can perform, you get the job,” he explained.

To his mind, getting the best results from a meritocratic society also meant the government must not supplant individual effort and responsibility; people must not lose the drive to provide for themselves. That, and seeing in Britain and Sweden how debilitating it was to subsidise a man for the rest of his life, was why he eschewed welfareism, despite being a loyal supporter of the Fabian school of thought in his youth. As he wrote in his memoirs: “We noted by the 1970s that when government undertook primary responsibility for the basic duties of the head of a family, the drive in people weakened. Welfare undermined self-reliance. People did not have to work for their families’ wellbeing. The handout became a way of life. The downward spiral was relentless as motivation and productivity went down. People lost the drive to achieve because they paid too much in taxes. They became dependent on the state for their basic needs.”

To this day, the People’s Action Party (PAP) Government continues to tie individual effort and responsibility to many of its help programmes for the lower-income, such as the Workfare Income Supplement Scheme.

The creation of the Central Provident Fund (CPF) and the 3M health-care financing system (Medisave, MediShield, and Medifund) are other examples of the Government’s drive to ensure that individuals themselves, and not the state, provide for most of their own needs.

Mr Lee realised that, as a country with no natural resources, the only way Singapore could survive, let alone thrive, was to have capable people leading it. His view was informed by how so many newly-independent former colonies had plunged into riots, coups and revolutions under inept leaders who had inherited sound constitutions from the British and French.

Indeed, Singapore’s vulnerabilities — an 80-storey building standing on marshy land—made imperative that the political leadership was made up of the cream of society’s talent.

He said once: “Can you have a good government without good men in charge of government? American liberals believe you can, that you can have a government of good men in charge of government with proper separation of powers between the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary, plus checks and balances between them ... and there will be good government, even if weak or not so good men win elections and take charge.

“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.”

It was a challenge that Mr Lee had started thinking about barely one year into Singapore’s independence.

And over decades, Mr Lee single-handedly devised the ways to spot and draft into government the capable, honest and dedicated, from schemes such as the Singapore Armed Forces overseas scholarships in 1971 to recruit the top brains — the PAP government has, over the years, had many of these scholars eventually become Cabinet ministers, including Prime Minister...
Lee Hsien Loong — to getting psychiatrists and psychologists to review potential candidates amid lengthy and thorough meetings with leaders that have become known as “tea sessions”.

He also spent years studying the hiring processes of multinational companies — eventually adopting in 1983 Shell’s system, which played a significant role in the country’s rapid industrialisation and his greening efforts — also played a role.

And his gift for making Singapore, in his words, a “nanny state”: “First we educated Singaporeans’ lives; the “Great Marriage Debate” in his 1983 National Day Rally had drawn the country’s upper class with gracious surroundings; and the lower class with gracious surroundings; and the lower class and emergency services, including of housing, social security and industry, in a bid to replicate these back home.

For instance, Mr Tony Blair’s New Labour came to look at the CPF system — where once British MPs had slammed Mr Lee’s remarks that Mrs Thatcher’s government needed to trim the excesses of the welfare state — while the Vietnamese asked him in 1991 to become their economic adviser during their war of attacking his stance during its occupation of Cambodia just years prior.

But more than his policies and programmes, Mr Lee’s insightful views of global developments and their impact on the world, delivered in his inimitable straight-shooting style, were always keenly sought.

No less than former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger paid Mr Lee this tribute: “There is no second Lee Kuan Yew in the world. Normally one would say that the leader of a country of the size and population of Singapore would not have a global influence — but precisely because Singapore can survive only by competition with much more powerful neighbours, and precisely because its well-being depends on stability and progress in the area, his views were of immense importance in the larger context then the technical problems of the Singaporean economy and so he always had a tremendous influence on us.”

The doyens of many world leaders, both past and present, were always open to Mr Lee — a mark of his stature and standing, given how few would dispense such treatment to the former prime minister of a small state, which less than half a century ago few had held out hope of survival.

Perhaps the most well-known testimony of Mr Lee as the seminal statesman came from Mrs Thatcher.

“In one of my speeches I read that he observed every speech of Harry’s. He had a way of penetrating the fog of propaganda and expressing with unique clarity the issues of our times and the way to tackle them. He had never been wrong.”

That Mr Lee, throughout the years, had impressed, and forged close personal relationships with leaders around the world also benefited the Republic on so many levels, ranging from security to stability to economic opportunities.

His friendship with members of Harold Wilson’s government helped delay the British troops’ withdrawal to late 1971, thereby buying Singapore time to build up its own defence forces.

The strong personal bonds regional leaders have formed with Mr Lee may account to some extent for the country’s continued success — even extending his hand into the world also benefitting the Republic and personal relationships with leaders around the world also benefited the Republic on so many levels, ranging from security to stability to economic opportunities.

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leaders such as Malaysian Prime Min-
ister Tun Abdul Razak and Indonesia’s
President Suharto shared with Mr Lee
facilitated the founding of the Association
of South-East Asian Nations in 1967, which
helped foster a stable environment
in which the Republic could grow.

And if not for Mr Lee’s place in the
eyes of the Australian, Indonesian,
and Taiwanese leaders, the Singapore Armored Forces might not have acquired
the permission for much-needed train-
ing space.

The closeness he maintained with
the United States laid the ground for
the island-nation’s Trade Agreement
signed by his successor, Mr Goh Chok Tong, in 1993. And the mutual respect between
Mr Lee and China’s Deng Xiaoping
played a central role in Singapore’s being
able to tap into China’s economy ahead
of many others, such as the setting up of
the Suzhou Industrial Project in 1994 and
the Tianjin Eco-city subsequently.

Mr Goh noted: “Mr Lee’s good rela-
tions with them enable Singapore, and
the leaders who came after Mr Lee, to
ride on those good relationships.”

One reason for Mr Lee’s prominence
as a statesman was the Western world’s
expectation of him as a great leader.

Said former British Prime Minister
Tony Blair: “One of (the) things that
Harry did incredibly effectively was he
became the interlocutor of the emerg-
ing East with the Western countries,
because if you’re an American leader or
a European leader, you talk in the same
language. But he understands the West,
he understands how we think, he un-
derstands how we work, and he also has
get these huge insights into China, the
other major countries in your region,
and so, he’s able to say to the Western
leadership, ‘Look, this is how you want
to think about this’.”

Mr Lee’s intimate knowledge of China stemmed from his early reali-
sation of her emerging importance,
and his efforts in pursuing closer ties,
particularly with Mr Deng — whom
he described as “the most impressive
leader I had met”.

The admiration was mutual; Mr Deng
looked to emulate Singapore’s growth
model in attempting China’s opening-up. After one of his visits to
Singapore, Mr Lee related in his mem-
oirs, Mr Goh said China “should draw
from their experience, and do even bet-
ter than them”.

After Deng’s endorsement, several
burning questions of the time, most of
them official, came from China armed
with tape recorders, video cameras
and notebooks to learn from our experi-
ence. Singapore had been given the
impetus, the man of whom most only saw
in passing in during the acrimonious
wage dispute between Singapore Airlines
and its pilots in 2003, robustly advok-
ating in Parliament the new formula
for ministerial pay the following year,
and his caution to Aljunied residents
in the 2011 General Election about the
consequences of their vote.

He has also consistently engaged
younger generations of Singaporeans,
attending dialogue sessions regularly
with the tertiary institutions.

Outside of Singapore, Mr Lee as-
sumed the role of consultant — he sat
on several boards and committees —
most especially (frequently, on China)
and advocate of Singaporean business
in his retirement.

For someone who never kept a diary
because he said it would have “inhib-
ited his work”, Mr Lee also made use of
his time after stepping down to write
his two-volume memoirs to remind
younger Singaporeans that “we cannot
afford to forget that public order,
personal security, economic growth,
progress and prosperity are not the
natural order of things, that they de-
pend on ceaseless effort and attention
from an honest and effective govern-
mment that the people must elect”, as
he wrote in one preface.

Through these, as well as other books
by journalists he granted interviews
to, Singaporeans were, for the first
time, allowed a glimpse into the
personal life of Mr Lee.

More than any other facet of his
private life, it was Mr Lee’s falling in
love, courtship, romantic secret mar-
rriage in the United Kingdom and deep
love for Madam Kwa Geok Choo that
most captivated many Singaporeans.

They learnt how Mrs Lee packed
his luggage when he needed to travel,
kept an eagle eye on his diet, and was
the one on whom he depended to im-
prove his speeches and writing. They
read about how he made it a point to
read Mrs Lee’s favourite poems every
night after she became bed-
ridden after she suffered a breakdown
in 2008, how she most recognised his
voice, and they saw and heard, at her
funeral in 2010, how severely Mr Lee
was devastated by the departure of
his closest confidante.

For someone who had no religious
faith, Mr Lee even turned to medita-
tion to help himself cope.

Asked by a group of journalists
about his greatest personal achieve-
ments, the man of whom many regard
the stern, strong public face for decades
said: “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.

Mr Lee Kuan Yew speaking at
the launch of his book My Lifelong
Challenge in 2011. PHOTO GENEK CHUA

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From mudflat to metropolis

Our strategy was to make Singapore a First World oasis in a Third World region

The singular motif in Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s blueprint for this unlikely city-state’s success was an unrelenting drive to be outstanding — and the visionary knew the most dramatic display of this, following independence, would be by swiftly metamorphosing Singapore’s look and feel to his exacting standards.

This strategy of viscerally distinguishing the Republic to potential investors derived from Mr Lee’s astute conclusion that sound, far-sighted planning of its landscape was central to its lasting success, be it in fostering social cohesion, spurring economic viability or overcoming its vulnerabilities.

This is why he personally had a hand in many of its physical developments. His ideas and thinking continue to influence new projects, such as Punggol Eco-Town and Marina Barrage.

GREENING A COUNTRY

Mr Lee’s first project of this strategy, creating a “clean and green” Singapore, was the most “cost-effective” and yet most far-reaching — a single-handed crafting of the Republic’s reputation as a fastidious Garden City.

He planted a mempat tree in Farrer Circus on June 16, 1963, to symbolise the birth of his annual Plant-A-Tree campaign — and marked its half-century in 2033 by planting a rain tree in Holland Village Park.

He sought to eradicate the “rough and ready ways” of people through anti-spitting and anti-littering campaigns and legislation — placing the Anti-Pollution Unit, set up in 1970, under the Prime Minister’s Office to signal his personal interest in the cause. He also resettled street hawkers into properly-designed food centres and markets.

This objective of creating a “First World oasis” to leapfrog the rest of South-east Asia, as the Israelis had done in their own region, was so that businessmen and tourists would pick Singapore as a base.

Describing the impact of showing off a neat and spiced-up city lined with shrubs and trees to visiting chief executives who were considering investing millions here, Mr Lee wrote in his memoirs: “Without a word being said, they would know that Singaporeans were competent, disciplined and reliable, a people who would learn the skills they required soon enough.”

This belief sprung from his own re-actions in his travels. “What impressed me was not the size of the buildings, but the standard of their maintenance. I knew when a country and its administrators were demoralised from the way the buildings had been neglected — washbasins cracked, taps leaking, water-closets not functioning properly, a general dilapidation and inevitably, unkempt gardens.”

In 1973, a Garden City Action Committee was set up to report regularly to Mr Lee on national greening efforts.

Ex-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong once remarked that Singapore was possibly the only country where gardening reports were read in Cabinet.

But Mr Lee pursued greening for more than the economic or aesthetic benefits. Ensuring the island was clean and green, and not only within privileged neighbourhoods, served the purpose of creating “a sense of equal-ness in this society” — critical for a fledging nation made up of immigrants without a common historical experience.

“Greening raised the morale of the people and gave them pride in their surroundings ... We did not differentiate between middle-class and working-class areas,” he said. “No society like that will thrive. We were going to have National Service. No family will want its young men to die for all the people with the big homes and those owning the tall towers.”

Over the decades, Mr Lee continued to act as Singapore’s chief gardener. Numerous tales are told of how he would send back notes of trees and plants he came across overseas that he thought would do well in Singapore.

Former civil service mandarin Peter Ho recalls how Mr Lee once sent the Ministry of Defence a memo — he had driven past Khatib Camp and noticed that it was sparsely planted. He also resettled street hawkers into properly-designed food centres and markets.

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“Greening raised the morale of the people and gave them pride in their surroundings ... We did not differentiate between middle-class and working-class areas,” he said. “No society like that will thrive. We were going to have National Service. No family will want its young men to die for all the people with the big homes and those owning the tall towers.”

Over the decades, Mr Lee continued to act as Singapore’s chief gardener. Numerous tales are told of how he would send back notes of trees and plants he came across overseas that he thought would do well in Singapore.

Former civil service mandarin Peter Ho recalls how Mr Lee once sent the Ministry of Defence a memo — he had driven past Khatib Camp and noticed that it was sparsely planted. He suggested trees and plants he thought would be suitable. “Apart from this awe-inspiring familiarity with all these botanical details, it struck me then how serious he was about the greening of Singapore,” said Mr Ho.

An iconic tribute to his legacy today is the S$1 billion Gardens by the Bay project aimed, naturally, at boosting Singapore’s economic and tourism appeal, and for which its CEO Tan Wee Kiat has credited Mr Lee’s support.

HOUSING

With a housing crisis on its hands in 1959, the People’s Action Party (PAP) had to set about tackling the challenge of re-housing Singaporeans from slum settlements into public housing blocks.

The Housing and Development Board (HDB) estimated the Government had to build an average of 14,000 housing units per year from 1959 to 1969, but the private sector then had the capability to provide only 2,500 a year.

It was also a politically sensitive venture, having to break up the racial enclaves that were a colonial legacy and assuage Muslim fears that the demolition of many dilapidated small mosques was not “anti-Islam” (a programme to build new and bigger mosques with the community’s help was pioneered).

Redevelopment required phasing out 8,000 farms rearing 900,000 pigs and many food-fish ponds. These farmers knew no other livelihood and, used to living in “shanty huts with a hole in the ground or a bucket in an outhouse”, they suffered “culture shock” and could not break their habits when moved into high-rise flats.

Many refused to use the lifts and some even brought their pigs, ducks
The defence of Singapore

‘National Service would bring political and social benefits’

With the impending British withdrawal, Singapore needed to build a Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) from scratch to avoid being cowed and intimidated by its larger neighbours. Mr Lee Kuan Yew assigned this responsibility to Dr Goh Keng Swee, who was a corporal in the British-led Singapore Volunteer Corps until it surrendered in February 1942.

After the prime minister’s letters for assistance to the Indian premier Lal Bahadur Shastri and Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser did not receive positive replies, Mr Lee instructed Dr Goh to proceed with assistance from the Israelis, but kept this under wraps in order not to provoke grassroots antipathy from Malay Muslims in Malaysia and Singapore.

While Dr Goh felt that Singapore should build up a regular army of 12 battalions between 1966 and 1969, Mr Lee proposed a small standing army with the capacity to mobilise a reserve force population.

Mr Lee preferred that the money be spent on infrastructure needed to raise and train National Service battalions than on the recurrent costs of a large army.

“I wanted the defence plan to aim at mobilising as large a part of the population as possible, in order to galvanise the people in their own defence while they had this strong feeling of patriotism as a result of their recent experiences,” Mr Lee wrote in his memoirs.

Dr Goh’s revised plan put up in November 1966 would mobilise a large section of the population while the regular component of the armed forces would consist of 12 battalions.

To attract and retain talent in the highest echelons of the SAF, Mr Lee later tabled a legislation to amend the National Service Ordinance in February 1967 so that those who enlisted in the SAF as a full-time career would be guaranteed jobs in the government, statutory boards or private sector when they left full-time service and go into the reserves. The bill was passed a month later.

In 1971, Mr Lee proposed the SAF Overseas Scholarship scheme, which Dr Goh refined. Through the scheme, some of the best students were recruited into the SAF over the years.

“Without a yearly intake of about 10 of our best students, the SAF would have the military hardware but without the brain power to use them to best advantage,” Mr Lee said.

Mr Lee had spoken of the importance of having a strong SAF on several occasions, including at the Temasek Society’s 30th anniversary dinner dialogue in 2012. “From the day we started, I knew that we needed a strong SAF and I believe that still remains today. Without a strong SAF, there is no economic future, there is no security,” he said.

Mr Lee talking with national servicemen during a National Day celebration at Tanjong Pagar Community Centre in 1970, when he was Prime Minister. The celebration was held in honour of NS youth.

PHOTO: MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND THE ARTS COLLECTION, COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE

WATER

Mr Lee realised water resource management had to be central to a state’s development plans decades before the world became aware of the importance of doing so — and made this a national priority he took a direct hand in.

Small wonder, since Singapore depended on its neighbour Malaysia for the bulk of its water supply. In 1971, Mr Lee set up the Water Planning Unit in the Prime Minister’s Office and asserted that “every other policy has to bend (at the knees for) our water survival.”

“There has never been a Prime Minister anywhere else who has had such interest in the environment in general, and water in particular,” said Professor Asit Biswas and Dr Cecilia Tortajada, authors of The Singapore Water Story, who were instrumental in PUB winning the Stockholm Water Industry Award in 2007.

There are few episodes more telling of Mr Lee’s foresight and political courage to make tough decisions for the long-term good than his plan to dam up all streams and rivers. The “most ambitious” part of this was the clean-up of the filthy Singapore River and Kallang Basin — a daunting exercise that, because the river drew hordes of squatters, hawkers and backyard industries, reluctant bureaucrats sided stepped until Mr Lee delivered an ultimatum in 1977.

It was an unpopular move that entailed moving out more than 40,000 squatters and 600 pig farmers, as well as relocating 5,000 street hawkers who were accustomed to doing business rent-free into proper buildings where they had to pay rent and utilities charges. Disgruntled, many of them voted against the PAP for years after.

But this “massive engineering job” of laying underground sewers for the whole island, so streams and rivers were free of sewage and aquatic life would return, was undertaken with the determination to inch Singapore towards water self-sufficiency, addressing one of its greatest security vulnerabilities.

The project paved the way for waterways to become essential water catchment areas. The 15th of these was the Marina Barrage, which sprang from Mr Lee’s vision in the 1980s to dam the mouth of the Marina Channel to create a freshwater reservoir in the heart of the city.

And though the 10-year river clean-up cost a hefty US$240 million (S$325 million) and had a political price, Mr Lee’s vision was vindicated when land values along the riverbanks soared, as did tourism and business. If not for Mr Lee’s political will and extraordinary insight, this mudflat would never have physically transformed into the metropolis it is today.

Without this futurist, hosting pinnacle events on urban solutions and sustainable development such as the World Cities Summit and Singapore International Water Week would have been beyond the city-state’s reach.

Mr Lee visiting the Flower Dome at Gardens by the Bay in 2011.

PHOTO: TODAY FILE PHOTO

and chickens to live with them.

“We had a resettlement unit to deal with the haggling and bargaining involved in every resettlement, whether of hawkers, farmers or cottage industrialists. They were never happy to be moved or to change their business,” Mr Lee recounted. “This was a hazardous political task which, unless carefully and sympathetically handled, would lose us votes in the next election.”

But the result of this massive exercise was a home-owning society — more than 90 per cent of the 85 per cent of Singaporeans living in HDB flats today own their homes. This, Mr Lee and then Minister for Finance Goh Keng Swee facilitated by expanding the Central Provident Fund (CPF) in 1968 so workers could tap their savings to buy a home.

Said Mr Lee: “If you ask people to defend all the big houses where the bosses live ... I don’t think that’s tenable. So, we decided from the very beginning, everybody must have a home, every family will have something to defend and that home we developed over the years into their most valuable asset.”

For example, Mr Lee mooted upgrading programmes in 1989 to “prevent older estates from looking like slums”, substantially raising their worth.

He also asked the HDB in 1974 to improve the quality and vary the flat designs and landscaping of new towns to add distinctiveness and character by “exploiting unique site features such as undulating terrain and ponds”, a visionary idea encapsulated in the new Punggol Eco-Town’s concept.

After Independence, I searched for some dramatic way to distinguish Singapore from other Third World countries and settled for a clean and green Singapore — Greening is the most cost-effective project I have launched.

PHOTO: SUNDAY TIMES

Mr Lee in his memoirs
The economic pragmatist

‘Live with the world as it is, not as we wish it should be’

He was a man unafraid to challenge the popular ideologies of the day; he had no truck with dogma. Right up to the end of his life, Mr Lee Kuan Yew believed in constantly adapting to the hard realities of a changing world, and to refresh his “mental map”, he ceaselessly sought out the views of experts, academics, industry, political leaders, journalists and the man in the street.

But having listened to and processed their arguments, he did not let himself be swayed if he absolutely believed something was in the best long-term interest of Singapore. Changi Airport — and a large part of the Singapore economic miracle — stands today as a symbol of this.

When Singapore wanted to expand its airport operations in the early 1970s, a British aviation consultant proposed building a second runway at the existing airport in Paya Lebar as that would entail the lowest land acquisition costs and the least resettlements. Although the Cabinet accepted the recommendation, Mr Lee asked for a reassessment by American consultants, and then a further study by a committee of senior officials on the viability of transforming the RAF airfield in Changi into a commercial airport. Both said to stay with the Paya Lebar plan. But Mr Lee was unsure whether that would be wise or sustainable for Singapore in the long run, recalling lessons he had picked up on his travels: “I had flown over Boston’s Logan Airport and been impressed that the noise footprint of planes landing and taking off was over water. A second runway at Paya Lebar would take aircraft right over the heart of Singapore city — we would be saddled with the noise pollution for many years.”

Reluctant to give up on his preference for the Changi site, he appointed the chairman of the Port of Singapore Authority, Mr Howe Yoon Chong — who had a “reputation as a bulldozer” — to chair a top-level committee for a final reappraisal. They reported that Changi was doable.

And so, despite the fact the 1973 oil crisis had just struck and growth in South-east Asia was uncertain following South Vietnam’s fall to the communists, Mr Lee took the “$81 billion gamble” in 1975 to build the new Changi Airport — demolishing buildings, exhume thousands of graves, clearing swamps, reclaiming land from the sea and completing the building in six years instead of 10.

To say the least, that “gamble” has paid off handsomely, entrenching Singapore as a vital tourism, aviation and economic node.

THE ACID TEST: ‘WOULD IT WORK FOR US?’

How Mr Lee turned around the “improbable story” of Singapore abounds with examples like this, where he stuck to a hard-nosed, pragmatic approach coupled with a visionary outlook in implementing solutions he believed would make Singapore survive and last, even if it went against so-called conventional wisdom.

“In a developing country situation, you need a leader... who not only understands the ordinary arguments for or against, but at the end of it says, ‘Look, will this work, given our circumstances? Never mind what the British, what the Australians, what the New Zealanders do. This is Singapore. Will it work in this situation?’” he said.

Mr Lee demonstrated time and again his ability to put on the lenses of a pure empiricist who could rise above prejudices and preconceptions.

Early on, he ditched the Fabian school of socialism — a style of governance he had been so enamoured with during his university days in Britain that he had subscribed to the society’s magazines for years after his return. He saw that its ideals would not work in reality. “We have to live with the world as it is, not as we wish it should be,” he once famously said.

In the early years, in defiance of the prevailing theory then that multinational corporations were neo-colonialist exploiters who sucked developing nations dry of their cheap land, labour and raw materials, Mr Lee — acting on the advice of the Republic’s Dutch economic guru Albert Winsemius — actively courted foreign investors with a liberal economic policy which included attractive tax and fiscal incentives.

Dr Winsemius’ “practical lessons on how European and American companies operated” showed Mr Lee how Singapore could plug into the global economic system of trade and investments by using their desire for profits”.

He explained the bold decision thus: “The question was, how to make a living? How to survive? This was not a theoretical problem in the economics of development. It was a matter of life and death for two million people.”

Looking back, Mr Lee believed that staying pragmatic ensured Singapore’s
survival and success. "If there was one formula for our success, it was that we were constantly studying how to make things work, and how to make them work better... What guided me were reason and reality. The acid test I applied to every theory or scheme was, would it work? This was the golden thread that ran through my years in office. If it did not work, or the results were poor, I did not waste more time and resources on it."

**LEAP OF FAITH**

Living with reality did not mean resigning to fate or operating in 'safe' mode — on the contrary, Mr Lee was restless about innovating and turning adversity into opportunity. Many things could go wrong, he’d said, but: “The crucial thing is: Do not be afraid to innovate.”

Former civil service head Peter Ho said many of the big leaps forward in the early years of fledgling Singapore were “nothing more than acts of faith”.

“It is a myth that everything in Singapore is planned down to the nth degree, that nothing is expected to go wrong, and that the government operates in a fail-safe mode,” said Mr Ho.

“The first container port at Tanjong Pagar was a big risk, as the container was by no means a proven mode of transportation. But Lee Kuan Yew gave Mr Howe Yoon Chong, who was then Chairman of PSA, enough leeway to make the move to Tanjong Pagar.”

Indeed, Mr Ho added, “that willingness to try things out spawned a generation of state entrepreneurs who created, almost out of nothing, national icons like Singapore Airlines, DBS, ST Engineering, Changi Airport, Singtel, and so on. The national computerisation programme is another example, started in the Ministry of Defence, which transformed Singapore.”

Early on, Mr Lee and his team recognised the importance of science and technology to the economy (English was chosen as a medium for school education in part because it best conveyed such subjects).

**CLIMBING ON OTHERS’ SHOULDERS**

Mr Lee was also always looking for solutions for Singapore by drawing lessons from other countries’ experiences or seeking out experts. No need to reinvent the wheel, as he repeatedly said.

On his travels, he watched “how a society, an administration, is functioning. Why are they good?”. He took notes on matters as diverse as tree planting. Why are they good?”. He took notes on matters as diverse as tree planting.

He started vehicle inspections after various anti-pollution measures here. He then started seeking out experts. No need to reinvent the wheel, as he repeatedly said. 

He also reversed this earlier stance. Long-held objections to holding Formula One races and allowing casinos in Singapore. He recognised that the F1 had a jet-speed following and could generate economic spin-offs for Singaporeans.

The larger goal of advancing Singapore's position on the world stage also swayed Mr Lee, as he emphasised how the race allowed us to “telecast our unique skyline to billions around the world” — “we say, okay, leave them alone, but let’s save the law at it is for the time being”. While places like China and Taiwan already had more liberal policies, he said: “But we have a part Muslim population, another part conservative older Chinese and Indians. So, let’s go slowly. It’s a pragmatic approach to maintain social cohesion.”

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On casinos — which he once said would be allowed only “over my dead body” — he explained in a New York Times interview in 2007: “I don’t like casinos, but the world has changed and if we don’t have an integrated resort like the ones in Las Vegas, we’ll lose. So, let’s go. Let’s try and still keep it safe and mafia-free and prostitution-free and money-laundering free. Can we do it? I’m not sure, but we’re going to give it a good try.”

He added: “We have to go in whatever direction world conditions dictate if we are to survive and to be part of this modern world. If we are not connected to modern world, we are dead. We go back to the fishing village we once were.”

Mr Lee touring the casino at Resorts World Sentosa with Resorts World Sentosa CEO Tan Hee Teck (left) and Genting International chairman Lim Kok Thay in 2010, when Mr Lee was Minister Mentor.

**FINANCIAL SYSTEM REFORM**

While Mr Lee stood by unpopular decisions that were for the long-term good, he also knew when to change course to maintain Singapore’s relevance or capture future opportunities.

For years, Mr Lee had believed in strict regulation of the financial system and in protecting the local banks. But then the 1997-98 Asian Financial Crisis broke.

Recalled Mr Heng Swee Keat, who was then Mr Lee’s Principal Private Secretary and who later served as Managing Director of the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS): “Our string of winners in the past, were now still growing and our banks were falling behind. Mr Lee was persuaded that our regulatory stance had to change.”

Mr Lee, who was then Senior Minister, came up with a calibrated broad plan that he discussed with and sought PM Goh Chok Tong’s approval for. This led to a major review of policies and the transformation of MAS.

In a 1999 interview, Mr Lee pointed to the game-changer of e-banking and the Internet. “If this government carries on the way I did over the last 30 years, protecting local banks to make them grow, then it’s in for trouble. We are a venue for 200 of the world’s biggest and most competitive banks. Unless we get ourselves up to a comparable level, we’ll be like New Zealand, where all their own banks have been taken over and are foreign-owned.”

Said Mr Lee: “If Mr Lee had not initiated the changes in the late 1990s, and sought to turn adversity into opportunities, we would not have become a stronger financial centre today. To prepare ourselves to open up our financial system in the midst of one of the worst financial crises is, to me, an act of great foresight and boldness. It has the stamp of Mr Lee.”

**CASINOS, F1 AND GAYS**

To be part of the 21st-century world — and the ruthless competition for talent, tourism dollars and investors — meant delicately recalibrating some issues of huge social sensitivity to Singaporeans.

In a 2007 interview, Mr Lee said: Singapore took “an ambiguous position on homosexuals” — “we say, okay, leave them alone, but let’s save the law at it is for the time being”. While places like China and Taiwan already had more liberal policies, he said: “But we have a part Muslim population, another part conservative older Chinese and Indians. So, let’s go slowly. It’s a pragmatic approach to maintain social cohesion.”

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**WINNING INVESTOR CONFIDENCE**

Said Mr Lee: “If I have to choose one word to explain why Singapore succeeded, it is ‘confidence’. This was what made foreign investors site their factories and refineries here.”

It was not just the infrastructural developments and development policies, but also the personal confidence that they evoked in investors.

For instance, within days of the October 1973 oil crisis, Mr Lee sent a clear signal to oil companies that the Government did not claim any special privilege over their stocks of oil in the refineries here.

Had the Government blocked these stocks from export, there would have been enough oil for Singapore’s own consumption for two years — but it would have undermined the country’s reputation for reliability, Mr Lee said.

He personally met the CEOs and managing directors of Shell, Mobil, Esso, Statoil, Total, and British Petroleum in November, to reassure them that Singapore would share in any cuts they imposed on the rest of their customers.

International confidence in the Singapore Government grew as the oil industry expanded into petrochemicals in the 1970s.

By the 1990s, Singapore had become the world’s third-largest oil-refining and trading centre, and the largest fuel oil bunker in volume.
The language of survival

"Everyone should learn English and their native language is to become the second one."

Few might have realised the significance at that time, but in making English Singapore’s lingua franca, a decision he made within only a few weeks of separation from Malaysia in 1965, Mr Lee Kuan Yew gave the Republic a fighting chance of overcoming the formidable crises post-Independence.

Adopting the international language of business, diplomacy, and science and technology was about the only way this resource-less tiny island could guarantee its survival after losing its economic hinterland in Malaysia. Unemployment was at 14 per cent and rising.

Mr Lee captured the move’s criticality in his memoirs: “Without it, we would not have many of the world’s multinationals and over 200 of the world’s top banks in Singapore. Nor would our people have taken so readily to computers and the Internet.”

Just as importantly, picking this race-neutral language demonstrated his government’s anti-communistic stance, helping to keep the peace in a newborn nation made up of a polyglot-settler populace who had struggled for years with racial and religious strife.

“We treat everybody equally. We judge you on your merits,” he said.

This decision was not so intuitive in that post-colonial era as it seems in hindsight. Other newly-independent African countries, Malaysia and India, for example, were throwing out the English language along with the British yoke in a fit of nationalism.

In Singapore too, language was a political issue — except that in its case, English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil were recognised as the four official languages, with Malay the national language and English the main language of commerce and administration.

NANTAH OPPOSITION

But the force with which Mr Lee pursued English language proficiency met with opposition, most robustly from Nanyang University (Nantah) graduates.

They raised the issue of Chinese language and culture in the 1972 and 1976 general elections, after Mr Lee did away with vernacular schools and made Nantah, a source of pride among the Chinese community as it was the only Chinese-language tertiary institution outside China then, switch to teaching in English. The latter move was despite the reservations of many of his colleagues and when it failed, he forced Nantah to merge with Singapore University in 1978.

His most powerful riposte to these opponents: All three of his children were sent to Chinese-medium schools. (From age six, they also had Malay-language tuition at home.)

Mr Lee himself, born to English-speaking parents, had started to pick up Mandarin again only at age 32 and “spent years sweating blood” to master it, a story he recounted in detail in his 2011 book, My Lifelong Challenge: Singapore’s Bilingual Journey.

BILINGUALISM

For the sake of building “a community that feels together”, Mr Lee pushed through the bilingualism policy in 1966. All students had to learn their “mother tongue”, Mandarin, Malay or Tamil, depending on their race, as a second language, and this became a compulsory subject at age 14.

“Everyone should learn English because I saw the difference between the Chinese-educated and the English-educated. The English-educated were rootless,” he explained to a team of authors, citing Raffles College students’ indifference although a massive riot was boiling at Chinese High School in 1956, in response to an anti-communist crackdown by the then David Marshall Government.

“If Singapore students all turned up like those in the university hostel, Singapore would fall,” he said.

The nexus between language and culture was crucial to creating a ragged, tightly-knit society with “cultural ballast” because with the language go “the literature, proverbs, folklore, beliefs, value patterns”, he believed.

He later said: “I have no doubts that if we lose... our sense of being ourselves, not Westerners, we lose our vitality. So that was our first driving force.”

IMPERFECT IMPLEMENTATION

But the various initiatives Mr Lee rolled out in subsequent years to put proficiency in mother tongue on par with that in English were to divide opinions, especially among the Chinese, even up to the present. Indeed, he described bilingualism in 2004 as the “most difficult” policy he had had to implement.

Mr Lee set up Special Assistance Plan schools in 1978 for students who were more proficient in both English and Mandarin to pursue both the subjects as first languages. Critics said the scheme caused ethnic segregation because these schools did not offer other mother tongues.

The following year, he also launched the Speak Mandarin Campaign to eradicate the use of dialects.

While not an insignificant number benefited from the bilingualism policy, particularly after Deng Xiaoping opened up China, many struggled with learning Mandarin. It was partly because many Chinese families retained strong loyalties to the different dialects spoken by their forefathers, but more importantly, it was caused by the way schools were teaching the language.

Mr Lee acknowledged as much during a parliamentary debate in 2004 on changes to Chinese language learning. The imperfect implementation of what he maintained was a sound policy, he said, caused interest in the Chinese language to be killed by the drudgery of rote memorising. He regretted not implementing the modular system earlier.

Reflecting on his belated realisation that language ability was at best, only loosely linked to intelligence, Mr Lee admitted in 2009 that “successive generations of students paid a heavy price because of my ignorance”.

In November 2011, he started the Lee Kuan Yew Fund for Bilingualism to support ideas that would promote the learning of English and mother tongue. Even towards the end, at his last appearance at the National Day Dinner in his Tanjong Pagar ward shortly before his 90th birthday, he was exhorting parents to give their children an early start in bilingualism. TEO XUANWEI
A place for all

‘This is not a country that belongs to any single community: It belongs to all of us.’

H e was the man who wove multiculturalism into the very DNA of Singapore, in the conviction that a small nation could not be divided against itself and continue to exist. The man who refused to allow Singapore to become a Chinese nation, this is not an Indian nation,” Mr Lee Kuan Yew declared in 1965, upon Singapore’s split from Malaysia due to irreconcilable differences over how society should be organised.

While Malaysia chose bumiputra dominance and communal politics, Singapore would be the model multicultural nation, unique in the region. “Everybody will have his own language, his own culture, his own religion,” he vowed.

Ever wearing the lenses of harsh reality, however, Mr Lee believed work ensuring racial harmony was never done. Forty-five years later, Mr Lee made a rare intervention in Parliament in 2010 — having interrupted his physiotherapy session — to bring what he felt was a needed reality check to those arguing for equal treatment for all races.

This premise was “false and flawed”, said the Minister Mentor, pointing to Article 152 of the Constitution, which makes it the Government’s responsibility to “constantly care for the interests of the racial and religious minorities” — in particular recognising the special position of the Malays as “the indigenous people of Singapore.” It would “take decades, if not centuries”, he added, for Singapore to reach a point where all races could be treated equally.

What some did not understand was that, for Mr Lee, multiculturalism was the only way to ensure Singapore’s survival — but it would never be a work in progress, an aspiration not to be confused with an ideology of race-blindness, because the facts of reality pulled in the opposing direction. That was the paradox Singapore had to grapple with.

FOUNDATIONS FOR HARMONY

In the initial years of Independence, many people advocated catering to the racial minority in Singapore. But Mr Lee and his team refused, having made clear from the start: “One thing we should not do is to try and stifle the other man’s culture, his language, his religion.”

“In such matters one has to find a middle path between uniformity and a certain freedom to be somewhat different. I think it is wise to leave alone questions of fundamental beliefs and give time to sort matters out.”

When dilapidated small mosques (surau) built on state land had to be removed for redevelopment, Mr Lee proposed a plan to replace each surau with bigger, better mosques in every housing estate through contributions from the Malay-Muslim community. Ex-Cabinet minister Othman Wok recalled: “He said he would instruct the Civil Service to prepare a circular for all Malay-Muslim communities to donate voluntarily to the mosque building fund, and the deduction would be through CPF. That was a good idea. Finally, they gave $50 cents.”

This freed Singapore from the pressure that could be brought to bear if the mosques were bankrolled by the oil-rich Saudis, said Mr Lee in retrospect; it also “gave our Malay pride in building their mosques with their own funds.”

GROUP REPRESENTATION CONSTITUENCIES

One controversial measure to ensure minority representation was the Group Representation Constituency scheme, which Mr Lee pushed through in 1988. He noted that where people in the 1950s and 1960s voted for the party regardless of candidates, once the PAP’s dominance was established and people expected it to be returned to power, they began voting for the MP: “They preferred one who empathised with them, spoke the same dialect or language, and was of the same race,” said Mr Lee.

“It was going to be difficult if not impossible for a Malay or Indian candidate to win against a Chinese candidate. To end up with a Parliament without Malay, Indian and other minority MPs would be damaging. We had to change the rules.” In addition, this would stymie Chinese chauvinist tendencies by any political party, he added.

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Another initiative that drew criticism was the formation of self-help groups. Having found that, since the days of the British, a larger percentage of Malay students were consistently poorer in mathematics and sciences, Mr Lee decided the Government could not keep the differences in exam results secret.

“To have people believe all children were equal, whatever their race, and that equal opportunities would allow all to qualify for a place in a university must lead to discontent. The less successful would believe the Government was not treating them equally,” he wrote.

In 1980, he roped in Malay community leaders to tackle the problem of Malay underachievement, leading to the first self-help group, Mendaki, in 1982. But Deputy Prime Minister S Rajaratnam, who crafted the National Pledge, was opposed, fearing the move towards community-based self-help groups would strengthen communal pulls. Mr Lee wrote: “While I shared Raja’s ideal of a completely colour-blind policy, I had to face reality and produce results. From experience, we knew Chinese or Indian officials could not reach out to Malay parents and students in the way their own community leaders did.”

Over the years, Malay students’ achievements improved. Mendaki’s progress spurred the formation of the Singapore Indian Development Association in 1991 and the Chinese Development Assistance Council in 1992. In another instance, Mr Lee’s refusal to spell out anything less than the “hard truth”, as he saw it, continued to draw flak in the last years of his life.

His remarks that Islamic piety stood out to integrate with the other communities — made in his book Hard Truths To Keep Singapore Going, published in 2011 — upset many. Soon after, he issued a statement explaining that the comment was made two or three years earlier and that “ministers and MPs, both Malay and non-Malay, have since told me that Singapore Malays have indeed made special efforts to integrate with the other communities ... and that my call is out of date.”

“I stand corrected, but only just this instance! I hope that this trend will continue in the future.”
Team S’pore, strong ministers, shared goals

‘The single decisive factor that made for Singapore’s development’

The Singapore Story clearly did not come down to Mr Lee Kuan Yew alone. As he acknowledged: “I was fortunate to have had a strong team of ministers who shared a common vision. They were able men determined to pursue our shared goals.”

But in this regard, perhaps Mr Lee’s most critical accomplishment for a young Singapore was his exceptional leadership acumen in putting together the right team — unearth ing political gems and administrative mandarins specifically suited for the challenges of the day, and whipping into shape a civil service machinery to implement policy.

As those who worked with him have said, he had the uncanny ability to attract the best in the country.

THE CORE TEAM

From winning the high-stakes battle against the communists to surmounting the myriad post-independence challenges of unemployment, a housing shortage, securing international recognition and building an army from scratch — to name just a few — pivotal roles were played by stalwarts such as Goh Keng Swee and S Rajaratnam.

One of those roles over the decades was to keep Mr Lee in check. “They were able men with the magnetic leadership to draw outstanding people to work with him”. They included former heads of Civil Service Lim Siong Guan and Sim Kee Boon (who later, as chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore, turned Changi Airport into an icon), as well as others who were “not only technically able, but also entrepreneurial, innovative and yet realistic”.

No one was as steady as Mr Lee, said Permanent Secretary for the Economic Minister of the Year Hon Sui Sen — the first chairman of the Economic Development Board (HDB). He had asked him to enter politics in 1953. He was “a superb judge of talent, with the magnetic leadership to draw outstanding people to work with him”. They included former heads of Civil Service Lim Siong Guan and Sim Kee Boon (who later, as chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore, turned Changi Airport into an icon), as well as others who were “not only technically able, but also entrepreneurial, innovative and yet realistic”.

One was D’Y Fillay, whom Mr Lee described as “equal to the best brains in America”. He built Singapore Airlines into a world-class carrier and helped develop the financial sector, among other contributions. There was also George Bogaars, who headed the Civil Service and was chairman of Keppel Shipyard. One of Mr Lee’s schoolmates at Raffles Institution was the tough-talking Howe Yoon Choong, who declined when Mr Lee asked him to enter politics in 1953 — he believed Singapore needed civil servants. As CEO of the DBS in the 1960s, he fast-tracked the public housing programme, and as chairman of the Port of Singapore Authority, went against the advice of professionals and built Singapore’s first container port.

He was finally drafted into politics and, as a Cabinet minister, championed the building of the Mass Rapid Transit system and Changi Airport.

Many of these best minds have described Mr Lee as having a zeal that could convert others — he was “a conviction politician”, a superb persuader and mobiliser who persuaded the Civil Service to also begin to believe that what Lee was fighting for was their fight as well”, said Ms Yong.

INSTILLING AN EFFICIENCY ETHOS

Beyond the people at the top, Mr Lee knew the importance of being backed up by an efficient administrative machinery as well to carry out his government’s programmes. His imprint is in the very ethos, processes and framework of today’s Public Service.

Right after separation, he personally drove the overhauling of a bureaucracy that had become ridden with lackadaisical and complacent mandarins — one famous example was how he tore into officers after finding light switches that did not work in a government building. Sloppiness would not be tolerated. He set out in unequivocal terms the ethos he expected: “I want those who believe that joining the government service means automatically you are going up the ladder to forget it”.

He also drove the pace of change by keeping close tabs on key assignments and projects, with an exacting eye for detail. For instance, he asked for a monthly report on the progress of the NEWater project even after he stepped down in 1990. The story is also told of how Mr Lee wanted a weekly report of the state of cleanliness of the toilets at Paya Lebar Airport. The then airport manager Mr Wong Woon Liang decided he had better ask for a daily report in that
Mr Lee, the People’s Action Party’s co-founder and its first Secretary-General, honoured with a standing ovation at the PAP60 commemorative event at the Victoria Concert Hall in November 2014. TODAY FILE PHOTO

**ENGAGING AND MOBILISING**

For all his toughness and demanding standards, Mr Lee also continually engaged civil servants to explain his thinking and ensure that the Public Service was working towards the same shared objectives — for instance, in the early days, he would take them along on community visits so that they could better grasp problems on the ground.

He would also hold meetings at which he would gather Members of Parliament, Permanent Secretaries, only those privy to your thoughts can understand,” he told them.

Charity of thought was a lesson he drilled home again and again. As Mr Heng recalled, Mr Lee’s favourite question was “So?”. “If you update him on something, he will invariably reply with ‘So?”’. You reply and think you have answered him, but again he asks, “So?” … His instinct is to cut through the clutter, drill to the core of the issue, and identify the vital points.”

Mr Ho added: “As civil servants, we were constantly amazed by Lee Kuan Yew’s breadth and depth … we had to be as sharp as he. To present our views, we had to be thorough in our research, and compelling in our arguments, to win the case. It created, in my view, a culture of excellence in the Civil Service. Never take short cuts, or the intellectually lazy argument, or short-change other points of view. Otherwise, Lee Kuan Yew would sniff out these weaknesses.”

At the end of the day, for Mr Lee, it was about stoking people to “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 … That is a very big factor in leadership — at the end of the day, you must also have the idealism to succeed, to make people come with you.”

**MERIT AND INCORRUPTIBILITY**

Central to the foundation of an effective Public Service were merit-based recruitment and anti-corruption measures. Mr Lee ensured no individual politician, Civil Service leader or influential person was allowed to appoint their friends and family. He strongly believed the Public Service should be staffed by each generation’s finest talent. So, Public Service Commission scholarships to famous universities were offered to top students, and those who performed well in service were fast-tracked.

Mr Lee argued that for Singapore to succeed, the system should enable the best, most suitable man for the job.” You must have an open recruitment system, proper appraisal systems, not just go by word of mouth of some individuals.”

At the same time, he took a keen interest in promotions and appointments in statutory boards, quasi-government institutions and trade unions to ensure elites who were also attuned to the government’s thinking formed the ruling class in every level of society.

To attract the best talent, he believed in ensuring competitive pay for all schemes of service. But at the same time this would be a “clean wage” policy — he guided the service away from providing staff quarters and cars very early on. “Today, there are virtually no hidden benefits,” said Ms Yong.

Mr Lee demanded incorruptibility — this was central to investors’ confidence, distinguished Singapore from the rest of the developing world and was the cornerstone of its survival. In 1959, he moved the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau directly under the Prime Minister’s Office, signalling that graft would not be tolerated under his watch, no matter the position of the culprit. For instance, investigations were opened in 1986 against then National Development Minister Teh Cheang Wan, who later committed suicide.

He said: “The moment key leaders are less than incorruptible, less than stern in demanding high standards, from that moment the structure of administrative integrity will weaken, and eventually crumble. Singapore can survive only if ministers and senior officers are incorruptible and efficient.”

He set a personal example of thrift and frugality: A simply-furnished office and home, and entertaining for friends and family. He strongly believed the government’s thinking formed the ruling class in every level of society.

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A leader shaped by the post-war crucible

'This lesson will never be forgotten'

Over his lifetime, Mr Lee Kuan Yew had to sing four national anthems: British, Japanese, Malaysian and finally Singaporean. This reflected the progression and momentous events of his life that shaped him into the leader he became. The Japanese Occupation and life as a student in Britain profoundly shaped his view of the world and human nature, while the political struggle for power and self-government honed his leadership style and tactics.

But it was in the pre-war years that Mr Lee's initiation into the politics of race and religion took place.

With World War II raging in Europe in 1940, Mr Lee, who had planned to read law in London, took up a scholarship to study at Raffles College instead (after having come in first in Singapore and Malaya in the Senior Cambridge examinations).

It was at Raffles College that he encountered Malaysia, a deep and intense pro-Malay, anti-immigrant sentiment among indigenous Malays who had been given special political and economic rights, and who feared being overwhelmed by hard-working Chinese and Indian immigrants.

Coming from the Malay states, their attitude contrasted with that of the Singapore Malays, who were accustomed to equal treatment in a British colony that made no distinction among the races.

It was also at Raffles College that Mr Lee formed lasting friendships with some who would later become close political colleagues, including the late Toh Chin Chye and Goh Keng Swee, then a tutor in economics.

THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

The Japanese invasion in December 1941 disrupted studies at Raffles College and heralded the most important foundational years of Mr Lee's life.

The Japanese had shattered the colonial system and the myth of British superiority — the idea that, as many had believed, the British empire would last a thousand years. We literally saw a whole society disintegrate — it collapsed overnight. And we were serfs, to be trampled on, to do the Japanese's bidding. And that did something to a whole generation; we said, 'No! Why? This is my life, my country! I have something to say'.”

The Japanese were cruel, unjust and vicious. In his first encounter with a Japanese soldier, Mr Lee was slapped, made to kneel and sent sprawling with a boot. He worked as a clerk, as a trusser for the Japanese, and ran his own businesses (such as manufacturing glue) to survive.

The Japanese Military Administration governed by fear. Punishment was so severe that crime was very rare, at a time when people were half-starved with deprivation. “As a result I have never believed those who advocate a soft approach to crime and punishment, claiming that punishment does not reduce crime,” Mr Lee said.

The Occupation was his first lesson on power, government and human reaction, he said. “I learnt more from the three-and-a-half years of Japanese Occupation than any university could have taught me. I had not yet heard Mao's dictum that 'power grows out of the barrel of a gun', but I knew that Japanese brutality, Japanese guns, Japanese bayonets and swords, and Japanese terror and torture settled the argument as to who was in charge, and could make people change behaviour, even their loyalties.”

STUDENT LIFE IN ENGLAND

After the war, Mr Lee pursued his law studies in England. It was there, in the late 1940s, that he came to seriously question the continued right of the British to rule Singapore.

He was treated roughly as a colonial by some landladies and shopkeepers, treatment he resented from social inferiors. “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.”

He took part in a discussion group called the Malay Forum, which pressed for an independent Malaya and a non-violent end to British rule. Its members included Dr Toh and Dr Goh, as well as Tun Abdul Razak, who would later become Prime Minister of Malaysia.

Mr Lee's time in Britain also helped form his initial political philosophy.

In his first term at the London School of Economics — before he transferred to Cambridge, where he graduated with double first-class honours — Mr Lee was introduced to the general theory of socialism in political scientist Harold Laski's lectures. He was immediately attracted to it.

"It struck me as manifestly fair that everybody in this world should be given an equal chance in life, that in a just and well-ordered society there should not be a great disparity of wealth between persons because of their position or status, or that of their parents,” he said.

But he would later alter his views on Fabian socialism. “They were going to create a just society for the British workers — the beginning of a welfare state, cheap council housing, free medicine and dental treatment, 

Mr Lee speaking at a rally of more than 100,000 people in August 1963, when he was Prime Minister, to press for compensation for civilian victims of the Japanese Occupation. PHOTO: AP
free spectacles, generous unemployment benefits. Of course, for students from the colonies, like Singapore and Malaya, it was a great attraction as the only logical alternative to communism.

“We did not see until the 1970s that that was the beginning of big problems contributing to the inevitable decline of the British economy.”

PAP AND THE FIGHT FOR SELF-GOVERNMENT

Returning home to Singapore in 1950, Mr Lee continued to witness the “injustice” of a whites-on-top society.

“You might be a good doctor, but if you are an Asian, you would be under...”

In 1952, when negotiations between the Postal and Telecommunications Uniformed Staff Union and the government failed, the union carried out the first strike since Emergency Regulations were introduced in 1948, upon Mr Lee’s reassurance that this was not illegal. The publicity enhanced his reputation.

Mr Lee and his coterie, which included S Rajaratnam and Dr Toh, became convinced that the unions could serve as the mass base and political muscle they had been seeking. He linked up with left-wing Chinese-educated unionists such as Lim Chin Siong and Fong Swee Suan in 1954. And the People’s Action Party was launched on Nov 21 that year — born out of a marriage of convenience with the pro-communist trade unionists.

The next year, the PAP won three of the four electoral seats it contested; Mr Lee won the Tanjong Pagar seat with the largest number of ballots cast for any candidate, and by the widest margin.

But as the party’s mass base continued to expand considerably, the Malay Communist Party set out to capture the People’s Action Party (PAP) itself.

In August 1957, during the party’s third annual conference, pro-communist elements managed to win half the central executive committee seats. However, five were retained during a government security sweep — and Mr Lee and his colleagues took the opportunity to create a cadre system, where only cadres could vote for the CEC and only the CEC could approve cadre membership.

In later years, Mr Lee would say of learning to be a streetwise fighter in the political arena: “I would not have been so robust or tough had I not had communists to contend with. I have met people who are utterly ruthless.”

MERGER AND DEFEATING THE PRO-COMMUNISTS

The British finally agreed to self-govern for Singapore (except in matters of defence and foreign relations) — and Mr Lee became Prime Minister of Singapore at the age of 35, when the PAP captured 43 of the 51 seats in the Legislative Assembly elections of May 1959.

But still, the pro-communists were growing in strength among the unions, and Mr Lee could not simply move against them without losing the support of the Chinese-speaking workers.

Union with Malaya thus provided the “perfect issue” on which to force a break with the party’s left-wing elements, which were opposed to the merger. After a vote of confidence was called in 1961 — a vote Mr Lee’s government barely won with 26 votes out of 51 — several assemblymen broke away to form the Barisan Sosialis.

The months that followed were the toughest, most exhausting fight for political survival yet for Mr Lee, against adversaries he later described as “formidable opponents, men of great resolve”.

Bringing the battle with the pro-communists fully out into the open, he campaigned at the grassroots, speaking daily in Malay, English and Chinese; and did a series of 12 radio broadcasts on the battle for merger, arguing why Singapore needed the hinterland for its economic survival.

When the merger referendum was held in September 1962, the PAP carried the day — 71 per cent of votes went to the form of merger that Mr Lee had campaigned for.

On Aug 31, 1963, Mr Lee declared Singapore’s independence from British rule and, on his 40th birthday on Sept 16, Singapore merged with the Federation of Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak to form Malaysia.

INTO THE FIRE OF MALAY COMMUNALISM

The merger would prove to be short-lived — a costly experience that brought into violent conflict the two major races in Singapore, as well as the PAP and the Federal government. As Mr Lee put it, the party “had jumped out of the frying pan into the fire of the Malay communists”.

The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) leaders were determined to maintain total Malay supremacy. They were worried by the inclusion in the Federation of Singapore’s Chinese majority and that the PAP might make inroads in Malaysia — for Mr Lee openly and strongly opposed the bumiputra policy, calling for a “Malaysian Malaysia” where Malays and non-Malays were equal.

UMNO leader Syed Ja’afar Albar’s stoking of racial flames reached a watershed during the race riots of July 1964. The Singapore Government’s memorandum that later set out the events leading to the riots concluded that those in authority in Kuala Lumpur did not restrain those indulging in inflammatory and racist propaganda.

In September, a second wave of racial riots erupted in Singapore. And by December 1964, both sides were groping towards a looser arrangement within the Federation. While Mr Lee tried to find a compromise with Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, the latter became more and more sold on total separation.

Goh Keng Swee eventually convinced Mr Lee that secession was inevitable — which was a heavy blow to Mr Lee, who believed Singapore’s very survival lay within Malaysia.

A MOMENT OF ANGUISH

On Aug 9, 1965, in a televised press conference, Mr Lee fought back tears as he formally announced the separation and the full independence of Singapore, saying: “Every time we look back on this moment when we signed this agreement which severed Singapore from Malaysia, it will be a moment of anguish. For me, it is a moment of anguish because all my life... you see, the whole of my adult life... I have believed in merger and the unity of these two territories.

But he and his team were determined to make Singapore succeed, despite the odds — and that in building the foundations for a new country, they would never forget what came before. “I would like to believe that the two years we spent in Malaysia are years which will not be easily forgotten, years in which the people of migrant stock here who are a majority learnt of the terrors and the follies and the bitterness which is generated when one group tries to assert its dominance over the other on the basis of one race, one language, one religion,” Mr Lee said in 1965.

“It is because of this that my colleagues and I were determined, as from the moment of separation, that this lesson will never be forgotten.”
When the gloves came off

‘In my bag I have a hatchet, and a very sharp one’

When journalist Dennis Bloodworth in 1989 described Mr Lee Kuan Yew as “bloody-minded and ruthless with his adversaries. He stomps them into the ground”, he was using metaphors no less graphic and remorseless than ones Mr Lee was wont to use about himself.

As he famously said in a book in-terview: “Everybody knows that in my bag I have a hatchet, and a very sharp one. You take me on, I take my hatchet, we meet in the cul-de-sac. That’s the way I had to survive in the past. That’s the way the communists tackled me.”

It was in the rough-and-dirty poli-ticking of pre-Independence Singapore that this Cambridge-trained lawyer learnt to be a tough street-fighter, taking on the British, the communalists in Malaysia and the pro-communists, people who were “utterly ruthless”, in his words. And that was the style with which he took on his later adversaries, or potential adversaries — be they unionists, the media or political opponents. “Anyone who takes me on needs to put on knuckle-dusters,” he once said.

Indeed, in many instances, he saw his own foes as foes also of the long-term good of Singapore — and he was determined that nothing should undermine all that had been achieved.

As he thundered at a 1980 General Election rally: “You unscramble this – the confidence, the organisation upon which Singapore thrives – and you’ve had it. And let there be no mistakes about this – whoever governs Singapore must have that iron in him or give it up!

“This is not a game of cards – this is your life and mine! I’ve spent a whole lifetime building this and as long as I am in charge — nobody is going to knock it down!”

THE LABOUR UNIONS

One of the earliest challenges for Mr Lee’s team was the labour unions.

A landmark confrontation took place two years after Independence.

The president of the Public Daily Rated Employees’ Union, K Suppiah, refused to negotiate over grievances and launched an illegal strike — involving 2,400 workers and threatening to embroil another 14,000. The strike’s leaders were arrested and labour laws were changed to ban all strikes in certain essential services.

This was a turning point in the nation’s industrial history — from the “happy, riotous 1950s” when union power was on the rise, to a “highly vulnerable” state where “the government could not allow any union to jeopardise Singapore’s survival”, according to Mr Lee.

He persuaded union leaders that to win investors’ confidence and create jobs, industrial peace was necessary.

And to enforce this peace — particularly in a key entity such as the national airline, Singapore Airlines — he was ready to “break heads”.

Singapore Airlines at its birth in 1972 was a key project aimed at boosting the international linkages the economy needed, and Mr Lee had personally secured the pact for SIA’s first and most lucrative route then, to London. So when its pilots association took illegal industrial action in 1980, Mr Lee confronted them, threatening: “I do not want to do you in, but I will not let anyone do Singapore in.”

Fifteen ex-co members were charged and convicted, and the association was deregistered and re-formed as the Air Line Pilots’ Association Singapore (ALPA-S).

In 2003, following a leadership oust-er at ALPA-S and a dispute with management that threatened to cost the airline hundreds of millions of dollars in losses, the Senior Minister summoned 14 of the union leaders to the Istana for a two-hour meeting.

As he later told a global forum: “In Singapore, when we decide that they are breaking the rules of the game, the unspoken rules as to how we survive, how we have prospered, then either their head is broken or our bones are broken ... So we are telling them, both management and unions, ‘you play this game, there are going to be broken heads’. Let’s stop it.”

But the iron fist was not the only...
thing; Mr Lee was about. Permanent Secretary Yong Ying highlighted the care with which he had designed the Labour Court — not involving lawyers in hearings, so as to encourage settlement of disputes rather than an adversarial approach; and there being no fees to act as an obstacle. The top priority was “to give companies and workers no excuse not to settle.”

**POLITICAL OPPONENTS**

For all his ruthless legal actions against key political opponents since the People’s Action Party’s (PAP) dominance of Parliament was broken in the 1980s, Mr Lee was not against the idea of having a good parliamentary opposition — something that would provide ministers with sparring partners to keep them on their toes.

“I have said if we have a credible First World opposition, we’ll treat them with First World civility,” he wrote. “If you are polite to me, I’m polite to you, but I’ll demolish your policy. It is the job of every government to do that if you want to stay in power.”

On Mr Chiam See Tong, he noted: “I’ve never been rough with Chiam. He’s gentle, I’m gentle. He’s a decent man and I respect him for that.”

But woe betide those who accused him of corruption or misusing his powers of office; or who set out to be destructive “trouble-makers”. Mr Lee unleashed the full force of not only his oratory, but also his legal weaponry on them.

And he made no bones about using libel suits to remove his political rivals. “If we had considered them serious political figures,” he said of Mr Chiam and Workers’ Party’s Low Thia Khiang in 2003, “we would not have kept them politically alive for so long. We could have bankrupted them earlier.”

His fiercest and most bitter antagonist was Mr Joshua Benjamin Jeyaretnam. After winning the 1981 Anson by-election, Mr Jeyaretnam became a thorn in the PAP’s side. Although barred from contesting the 1985 General Election upon conviction of misappropriating funds, he spoke at the campaign rallies and alleged that Mr Lee had tried to cover up former National Development Minister Teh Cheng Wan’s corruption. He lost the defamation suit and was ordered to pay S$260,000 in damages to Mr Lee.

Other actions followed in 1995 and 1997, brought by other PAP MPs, and in 2001 Mr Jeyaretnam was declared bankrupt. Mr Lee said bluntly in 1997: “As long as Jeyaretnam stands for what he stands for — a thoroughly destructive force for me — we will knock him. There are two ways of playing this. One, you attack the policies; two, you attack the system. Jeyaretnam was attacking the system, he brought the Chief Justice into it. If I want to fix you, do I need the Chief Justice to fix you? … He brought the Chief Justice into the political arena. He brought my only friend in university into our quarrel. How dare he?”

Another Opposition leader who became the target of two libel suits by Mr Lee was Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) chief Chee Soon Juan — first after the 2001 GE and again in 2008 for an article in the SDP’s newsletter. In the latter case, Mr Lee took the stand along with fellow plaintiff Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

The point Mr Lee was making in all this, said former Cabinet Minister S Jayakumar, was: “He is prepared for a robust criticism of his policies. He can be criticised for foolishness, maybe even for incompetence, for arrogance, but his red line was: Not on reputation and integrity … he would want to demonstrate that it is a red line, you justify it. He’s prepared to justify his record.”

**THE MEDIA**

To Mr Lee, the idea of a free press as the “fourth estate” was anathema. “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,” he declared in 1974 to a General Assembly Of The International Press Institute.

And that was what he set out to drill into the Singapore media — to act “as a positive agent in nation-building”. He would brook nothing less.

In a speech to the Singapore Press Club in 1972, Mr Lee warned: “When any newspaper pours a daily dose of language, cultural or religious poison, I put my knuckle-dusters on. Do not believe you can beat the state.” Indeed, former Singapore Press Holdings English and Malay Newspapers Division Editor-in-Chief Cheong Yip Seng described the 1970s as “the bare-knuckles phase in the turbulent history of government-media relations”.

In 1973, for example, Mr Lee demanded that a Sunday Nation writer be sacked for decrying the relentless pursuit of good grades — what Mr Lee saw as a critique of education policy.

The Newspaper and Printing Presses Act of 1974 set the framework for greater government control of the media; later amendments restricted the circulation of foreign publications that engaged in Singapore politics or refused to grant the Government a right of reply. This was because Mr Lee believed the foreign press should be observers and not participants in domestic politics.

“If we do not stand up to answer our critics from the foreign media, Singaporeans, especially journalists and academics, will believe that their leaders are afraid of or unequal to the argument, and will lose respect for us,” Mr Lee wrote in his memoirs.

Over the years, restrictions were imposed on the local circulation of various international publications that refused to print in full the Government’s reply to articles: Time Magazine, the Asian Wall Street Journal, Asialink magazine, The Economist.

The Far Eastern Economic Review, in addition to having its circulation cut from 9,600 copies to 500 in 1987, also was hit with a libel suit, which Mr Lee won, in 1989. The International Herald Tribune came in for a couple of libel suits in 1994.

To criticisms that he came down too hard on the media and political opponents, Mr Lee countered: “Wrong ideas have to be challenged before they influence public opinion and make for problems. Those who try to be clever at the expense of the government should not claim if my replies are as sharp as their criticisms.”
The great persuader

‘Dominance of the public platform was my strength’

He did not crave to be popular; rather, Mr Lee Kuan Yew sought to persuade people to see his point of view.

A forceful orator in part due to his legal training, his ability to sway his listeners contributed greatly to Mr Lee’s effectiveness over the years. The man shaped in the turbulent power struggles of pre-independence Singapore grasped full well the importance of being able to win over the crowd, though he refused to be led by it.

A leader concerned with being popular was a weak leader, he believed, and he preferred to be feared than to be loved.

A leader with a weakness for people, he preferred, would be swayed by the crowd, and he refused to be led by it.

In an interview in 1975, Mr Lee said: “My job is to persuade my flock, my people, and that’s the right way... What the crowd thinks of me from time to time, I consider totally irrelevant... The whole ground can be against me, 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.”

His former Cabinet colleague, the late Goh Keng Swee, said of his persuasive powers: “He gets his way not, as some opposition people say, by dictating to other people, but by persuading them. He spends an awful lot of time persuading people.”

‘A LOCAL RONALD REAGAN’

Mr Lee did not mince words nor try to be politically correct. He once described himself as “a local Ronald Reagan” (referring to the charismatic former-actor-turned-United States President), able to “speak to the people over the blather of the media”, in reference to his success at defending his position against political opponents and the media.

Ambassador-at-Large Tommy Koh, who heard Mr Lee speak to a crowd of hostile port workers at Tanjong Pagar in 1963, recounted: “Through his sheer charisma, eloquence and persuasiveness, and using a mixture of Malay and English, he was able to turn the meeting around.”

Gifts or not, communication and persuasion were something Mr Lee worked at relentlessly.

Working with the labour unions to build a political support base after his return from Britain, he learnt to speak the common people’s language — Malay, Chinese and simplified English instead of the BBC-standard natural to him.

He took up Mandarin classes again with renewed determination in 1955 at the age of 32, and by the 1959 elections, had mastered it well enough to speak without a script. “I won the respect of the Chinese-speaking for working hard at their language,” he recollected.

For the 1961 Hong Lim by-election, Mr Lee “sweated blood to master Hokkien” — devoting an hour to learning it three to five times a week, so he could get his views across to the uneducated.

To learn a new language in his late 30s amid day-to-day work required “superhuman concentration and effort”, he recalled. “The first time I made a Hokkien speech in Hong Lim, the children in the crowd laughed at my mistakes — wrong sound, wrong tones, wrong sentence structure, wrong almost everything. But I could not afford to be shy or embarrassed. It was a matter of life and death.”

MASTER STORYTELLER AND ‘POP STAR’

Over the months of September and October 1961, Mr Lee gave a series of 12 radio talks campaigning for merger with Malaysia, explaining why it was crucial for Singapore’s survival. The broadcasts were made in Malay, Mandarin and English, three times a week each.

“It was a gruelling experience.
On one occasion, Radio Singapore staff were alarmed when they looked through the studio’s glass panel and did not see me at the microphone. One of them spotted me lying on my back, flat on the floor in a state of collapse, as she thought,” Mr Lee recounted. He had, in fact, lain down “to recover from my exhaustion and recharge my batteries in between recording the three different versions of my broadcast”.

Those broadcasts showed Mr Lee to be a master storyteller, said former Singapore Press Holdings Editor-in-Chief (English and Malay Newspapers Division) Cheong Yip Seng, who was then a Senior Cambridge-year schoolboy. “Every broadcast ended with the listener in suspense and anxious for the next instalment, the way ordinary folk at that time lapped up the lungful of serials broadcast over Rediffusion by Lei Tai Sor in Cantonese.”

He could “explain complex issues in simple terms, in a way the masses, usually in the thousands and then not well-educated, could understand. His deep, powerful voice rose and fell for emphasis and effect, and he spoke with great passion, determined to convince”.

While radio had a wide reach, Mr Lee believed in also taking his message to the ground. After the merger referendum in September 1962, he visited constituencies to shore up support for elections the next year.

These 10 months between December 1962 and September 1963, Mr Lee said, were the most hectic of his life: He made as many as 10 speeches a day, in Malay, English and Hokkien or Mandarin. “I became a kind of political pop star,” he said.

**SPEECH THAT CHANGED HISTORY**

But possibly his most important speech yet came in May 1965, nearly two years after Singapore had become part of Malaysia, when he laid out his case against communal politics. His audience: The Malaysian Parliament.

He caused a sensation addressing them in Bahasa, Former Minister for Social Affairs Othman Wok said: “I noticed that while he was speaking, the Alliance leaders sitting in front of us, they sank lower and lower because they were embarrassed this man could speak Malay better than them.”

Former Cabinet colleague, the late Lim Kim San, noted: “That was the turning point. They perceived him as a dangerous man who could one day turn a dangerous point. They perceived him as a dangerous man who could one day turn into a weak leader. Between being loved and being feared, I have always believed Machiavelli was right. If nobody is afraid of me, I’m meaningless.”

Mr Lee felt at his best as an orator without a script. “I had better rapport with my audience when I expressed my thoughts as they formed and flowed in my mind, whereas if I had a script, I could not get my message across with the same conviction and passion.”

He was in his element in the election hustings, delivering fiery, no-holds-barred oratory in the evenings at mass rallies in the constituencies. But particularly memorable were his speeches at Fullerton Square in the midday heat to reach out to office workers.

“So the umbrellas sprouted open and the crowds started flagging and you could sense that they would soon disperse. But (Mr Lee) did not miss a beat. He continued. He looked them in the eyes. He addressed them as if he was talking to each and every one of them personally.”

Mr Lee said: “The people stayed and I carried on. Although wet, I never felt the cold; my adrenaline was pouring out. The spoken word on television made a far greater impact than the written script in newspapers. My dominance of the public platform was my strength throughout my political life.”

His trademark combative and candour during the hustings, nonetheless, did not always sit well with a new generation of Singaporeans. In the 2011 General Election, his remarks to reporters that Aljunied voters would not see me at the microphone. One of them spotted me lying on my back, flat on the floor in a state of collapse, as she thought,” Mr Lee recounted. He had, in fact, lain down “to recover from my exhaustion and recharge my batteries in between recording the three different versions of my broadcast”.

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Speaking in English, “Malay and Chinese in the year’s most important political speech, he would give an overview of the Government’s performance, spell out the key challenges and talk about policy changes — and, more often than not, remind his audience colourfully of Singapore’s vulnerabilities.

“With only notes, I would speak for one to two hours. But the important issues of the day … I had to learn how to hold the audience, both at the National Theatre and over television, and get them to follow my thought processes,” Mr Lee said.

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Political renewal, a life and death matter

‘My most important job was to get a team that could carry on the work’

While the obsession of many political leaders — especially those of new nation-states — was with holding on to power for as long as possible, Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s, from the very beginning, was the search for his successors.

In fact, it was barely over a year into his task of governing a newly-independent Singapore — when almost the entire Old Guard leadership were relatively young — that he expressed his worries in 1966 about the Republic’s “very thin crust of leadership”, for it was a “life-and-death” matter, in Mr Lee’s words, that developing countries such as Singapore had good political leadership.

And by the 1968 elections, his efforts to assemble a group of successors had begun — bright PhD holders such as Chiang Hai Ding and Wong Lin Ken were fielded, but he quickly learnt that political leadership required “other qualities besides a disciplined mind able to marshal facts and figures”.

“There is a heavy price to pay if mediocrities and opportunists ever take control of the government of Singapore,” he once said, because this tiny, resource-less island had nothing except “its strategic location and the people who can maximise this location by organisation, management, skills and, most important of all, brains”.

“Five years of such a government, probably a coalition and Singapore will be down on her knees ... Once in disarray, it will not be possible to put it together again.”

HEADHUNTING

When then-Finance Minister Hon Sui Sen asked in 1976 to retire after one more election, what Mr Hon said had a “profound influence” on Mr Lee’s conviction that “my most important job was to get a team that could carry on the work, otherwise we would fail”.

“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,’ ” Mr Lee recounted.

Helped by his closest collaborators, Dr Goh Keng Swee and Mr S Rajaratnam, Mr Lee endeavoured tirelessly to work out a system that would uncover, from a tiny catchment area, potential successors who could excel in an environment with a small margin for error.

Mr Lee in his book From Third World To First

These efforts ranged from systematically scouring the country’s top executives, academics and civil servants; to starting the Singapore Armed Forces Overseas Scholarship in 1971 to groom the best brains at a young age (by 1995, four former SAF scholars had entered politics and later became Cabinet Ministers — Lee Hsien Loong, George Yeo, Lim Hng Kiang and Teo Chee Hean).

Mr Lee even studied the headhunting processes of top multi-national corporations — he eventually adopted in 1983 Shell’s system of assessing a candidate’s “helicopter qualities” — and included evaluations by psychologists and psychiatrists in the People’s Action Party’s famous “tea sessions” with potential political recruits.

The attempts to inject new blood into the leadership were “not without stress”. “Several old-guard ministers were concerned about the pace at which they were being replaced,” he wrote in his memoirs.

PAYING COMPETITIVE SALARIES

Although the means of identifying able men and women were eventually settled, Mr Lee faced the challenge of convincing them to serve in politics.

The controversial solution he pushed through in 1985 of paying office-holders reasonable salaries — also aimed at deterring corruption — saw him lock horns with Opposition MPs for three hours in Parliament. The issue was revisited several times over the years, especially following Mr Lee’s radical proposal in 1995 to peg ministerial salaries, based on a formula, to the six highest-paid individuals in the private sector — and it remains contentious today for many Singaporeans.

Nonetheless, his response to the debate over the latest review of ministers’ pay in 2011 left no doubts as to Mr Lee’s continued conviction that this was how to get good people to step forward.

“To find able and committed men and women of integrity, willing to spend the prime of their lives, and going through the risky process of elections, we cannot underpay our ministers and argue that their sole reward should be their contribution to the public good,” he said in January 2012.

“We did not take Singapore from the Third to the First World by headhunting ministers willing to sacrifice their children’s future when undertaking a public service duty. We took a pragmatic course that did not require people of calibre to give up too much for the public good. We must not reduce Singapore to another ordinary country in...
the Third World by dodging the issue of competitive ministerial remuneration.”

This was a “clean” wage, however — there were none of the frills of office, such as houses or a State plane, that other countries’ ministers enjoyed. Per-
manent Secretary of the Public Service Division Yong Ying I noted: “We are possibly the only country in the world where ministers are not driven around in chauffeured limousines, but drive themselves in their own cars to work and to many public engagements.”

In 2006, when the saga involving Hotel Properties came to light, Mr Lee wanted the issue of unsolicited dis-
counts for purchases of new condomin-
ium units made by him and then Dep-
uty Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong explained in Parliament.

There had been market talk that the two leaders had been offered units in all of HPL’s property projects. Follow-
ing a parliamentary debate, no
impropriety was found in the sales. Nevertheless, the saga led to new rules for ministers, such as having to clear all property purchases with the Prime Minister, whether for occupation or investment.

At the conclusion of the debate, then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said he had not taken the decision to invest the matter lightly, noting that much was
at stake in terms of the reputation of the Government and the political cost, among other things.

But, referring to Mr Lee Kuan Yew, he said: “Integrity is the cornerstone of the PAP government. Senior Minister laid this cornerstone. It will survive the Senior Minister.”

The decision to give this a full and public hearing raised eyebrows inter-
nationally. “Almost anywhere in Asia, few would have cared. But this was Sin-
gapore, which takes pride in its image of incorruptibility,” noted an Asiaweek article. (The discounts, incidentally, were treated as unsolicited gifts and given to the Government.)

To Mr Lee, there was no room in government for self-aggrandisement or personality cults. Until his bronze bust was unveiled at the Singapore University of Technology and Design in August 2013, in all of six decades there were no public statues or build-
ings, and only two schools of learning, named after him.

HANDING OVER THE REINS

What set Mr Lee apart from many lead-
ers was the visible, planned manner in which he orchestrated handing over the reins in November 1990. He had origi-

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As far back as 1980, he had an-
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Mr Lee let the younger ministers pick their own leader — after the 1984 election, they unanimously chose Mr Goh — and it was years later that he revealed that his first choice had been Dr Tan as he found Mr Goh “wooden”. The decision to give this a full and

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Weeks before he passed the baton to Mr Goh, Mr Lee told foreign magazine Worldlink: “I think my mission will not be complete until the system has been handed over and works without me. Whether my colleagues and I have suc-
ceded or failed depends upon whether Singapore works without us.”

ETHOS OF STEWARDSHIP

Mr Lee remained in the Cabinet until
2011, first as Senior Minister, then as
Minister Mentor. His staying on at-
tracted criticisms periodically about whether he had truly relinquished pow-
er, particularly after it emerged that his
son would be the third Prime Minister.

But Mr Lee himself, as well as Prime
Ministers Goh and Lee Hsien Loong, asserted that his role had evolved to be-
come a resource person, or a guardian
to the younger team. Indeed, Mr Lee
had begun the process of ceding the reins well before he officially handed over in 1990.

As he told a rally crowd in the 1988
General Election: “This time you are casting your vote not in judgment over
my performance because I did not make the decisions … For four years, (Goh Chok Tong and his younger colleagues) have made all the major decisions. Yes, I presided over the Cabinet meetings, but even when I disagreed with them, I have not over-ruled them.”

This had included, for instance, mod-
ifying his position to take in the younger ministers’ views on the shape of the
Elected President scheme, which was
enacted in 1991, and not objecting to the plans to have casinos here even though he was once dead set against the idea.

Speaking to a team of journalists interviewing him for a book in 2009, Mr Lee said: “As long as I’m of value, my value is to try and consolidate what we’ve achieved in Singapore. I’m not interested in consolidating any leader or any system. Having seen this place rise, I do not want to see it fall — it’s as simple as that.”

This ethos of “honest stewardship”, observed Mr Yong, has permeated beyond the political sphere with key ramifications. Singapore’s bureau-
cracy, unlike others, having delivered professionally-run companies such as Singapore Technologies, Keppel and Singapore Airlines, devolved power and deliberately withdrew from con-
trol. “To use power for the right pur-
pose, and to be able to give it up and withdraw at the right time, is a critically important ethos we have imbibed from him,” she said. TEO XUANWEI
Policies for the bedroom and beyond

‘We would not have made economic progress if we had not intervened on very personal matters’

Mr Lee Kuan Yew did not seek to remake only Singapore; he wanted to remake Singaporeans too. His government’s social engineering efforts ranged from changing social habits that were a legacy of coolie ancestors to even, controversially, who should have babies so as to breed talent.

“I am often accused of interfering in the private lives of citizens,” he said in 1987. “Had I not done that, we wouldn’t be here today. And I say without the slightest remorse … we would not have made economic progress if we had not intervened on very personal matters.”

To make Singapore “a First World oasis in a Third World region”, he told The New York Times, “we built the infrastructure … The difficult part was getting the people to change their habits so that they behaved more like First World citizens, not like Third World citizens spitting and littering all over the place.”

The carrot was used and, more often than not, a big stick.

There were campaigns — more than 200 in the ’70s and ’80s — and the Keep Singapore Clean Campaign in 1965 was one of the first. There were fines for littering, jaywalking, spitting, urinating in lifts, failing to flush toilets and smoking in certain areas. (Mr Lee was himself a smoker who quit in his 80s when it caused him to lose his voice in election hustings)

With typically blunt imagery, Mr Lee said: “Mine is a very matter-of-fact approach to the problem. If you select a population and they’re educated and they’re properly brought up, then you don’t have to use too much of the stick because they would already have been trained. It’s like with dogs. You train it in a proper way from small. It will know that it’s got to leave, go outside to pee and to defecate.

“No, we are not that kind of society. We had to train adult dogs who even today deliberately urinate in the lifts….”

To improve the image of Singaporeans presented to tourists, a concerted effort was made with the launch, in June 1979, of the annual National Courtesy Campaign. Being polite, Mr Lee said in his speech, was a desirable attribute which was found in cultivated societies.

Still, it was another measure that the Republic became famous for around the world.

For many years, Mr Lee had been concerned about used gum stuck to pavements, medallions, which made for costly maintenance, but had resisted a ban. But when the MRT began running in 1987, vandalism prevented doors from closing. The Government banned chewing gum in 1992.

BIRTH RATES

The Government’s reach extended to the bedroom. A population boom in the early years threatened to overwhelm the fledgling nation’s housing, education and medical infrastructure, as well as strain the economy as well. So, the Stop at Two policy was born.

The Family Planning and Population Board was set up in 1966 to achieve zero population growth. Abortion was legalised and voluntary sterilisation encouraged among lower-educated women. Disincentives were imposed on those who had more than two — including reduced benefits in housing allocation, maternity leave and tax deductions, and lower priority for school places.

But by 1980, population growth had fallen below replacement level — to 1.5 per cent, from 2.8 in 1970 — which the Government realised only upon analysis in 1983.

Referring to criticism that it had been wrong, Mr Lee wrote: “Yes and no.” Without lower population growth, unemployment and schooling problems would not have been solved, he argued. “But we should have foreseen that the better-educated would have two fewer children, and the less-educated four or more.”

In hindsight, “we would have refined and targeted our campaign differently” right from the 1960s, he said.

In recent years, the Government poured money and effort into trying to get Singaporeans to have more babies, but the low birth rate has persisted. Mr Lee dismissed as “absurd” the accusation that the Stop at Two policy was to blame. Couples’ reluctance was caused by changed lifestyles and mindsets, he wrote, which no amount of financial perks could alter. “I cannot solve the problem and I have given up,” he said, leaving the task to the new generation of leaders.

GRADUATE MOTHERS SCHEME

Even more controversial was what arose from that 1980 census about better-educated women having fewer children. Mr Lee articulated his controversial eugenicist idea of breeding talent in his 1983 National Day Rally, televised live to the nation.

He told Singaporeans with trademark bluntness: “If you don’t include your women graduates in your breeding pool and leave them on the shelf, you would end up a more stupid society ... So what happens? There will be less bright people to support dumb people in the next generation. That’s a problem.”

He wrote later in recollection: “The press named it the Great Marriage Debate. As I had expected, the speech stirred a hornet’s nest.”

The next year, Mr Lee and then Education Minister Goh Keng Swee decided to grant graduate mothers priority in the best schools for their third child. The controversial Graduate Mothers Scheme proved divisive among the public and the Cabinet, with egalitarians such as Deputy Prime Minister S Rajaratnam outraged. The backlash contributed to the People’s Action Party’s 12-percentage-point drop in votes in that year’s General Election, and the scheme was dropped soon after.

But Mr Lee continued to hold on to his view that humans were gifted unequally by nature. He had cited studies of identical twins brought up separately, which found evidence that about 80 per cent of a person’s make-up was from nature and the rest from nurture.

While government policies could help equalise opportunities at the starting point, he wrote in Hard Truths To Keep Singapore Going: “I tell people frankly God has made us that way ... I can give you extra tuition, better environment, but the incremental benefits are not that much. And their peers with bigger engines will also make progress. So the gap will never be closed.

“Still ... we are always trying: Give them extra tuition, give them extra attention, encourage them. So when I receive an honourarium for my speaking engagements, I donate the money to give out scholarships and prizes to the lower end to encourage them to do well and upgrade from ITE to polytechnics and so on. Occasionally, some do make it.”

One measure of this era that did survive, however: The Social Development Unit (now called the Social Development Network), set up in 1984 to facilitate socialising between men and women graduates. While the Government’s matchmaking efforts drew some ridicule over the years, Mr Lee averred: “Traditional methods of choosing marriage partners had been ruptured by universal education. The Government had to provide alternatives to the family matchmakers of old.”
All the world was his stage

Mr Lee built close ties with both Asian and Western leaders, who valued his unique insights

In 1967, when Singapore was two years independent and he was a young Premier of only 44, a report described Mr Lee Kuan Yew giving a talk at Harvard University. As he spoke about the escalating Vietnam War and the role of the United States, the Crimson, university newspaper suggested: “Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of the city-state of Singapore, is a Mayor who talks as though he may one day be a world statesman... His concern for the fate of South-east Asia, fortified by his spectacular economic successes and his ambitious style, makes Lee a potential international strongman.”

Five decades on, this description seems prophetic. Mr Lee is to be credited with Singapore’s early transformation from Third World to First, as reflected in the title of the first volume of his memoirs. More than any other member of the founding generation of local politicians, he shaped politics and ensured continuity. Singapore’s survival and success are his touchstones. Yet, more than this, Mr Lee is remembered not only as the first Prime Minister of Singapore; his influence has transcended our city-state.

PRAGMATISM PLUS

Mr Lee came to power in a generation of nationalists who sought independ-ence from the Western powers in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt and Jawaharlal Nehru of India. These charismatic leaders captured the headlines of that tumultuous era and live on in their national histories. Not all, however, have enjoyed the same longevity or continued to enjoy standing and relevance.

Yet Mr Lee was never an idealist nor a demagogue of Third World ideology and utopian theories. One might even say that he does not leave behind a coherent, theoretical framework or populist slogan. He was famously pragmatic to focus on what works. But this did not mean he had no regard for principle. Rather, he blended the two.

In a recent assessment, Ambassador-at-Large and former Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Bilahari Kausikan remarked: “He understood that international order... the prerequisite for international law and organisation. So while you may work towards an ideal and must stand firm on basic principles, you settle for what is practical at any point of time, rather than embark on quixotic quests.”

A major factor that shaped Mr Lee’s world view was his experience of the Japanese occupation, as he himself has alluded to on several occasions. The illusion of colonial superiority and of Singapore as the “impregnable fortress” was so suddenly and savagely torn apart that the experience anchored Mr Lee to an unsentimental view of human nature and a focus on power. This was reinforced by events in the early history of Singapore: Konfrontasi with Sukarno’s Indonesia, the exit from and tensions with Malaysia, and the withdrawal of the British bases in 1971.

NIMBLE AMONG THE GIANTS

These experiences drove Mr Lee to be a shrewd and nimble diplomat to ensure stability and security for Singapore in a difficult world. A key part of Mr Lee’s foreign policy has been in this context: he understood as efforts to engage with the powerful and especially with the US. During the Cold War, Mr Lee and Singapore made every effort to befriend America as the dominant superpower in Asia in the post-WWII world and bulwark against communism.

Survival was moreover not only accepting American protection and, while Singapore did not become a US ally, Mr Lee emphasised a broader engagement. As Ms Chan Heng Chee, former long-serving Ambassador to the US, recounted: “For Lee Kuan Yew, the US role in Asia was not just a military one. The US offered markets, technology and investments to the region that no other power could match. This was essential for the emergence of the four Asian tigers and the ASEAN (Association of South-east Asian Nations) countries.”

Another important dimension in Mr Lee’s foreign engagements arose as he developed a close relationship with China. Beginning from Deng Xiaoping’s historic visit to Singapore in 1978, Mr Lee made every effort to engage the reforming China, politically and economically.

Yet as he developed this relationship with China, Mr Lee was not one to indulge in the idea that China and Asia’s future could be separated from the American role. Instead, with his knowledge and access to the reforming China, Mr Lee played a major role in helping America and the West better understand China.

When the Tiananmen incident on June 4, 1989, triggered US threats of sanctions and boycotts, Mr Lee articulated a view of human rights and “Asian values” that responded to Western criticism. While not the only Asian spokesman with such views, then and now still controversial, his testimony held weight among world leaders not only because of his innate understanding of China, but because he had built up long-standing ties and trust.

Conversely, Mr Lee also shared other somewhat less welcome insights into China. This was never easy. He believed that China and the rest of Asia would benefit from the continued presence of the US.

In his keynote address after receiving a lifetime achievement award from the US-ASEAN Business Council in Washington, DC, in 2009, Mr Lee said: “The size of China makes it impossible for the rest of Asia, including Japan and India, to match it in weight and capacity in about 20 to 30 years. So we need America to strike a balance.”

His comments were misconstrued by some netizens and commentators in China. But throughout, Chinese leaders — from Deng Xiaoping and Mr Jiang Zemin to Mr Hu Jintao and Mr Xi Jinping — have understood that this and...
More than anything else, Mr Lee’s own personality, with its immense clarity of thought and expression, was unique to him, valued by so many and seen in the clearest, unvarnished way. As a 32-year-old, Mr Lee said: “I have been accused of many things in my life, but not even my worst enemy has ever accused me of being afraid to speak my mind.”

This was one of his key strengths, in Mr Kausik’s view: “The disciplined clarity of his thought and expression was one of the primary sources of the influence Mr Lee wielded, disproportionate for the leader of a small country like Singapore. His views were valued because they were unvarnished and gave a fresh and unique perspective. He said things that leaders of much larger and more powerful countries may well have thought and may have liked to say, but for one reason or another, could not themselves prudently say. And so he made Singapore relevant.”

Speaking in 2009, Mr Lee had said of Singapore’s foreign policy fundamentals: “Independence was thrust upon Singapore. The fundamentals of our foreign policy were forged during those vulnerable early years. They remain relevant because small countries have little or no political clout in the region, let alone the world. A small country must seek a maximum number of friends, while maintaining the freedom to be itself as a sovereign and independent nation. Both parts of the equation — a maximum number of friends and freedom to be ourselves — are equally important and interrelated.

“Friendship, in international relations, is not a function of goodwill or personal affection. We must make ourselves relevant so that other countries have an interest in our continued survival and prosperity as a sovereign and independent nation. Singapore cannot take its relevance for granted. Small countries perform no vital or irreplaceable function in the international system. Singapore has to continually reconstruct itself and keep its relevance to the world and to create political and economic space. This is the economic imperative for Singapore.”

Yet Mr Lee also forged close personal friendships with world leaders, amity that has helped Singapore in many areas, from security to economics. His personal ties with regional leaders such as late Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak and Indonesian President Suharto smoothed the way for the founding of ASEAN in 1967. His friendship with members of United Kingdom Prime Minister Harold Wilson’s government helped delay the British troops’ withdrawal to late 1971, buying Singapore time to build up its own defence forces. He also held long-term friendships with world leaders and senior officials such as British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, words: He put things succinctly and with the right nuance.”

Despite his personal friendships with world leaders, he was not afraid to stand up to a greater power where needed. There were famous instances, such as in 1968, when he turned down a direct appeal by Indonesian President Suharto to pardon two Indonesian marines for the MacDonald House bombing; and in 1994, when, as Senior Minister, he refused American appeals against the caning of Michael Fay. In widely reported comments on local television, he had said of the US: “The country does not restrain punish the individuals, forgiving them for whatever they have done... That’s why the whole country is in chaos. Drugs, violence, unemployment and homelessness, all sorts of problems in its society.”

Former Prime Minister SR Nathan also recalls how Mr Lee declined a gift from late Chinese Premier Hu Gaofeng on his first visit to China in 1976. The gift was a book by Australian academic Neville Maxwell titled the 1962 Sino-Indian war, and Hua told Mr Lee that it was “the correct version of the India-China war”.

Mr Nathan said: “When PM took the book, he looked at it, flipped through and then handed it back to Premier Hua, saying, ‘Prime Minister, this is your version of the war. There is another version, the Indian version. And in any case I am from South-East Asia — it’s nothing to do with us’.”

Mr Hua showed no reaction, but a silence fell in the room.

Mr Lee was never afraid of controversy. He did not court headlines deliberately, but neither would he self-censor if it meant his views were less sharply focused and expressed. As a 32-year-old, Mr Lee said: “I have been accused of many things in my life, but not even my worst enemy has ever accused me of being afraid to speak my mind.”

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This was one of his key strengths, in Mr Kausik’s view: “The disciplined clarity of his thought and expression was one of the primary sources of the influence Mr Lee wielded, disproportionate for the leader of a small country like Singapore. His views were valued because they were unvarnished and gave a fresh and unique perspective. He said things that leaders of much larger and more powerful countries may well have thought and may have liked to say, but for one reason or another, could not
T he relationship between China, one of the largest countries in the world, and Singapore, a little red dot in South-east Asia, has been widely regarded as special or unique. Mr Lee Kuan Yew has been instrumental in building this relationship.

Over the past few decades, China has successfully made two simultaneous transformations.

Internally, it has lifted itself from being one of the poorest economies to becoming the world’s No. 2.

Externally, it has broken out of isolation to become part of the international system.

Why has Singapore under Mr Lee succeeded in building a special relationship with China?

The answer is simple: Mr Lee, and Singapore, have been an important part of China’s dual transformations.

He once told journalist Tom Plate, in Giants Of Asia: Conversations With Lee Kuan Yew: “The ideas that Deng Xiaoping formed, if he had not come here (in the 1970s) and seen the Western multinationalss in Singapore producing wealth for us, training our people so as a result we were able to build a prosperous society, then he might never have opened up ... opening up the coastal SEZs (Special Economic Zones) that eventually led to the whole of China opening up by joining the World Trade Organization ...”

THE PRE-DENG ERA

Since the late Deng, Chinese leaders have appreciated Mr Lee’s contribution to China’s modernisation, viewing him as its close friend. Even though this relationship began under Deng, the initial effort was laid by Mr Lee in the pre-Deng years.

Up to 1979, China did not recognise Singapore’s existence as an independent state and Mr Lee was often derided as a “running dog of United States and British imperialism”.

When the US began to normalise ties with China under then President Richard Nixon, Mr Lee saw a chance to improve Singapore’s relations with China. He visited China in 1976, meeting Mao Zedong and his successor, Hua Guofeng. Although Mao and Hua did not impress Mr Lee very much, ties between the countries slowly improved.

Mr Lee’s first visit to Beijing helped cement Singapore’s commercial ties with China. At the same time, Chinese perception of Singapore began to change.

However, real change in the Singapore-China relationship took place only after Deng returned to power in the late 1970s.

Mr Lee recounted in his book From Third World To Third what he told Deng during his 1978 visit to Singapore: “ASEAN (Association of South-east Asian Nations) governments regarded radio broadcasts from China appealing directly to their ethnic Chinese as dangerous subversion ... Deng listened silently. He had never seen it in this light ... He knew that I had spoken the truth. Abruptly, he asked: ‘What do you want me to do?’”

Not long after, China stopped broadcasting to South-east Asia.

After Deng

In 1992, the Chinese Communist Party held its 14th National Congress and formally incorporated Deng’s theory on a socialist market economy into the party’s charter. Deng had retired from politics and rarely appeared in public. But the solid foundation laid by him and Mr Lee helped drive the bilateral relationship forward. As China continued its steady growth, economic and business ties between the two countries deepened.

The main reason is that Singapore has constantly made itself relevant to China’s development by sharing its experiences and best practices. In 1994, when China initiated a new wave of industrialisation, the China-Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park was established. In 2007, when China’s environmental problems became a hot issue before the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the idea to jointly build an eco-city was broached and later developed into the Sino-Singapore Tianjin Eco-city.

Other key projects include the Sino-Singapore Guangzhou Knowledge City, Singapore–Chengdu High-Tech Park and the Sino-Singapore Jilin Food Zone. These projects provide avenues for existing and aspiring leaders from both sides and at different levels to meet each other regularly to strengthen personal ties.

Emiritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong said: “Mr Lee’s good relations with China’s leaders enabled Singapore and the leaders who came after Mr Lee to ride on those good relationships.”

LEE AS CHINA’S INTERLOCUTOR TO THE WORLD

Singapore’s relationship with China is special not only because Mr Lee (and Singapore) have contributed to China’s modernisation, but also because he (and Singapore) have helped the world, particularly the West, and China to understand each other.

No leader appears to be as candid as Mr Lee; he often reminded China how to integrate itself into the world. At times, his comments ruffled feathers, particularly among the younger generation of Chinese. But China’s leaders understand that Mr Lee’s comments were in their interest.

In the same way, Mr Lee helped the West to understand China. Since Deng, the West has frequently dismissed China’s growth and its sustainability. Mr Lee would tell the Americans and Europeans that China’s growth was indeed real. He often cautioned the US against underestimating China and trying to contain this rising power. Because of his innate understanding of China, Mr Lee’s views were sought and closely listened to by other world leaders.

Former US Secretary of State George Shultz once said: “He (Mr Lee) didn’t just go see leaders in Beijing. He was able to travel in the country and see people in all sorts of occupations and age levels, so he is a very penetrating observer ... I found that very valuable to listen to what he had to say, as we tried to formulate in the US how we would approach China.”

Today, China is an important player on the world stage and its leaders can talk directly to other world leaders everywhere. But Chinese leaders continue to appreciate Singapore’s view on the world. As then Vice-President Xi Jinping told Mr Lee during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games: “We will need you for a long time. I have been to Singapore. I know what you have and our people want to learn. We get more from you than from America.”

Singapore is constantly finding ways to stay relevant to China. Both countries now cooperate in areas such as financial cooperation, food safety and social management. For China, it is even more important to get its relationship right with a small, neighbouring country such as Singapore. This will be the best litmus test of its peaceful rise.

ZHENG YONGNIAN

Mr Lee played a vital part in Beijing’s transformations and in building bilateral ties.
Mr Lee was seen as a vital interpreter of events in Asia by successive American Presidents

Mr Lee Kuan Yew has been the most instrumental factor in the development of Singapore’s relations with the United States. In fact, bilateral ties were initially very much centred on the friendship between Mr Lee and successive American leaders who deeply respected his strong conviction, clear big-picture vision and extraordinary strategic leadership.

The Vietnam War could be said to have strengthened Mr Lee’s cachet and standing with Washington. Mr Lee saw American participation in the war as buying time for non-Communist states in Southeast Asia, and played a role in stiffening US resolve to resist Communism. Singapore’s independent and non-aligned foreign policy orientation gave him great credence within the American policy establishment, as a neutral party supporting their military campaign in Vietnam.

Mr Lee remained a vital interpreter of events in Asia long after the Vietnam War ended. His standing in American policy circles has been explained by Foreign Minister K Shanmugam, who notes that Mr Lee recognised some fundamental truths about the US and the world well before other states and leaders. Mr Lee saw that strong US presence was vital to maintain peace and balance in Asia as the Asian economies developed, and supported it long before it was fashionable to do so. Singapore was often in the minority of voices, sometimes even alone, in speaking up for the US in the developing world and forums such as the Non-Aligned Movement.

BELIEF IN AMERICA’S STRENGTH

Later, again under Mr Lee’s leadership, Singapore stepped up to help the US maintain its presence in the region even as the US drew down its assets elsewhere. In November 1990, in one of his last acts as Prime Minister, Mr Lee signed a Memorandum of Understanding with then US Vice President Dan Quayle in Washington, offering enhanced use of facilities in Singapore to American military aircraft and naval vessels as a contribution to sustaining US forward military position in Southeast Asia.

But as he worked with American statesmen at the strategic level and preserved the balance of power in Asia, Mr Lee saw flaws within American society. Although he praised America’s strengths, its enterprising spirit and openness to talent, Mr Lee did not shy away from speaking of America’s weaknesses such as the widespread availability of guns, and as he puts it, the breakdown of civil society and erosion of the moral underpinnings of American society.

As America leaders valued Mr Lee’s views on geopolitics and the world order, and admired his accomplishments, they did not take to heart his criticism. In some cases, American opinion makers also agreed with Mr Lee’s analyses of the problems troubling their country. They knew that Mr Lee believed in the American can-do way and that the US is the only country with the strength and determination to deal with the challenges faced by the global community. Even as the US was affected by the recent financial crisis and some saying it was in decline, Mr Lee repeatedly reminded others not to underestimate American creativity, resilience and innovative spirit. He was confident the US will find its feet again. Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger writes: “Lee has made himself an indispensable friend of the United States, not primarily by the power he represents, but by the excellence of his thinking. His analysis is of such quality and depth that his counterpart consider meeting with him as a way to educate themselves ... Every American president who has dealt with him has benefited from the fact that, on international issues, he has identified the future of his country with the fate of democracies. Furthermore, Lee can tell us about the nature of the world that we face, especially penetrating insights into the thinking of his region. Lee’s analyses shed light on the most important challenge that the United States confronts over the long term: How to build a fundamental and organic relationship with Asia, including China. There is nobody who can teach us more about the nature and the scope of this effort than Lee Kuan Yew. ... Lee is not only one of the seminal leaders of our period, but also a thinker recognized for his singular strategic acumen.”

Mr Lee’s long-term vision and strategic intellect single-handedly contributed to the cementing of the close ties that Singapore now enjoys with the US. Singapore and US officials often articulate that Mr Lee has established the institutions and processes for both countries to pursue strategic interests that would normally be impossible between a small island state and the global superpower. American policymakers would always recall how Mr Lee developed the basis of bilateral friendship and access arrangements for American forces in Singapore. They also believed that it was Mr Lee’s persuasive influence that laid the ground for the US to enter into negotiations with the Singapore Government on a bilateral free trade agreement. Through Mr Lee’s readiness to meet a large number of officials from the American policy establishment, substantial linkages have been built up that are now permanent and regular exchanges between the Singapore and US authorities.

Differences in policy and governance have surfaced from time to time. There will always be different priorities and emphasis in policy implementation, but bilateral ties are now locked into a pragmatic partnership going beyond individual personalities. The solid foundation established by Mr Lee has allowed both countries to focus on the strategic issues and the big picture to substantiate the unique relationship. Ultimately, the ability of Singapore to articulate regional concerns and views, particularly on geopolitical and strategic issues, and to foster consensus in various international forums on common challenges facing the world will ensure a continuous dialogue and cooperation between the two countries.

Singapore leaders will continue to have access to the top policy-makers in Washington. Yet, they would need to establish their own level of influence and strategic value to the US. Countries in Asia have new leaders who can engage the US directly and in their own ways. This is different from the situation when Mr Lee was in government. The quality of Singapore’s strategic assessment of developments in Asia and beyond will determine the level of confidence, trust and value which American policy-makers will accord to Singapore.

Ong Keng Yong is Executive Deputy Chairman of the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University. This piece was written in his personal capacity.
A close but difficult relationship

Ties between Malaysia and Singapore have been marked by their share of ups and downs.

The Republic of Singapore’s tumultuous relationship with its neighbour across the Causeway during Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s tenure as Prime Minister was often attributed to his personal relationship with Malaysia’s leaders.

But in Mr Lee’s view, the root cause of the problems that arose when Singapore separated from Malaysia in 1965 lay in “our diametrically different approaches to the problems facing our two multiracial societies”.

“A multiracial society of equal citizens was unacceptable to the UMNO leaders of Malaysia in 1965 and remained unacceptable in 1999,” he said in his 2000 memoirs From Third to First, referring to the United Malays National Organisation, the largest party in Malaysia’s ruling coalition.

Malaysian politicians wanted independent Singapore “to be obliging and accommodating” in an abang-adik (big brother-little brother) relationship — “with little brother giving way graciously” to Malaysian interests, Mr Lee said.

Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman tried to use three levers — the military, economy and water — to force Singapore to follow Malaysia’s lead.

“We countered the military leverage by building up the SAF (Singapore Armed Forces). We overcame their economic hold by leapfrogging them and the region to link up with the industrial countries,” Mr Lee said in 2000.

But Singapore had no choice but to continue to rely on Malaysia for water, which was to remain a major sticking point in bilateral relations for four decades.

Relations across the Causeway became “relatively trouble-free” for a few years after Mr Abdul Razak Hussein became Malaysia’s Prime Minister in September 1970.

To mark improving bilateral relations since Singapore’s independence, Mr Lee made his first official visit to Malaysia in March 1972. Mr Razak returned the visit in 1973. During the Razak years, relations between the two countries were “equable”, with few serious disagreements, said Mr Lee.

Mr Lee had a good working relationship with Malaysia’s third Prime Minister, Hussein Onn, whom he described as “open and direct” in their dealings, “coming straight to the point, unlike Razak”.

Despite the amicable relations between Mr Lee and Mr Hussein, bilateral ties remained impeded by UMNO leaders who were suspicious of Singapore.

As Singapore grew, the Malaysian attitude towards economic cooperation was one of, in Mr Lee’s words, “envy and disdain”. Malaysia subsequently took a series of measures to reduce the import and export of goods through Singapore. For example, from 1973, all goods shipped from one part of Malaysia to another had to be consigned from their own ports, in order to qualify for import tax exemption.

Timber exports to Singapore were also banned, badly affecting the island’s plywood factories and sawmills.

Johor leaders had also convinced Mr Hussein that Singapore was out to harm the Malaysian state and prevent its economic progress, noted Mr Lee.

Malaysia continued to take a series of actions that would slow down the Singapore economy.

For example, the Johor state government banned the export of sand and turf, while the federal government ruled that from 1977, all exports from Johor to East Malaysia had to be shipped through the Pasir Gudang port, instead of Singapore.

Despite such developments on the economic front, Mr Lee still had a good start with Malaysia’s fourth Prime Minister, reaching out to Dr Mahathir Mohamad while he was still Deputy Prime Minister by inviting him to visit Singapore in 1978.

Expecting Dr Mahathir to succeed Mr Hussein, Mr Lee had wanted to put their old antagonism behind them.

Back in May 1965, during a session of the Malaysian Parliament in Kuala Lumpur, Dr Mahathir had denounced Singapore’s People’s Action Party, led by Mr Lee, as “pro-Chinese, communist-oriented and positively anti-Malay”.

Dr Mahathir subsequently made several visits to Singapore, during which they had “long and frank exchanges of several hours each to clear the air surrounding our suspicions of each other”, Mr Lee said.

Mr Lee told Dr Mahathir about Singapore’s fears that Malaysia would cut off the water supply to the Republic — something that Malaysia publicly threatened to do whenever their bilateral differences cropped up — though the guarantee of water supply was part of the 1965 Separation Agreement.

Dr Mahathir said he accepted an independent Singapore and would not undermine it.

“I believed I had satisfied him that I was not interested in out-maneuvering him, that I wanted a business-like relationship,” Mr Lee said.

Despite the differences between the two that would emerge in later years after Mr Abdul Razak Hussein, relations between Malaysia and Singapore were “relatively trouble-free” for a few years after Mr Abdul Razak Hussein became Malaysia’s Prime Minister in September 1970.

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Mr Lee and former Indonesian President Suharto in Jakarta in 2006. Mr Lee, then Minister Mentor, was on a five-day visit to Indonesia. PHOTO: REUTERS

Building rapport with Indonesia

Mr Lee had a good relationship with Suharto, but also sought to better understand Jakarta in the post-strongman era

Mr Lee and Suharto had a good personal relationship throughout their political careers, despite low points in bilateral ties. One was the execution of two Indonesian marines in Singapore for the 1965 bombing of MacDonald House in Orchard Road, despite a direct appeal by Suharto.

However, Mr Lee’s gesture to lay flowers on the marines’ graves in 1973 helped soothe the tension and showed Singapore’s commitment to improving relations with Indonesia.

The “empat mata” meetings between Suharto and Mr Lee during Association of Southeast Asian Nations and other meetings further helped build rapport and confidence.

Mr Lee wrote in his book From Third World To First: “Our friendship overcame the many prejudices between Singaporeans of Chinese descent and Indonesians. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, we met almost every year to keep in touch, exchange views and discuss matters that cropped up.”

During the 1997-98 financial crisis and as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) put pressure on Indonesia to undertake structural reforms, Mr Lee was against sudden regime change in Indonesia. He believed discontinuity would worsen its already precarious situation.

Despite Suharto’s fall from power in 1998 and against popular opinion in Indonesia, Mr Lee saw him as a “patriot.”

Writing in From Third World To First, he viewed the change with concern and some sorrow: “It was an immense personal tragedy for a leader who had turned an impoverished Indonesia of 1965 into an emerging tiger economy, educated his people and built the infrastructure for Indonesia’s continued development.”

In a display of personal diplomacy, Mr Lee made a trip to see Suharto shortly before the Indonesian leader died in 2008.

In contrast, Mr Lee’s views of Suharto’s successors were mixed. His initial reaction to the prospect that Mr B J Habibie, who served as Vice-President to Suharto, would take over from the latter was less than positive. But later, even after Mr Habibie remarked that Singapore was a “little red dot in a sea of green”, Mr Lee reassessed him to be “highly intelligent, but mercurial and volatile”, as he wrote in From Third World To First.

Mr Lee also credited Mr Habibie for Indonesia’s decentralisation efforts that empowered the districts and municipalities, which helped prevent separatist tendencies from mushrooming.

Later, in Tom Plate’s 2010 Conversations With Lee Kuan Yew, Mr Lee would say of Indonesia: “Successor Habibie made a mess of it. Then Gus Dur made a bigger mess. Megawati calmed it down. SBY (Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono) has improved it slightly, but there’s a long way to go.”

Beyond personalities, Mr Lee also made a number of visits to the country to meet a broad range of political actors in order to better understand post-Suharto Indonesia. This habit of reaching out to senior Indonesian leaders continues today — Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong held retreats with his Indonesian counterpart in 2010, 2012 and 2013. 

Pushpanathan Sundram and Simon Tay

Pushpanathan Sundram is former deputy secretary-general of ASEAN for ASEAN Economic Community, managing director at EAS Strategic Advice, Asia and senior research fellow at the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA).

Simon Tay is chairman of SILA and author of Asia Alone: The Dangerous Post-Crisis Divide from America.
Preserving S’pore’s security via ASEAN

The regional grouping helped buttress solidarity while maintaining a balance of power

Four decades ago, Indonesia, together with Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Singapore, established the Association of South-east Asian Nations, or ASEAN, at a time when the region was in turbulence. It was August 1967: the Cold War was at its peak, dividing the region into communist and non-communist blocs, with a fault-line running right through the heart of South-east Asia. The United States’ war campaign in Vietnam was also intensifying.

Compounding the situation were the disputes between South-east Asian countries. Singapore had been forced out of Malaysia two years earlier. Indonesia had recently wound up “konfrontasi” with Malaysia and Singapore. Malaysia and the Philippines were also locked in a dispute over Sabah, while Brunei had put down, with the help of British forces, an internal rebellion aided by Indonesia.

For Mr Lee Kuan Yew, these factors reinforced the fact that Singapore was situated in “a turbulent, volatile, unsettled region”.

THE NEED FOR ASEAN

ASEAN’s formation was therefore based on an overarching rationale to counter communism and act as a unifying force during the Cold War. It was hoped that member states would also build their own resilience by managing their differences and preventing proxy wars in the region.

In From Third World To First, Mr Lee wrote: “The unspoken objective of ASEAN was to gain strength through solidarity ahead of the power vacuum that would come with an impending British and later a possible US withdrawal.”

It was clear that the leaders — Mr Lee, former Indonesian President Suharto and former Malaysian Prime Ministers Hussein Onn and, later, Mahathir Mohamad — shared an innate understanding of the situation and different sensitivities of the region during ASEAN’s formative years.

Mr Lee’s views of the grouping were shaped by Konfrontasi with Indonesia and the Vietnam War. To him, ASEAN was a vehicle that would not only buttress regional solidarity, but also maintain a delicate power balance between Indonesia, the largest power in South-east Asia, and its neighbours.

Mr Lee ensured that the voices of smaller states were not lost. In a 1999 Asiaweek interview, he said: “We don’t pick quarrels. As ASEAN’s smallest member, we have to stand our ground, or our rights will be rolled over.”

When Vietnam invaded and occupied Cambodia in 1978, for example, Mr Lee was the first to write to then Thai Prime Minister Kiartiaksuk Chumman and Chair of ASEAN to urge the organisation to stand united and steadfast in supporting the Cambodian coalition and pressure Vietnam to withdraw its troops. He later wrote: “We had spent much time and resources to thwart the Vietnamese in Cambodia because it was in our interest that aggression be seen not to pay.”

Mr Lee saw ASEAN as a means to preserve the security of a small state like Singapore, especially with its predominantly ethnic Chinese population, in a sea of Malays. He helped cement the fact that Singapore is a South-east Asian country by recognising China in 1990 only after Indonesia had done so.

By using his friendship with Suharto and being sensitive to Indonesia’s feelings on thorny issues, such as China, Mr Lee was able to carve out a reasonable space for Singapore in ASEAN. Mr Lee wrote in From Third World To First: “Under Suharto, Indonesia did not act like a hegemon. This made it possible for the others to accept Indonesia as first among equals.”

FUTURE OF ASEAN

Later, with the collapse of communism, the reality of a multi-polar world, and China’s growing heft in the region, ASEAN continued to maintain a strategic balance of power in the region.

The grouping engaged the world’s major powers through multilateral mechanisms such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Plus Three Meeting, which includes China, Japan and South Korea.

At the same time, ASEAN needed a new force for unity: Economics. This economic imperative started in 1992, after Mr Lee had stepped down, with the launch of the ASEAN Free Trade Area and its goal of economic integration.

ASEAN enlarged from 1997 onwards to include new members. By the 2003 ASEAN Summit, member states would call for closer economic integration and the creation of an ASEAN Community by 2020, a goal which has now been advanced to 2025.

As one of the founders of ASEAN, Mr Lee had from the start engaged with new members and encouraged their opening and entry into the regional group and international community. For example, ASEAN and Singapore had worked hard on the Cambodian question early on, with Mr Lee personally travelling the world to highlight the issue.

Yet, Mr Lee also rapidly adjusted to the realities and possibilities of the post-Cold War world. In a 1999 Asiaweek interview, he said: “There’s no great ideological divide between the ASEAN countries. The communist system is gone. We are just varying degrees of democracy or authoritarianism. Every country wants economic and social progress. After the severe financial and economic setbacks, nobody’s got time for ideological or expansionist issues.”

Vietnam, in particular, came into focus for him. Mr Lee first visited it in the early ‘90s and had been appointed an adviser to its government. He then made visits to the Singapore-Vietnam industrial parks that were opened as part of inter-governmental cooperation.

Vietnam’s successful integration into ASEAN’s fold is proof that economic integration is indeed the path forward. Already, the organisation has announced that it has achieved 80 per cent of its goals in the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint to be an integrated market by 2015.

As Mr Lee put it in 2011’s Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going: “The logic of joining markets is irrefutable and it will happen.”

When, and not if, economic integration occurs, it would certainly validate Mr Lee’s confidence in ASEAN’s ability to serve as a viable force for unity and prosperity. Pushpanathan Sundram and Simon Tay
The love of his life

"Without her, I would be a different man, with a different life."

S he was his closest friend, his "tower of strength", for more than three-quarters of his life — the woman who got his attention when he bestowed him in school, who ran his household and their law firm, and without whom he would have been hard-pressed to enter politics.

Madam Kwa Geok Choo and Mr Lee Kuan Yew were often seen as inseparable. But the Singapore public found out just how much she meant to him only when he published his memoirs in 1999 — telling all for the first time about the great love of his life and revealing an unexpected side to his unsentimental, hard-nosed public face.

At Raffles College, she had beaten him to be the top student in English and economics at the end of the first term, giving Mr Lee stiff competition for the coveted Queen’s Scholarship.

When the Japanese Occupation interrupted their studies, they recon nected under different circumstances: Mr Lee and her brother-in-law ran a business making stationery glue.

With their friendship blossoming by September 1944, Mr Lee knew Mrs Lee well enough to invite her to his 21st birthday dinner, "an event not without significance" in those days.

With the end of the war, Mr Lee decided to read law in England on his birthday dinner, "an event not without significance" in those days.

With the end of the war, Mr Lee decided to read law in England on his family’s savings. Mrs Lee, who was two-and-a-half years older than Mr Lee, said she would wait for his return.

In the months before he left in September 1946, the couple spent a lot of time together and took photographs.

Mr Lee wrote in his memoirs: "We were young and in love, anxious to record this moment of our lives ... We both hoped she would go back to Raffles College, win the Queen’s Scholarship to read law and join me wherever I might be.

"She was totally committed. I sensed it. I was equally determined to keep my commitment to her."

Indeed, Mrs Lee was awarded the Queen’s Scholarship the next year. However, the Colonial Office could not find her a university place for that academic year and said she would have to wait till 1948.

Mr Lee, who was studying at Cambridge’s Fitzwilliam College, managed to eventually arrange a meeting with the mistress of Girton College and persuaded her to take in Mrs Lee.

She arrived in Britain in October.

Back in Singapore in August 1950, the young couple got married on Sept 30 for a second time. They started their careers doing their pupillage at Laycock & Ong and, in 1955 with Mr Lee’s brother Dennis, they set up the law firm Lee & Lee.

One of Singapore’s best conveysancing lawyers, she also in 1965 helped Law Minister Eddie Barker draft the clauses in the Separation Agreement to guarantee the water agreements with the state of Johor. And for most of Mr Lee’s political career, she was his unofficial speechproofreader — indeed, since his first speech to the Malayan Forum in 1950.

But for the most part, she devoted herself to the role behind the scenes of being her husband’s staunchest supporter, running both the household, especially after the birth of their first son Hsien Loong in 1952, and the law firm as Mr Lee immersed himself in politics.

Not only did her income enable him to continue in office over the years, she also put his mind at ease, Mr Lee said once, for "in case anything untoward should happen to me, she would be able to bring up my three children well".

While she was often seen by Mr Lee’s side over the years at official functions and on official trips, Mr Lee said he “made a point not to discuss the formulation of policies with her, and she was scrupulous in not reading notes or faxes that were sensitive”.

But he did pay attention to her uncanny gut feel for people’s characters. "She would tell me whether she would trust that man or not. And often she was right," he said.

When he penned his memoirs, she would stay up with him until 4am going over the drafts, correcting, critiquing and getting him to write “clear and crisp”.

FACED CRISIS TOGETHER

In terms of their relationship as a couple, they did not dodge difficult personal problems, but faced them and sorted them out early on, Mr Lee said. "We gradually influenced each other’s ways and habits, we adjusted and accommodated each other. We knew that we could not stay starry-eyed lovers all our lives, that life was an ever-ongoing challenge with new problems to resolve and manage."

When their younger son Hsien Yang married in 1981, Mr Lee wrote the newlyweds a letter with advice on marriage: "We have never allowed the other to feel abandoned and alone in any moment of crisis. Quite the contrary, we have faced all major crises in our lives together, sharing our fears and hopes, and our subsequent grief and exultation. These moments of crisis have bonded us closer together.”

Mr Lee’s brother, Mr Lee Suan Yew, described the couple as being inseparable — they had to be seated together at family dinners.

While her husband did not prefer the arts, Mrs Lee loved classical music. "And he, being very much in love with his wife, would comply and follow her to the Esplanade and listen to some concerts," Mr Lee’s brother said.

Others, such as former minister George Yeo, who had the opportunity to observe the couple on overseas trips, spoke of their very special close relationship. Education Minister Heng Swee Keat recalled their bantering over Mr Lee’s sweet tooth and how Mrs Lee would “with good humour keep score of the week’s ‘ration’.”

While she sat quietly and unobtrusively, anyone who saw them would know “how much strength her presence gave her husband” at official events.

HER STROKE AND HIS TOUGHEST MOMENTS

In October 2003, Mrs Lee suffered a stroke while she and Mr Lee were in London. She was flown back to Singapore for an operation. As Mr Lee had already planned to have a prostate
The proud father
I've got three children. I'm very proud of:

A way from the public eye, Mr Lee Kuan Yew was an “Eastern” father who, while not ostentatious about showing love and affection, made it evident to his family. His family was his greatest personal achievement, he once said: “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.”

Elder son Hsien Loong was born in 1952, daughter Wei Ling in 1955 and son Hsien Yang two years later. Mr Lee and his wife took pains to ensure they grew up living normal lives after he became Prime Minister in 1959 when they were aged seven, five and two, respectively.

For one thing, they decided not to live at Sri Temasek, the Prime Minister’s official residence at the Istana, “because that would be a very bad thing for the kids to get an inflated idea of who you are, what you are, with all the servants around and the gardeners.”

But watching his children grow up also “constantly reminded” Mr Lee of “the need to build a safe and wholesome environment for our children to live in.”

Mrs Lee did most of the nurturing and would return from work to their Oxley Road home daily to have lunch with the kids. She would use the cane when they were very naughty, but for Mr Lee, “a stern rebuke was effective enough”, he said. “Having a violent father turned me against using physical force.”

Mr Lee made a point of spending time with his children. At least once a year, sometimes twice, he would take the family to Cameron Highlands or Fraser’s Hill for two weeks. His brother Mr Lee Hsien Yang said: “He’s not a physical person; he’s not a man who’ll hug you and so on, but his love for the children was also tremendous.” His kind of love was “very Eastern, not Western in style.”

Mr Lee was also a practical father. At a time when he himself, being raised English-speaking, was picking up Mandarin to win political support among the Chinese-speaking masses, his three children spent the first 12 years of their education at Chinese-medium schools. He said: “I spoke to my kids in Mandarin until they got to secondary school. But Chinese, my wife, spoke to the kids in English. From the age of six, they had Malay tuition at home.”

His eldest son was even made to join the Scouts, where he could interact with Malay children. “Education in three languages was very important with the merger with Malaysia a reality. It was a chance for the children to expand their social circle,” Mr Lee explained.

The education of his children was a very important responsibility to him as a father and he was satisfied when all three earned scholarships. “Loong” followed in his political footsteps and later became State Minister of Singapore. Mr Lee Hsien Yang took the business track, helming Singapore Telecommunications and other firms, for example; while Ms Lee Wei Ling went the medical route and became director of the National Neuroscience Institute.

HIS SON’S CANCER

One of Mr Lee’s most anxious moments was when Mr Lee Hsien Loong, then Deputy Prime Minister, was diagnosed with lymphoma in October 1992. The elder Mr Lee, who was in Johannesburg with his wife, got a call from his son. “I immediately rang back, fearing bad news. It was devastating. A biopsy of a polyp found in his colon had been diagnosed as cancer, a lymphoma.”

Former minister George Yeo said I’ve got three children. I’m very proud of. ‘I’ve got three children. I’m very proud of. ‘I’ve got three children. I’m very proud of. Former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, my wife, spoke to the kids in English. From the age of six, they had Malay tuition at home.”

His brother received him at family dinners, “at 10pm ... he’ll say, ‘I’m sorry I have to leave you now’ and go back home and read her favourite storybooks”.

Even when abroad, he would speak to her via webcam.

To fill the “empty blank spaces” now that she was unable to accompany him for meals and walks, Mr Lee kept himself occupied honing his Mandarin. To cope at night with hearing the sounds of his wife’s discomfort in the next room, he took up meditation. The constant stress of her illness, he said, was harder on him than the stresses of the political arena.

“I can’t break down. Life has got to go on. I try to busy myself, but from time to time in idle moments, my mind goes back to the happy days when we were up and about together,” Mr Lee said.

Mr Lee’s pain at his wife’s death in October 2010 was evident in the words of his eulogy: “Without her, I would be a different man, with a different life.” She devoted herself to me and our children. She was always there when I needed her.

“She has lived a life full of warmth and meaning. I should find solace in her 89 years of life well lived. But at this moment of the final parting, my heart is heavy with sorrow and grief.”

Mr Lee at his 80th birthday celebrations

They have never made a show of being a loving couple in public. Even in private, they have rarely demonstrated their love for each other with hugs or kisses. It was only after my mother’s second stroke that I saw my father kiss my mother on her forehead to comfort her. They don’t seem to feel the need for a dramatic physical show of love.

Dr Lee Wei Ling

At the end of the day, what I cherish most are the human relationships. With the unfailing support of my wife and partner, I have lived life to the fullest. It is the friendships I made and the close family ties I nurtured that have provided me with that sense of satisfaction at a life well lived, and have made me what I am.

Mr Lee said.

In October 2011, she wrote of how she now travelled overseas with Mr Lee. “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.”

Though more frail than he used to be, he insisted on travelling and doing what had to be done to benefit Singapore. “For my part, I keep him company when he is not preoccupied with work and I make sure he has enough rest,” said the single Dr Lee, who lived in the family home with her father.

She has also written about what it was like growing up as the daughter of Mr Lee Kuan Yew. “My every move, every word, is scrutinised ... One friend said I lived in a glass house. After my father’s recent comment on my lack of culinary skills, another observed, ‘You live in a house without any walls.’ Fortunately, I am not easily embarrassed.”

With the unfailing support

Mr Lee as a token of appreciation at the launch of the Chinese edition of Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths To Keep Singapore Going in 2011. TODAY FILE PHOTO

An old photograph of his family presented to Mr Lee as a token of appreciation at the launch of the Chinese edition of Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths To Keep Singapore Going in 2011. TODAY FILE PHOTO

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LEE KUAN YEW
1923 – 2015

Forever in our hearts