

Lee Kuan Yew Retracts Controversial Remarks On Muslims
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SINGAPORE - Singapore state founder Lee Kuan Yew retracted controversial remarks on the city-state's Malay Muslim community, news reports said Tuesday.

In a book launched in January, Lee is quoted as saying that multiracial Singapore was making good progress "until the surge of Islam came." He described Muslims as "distinct and separate," and called on them to "be less strict on Islamic observances" for better social integration.

But in a statement carried by state media Tuesday, Lee said those views were "out of date," noting that he made the comments published in the book "probably two or three years ago."

He said ministers and legislators had told him that, especially after the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11, 2001, "Singapore Malays have indeed made special efforts to integrate with the other communities."

"I stand corrected. I hope that this trend will continue in the future," said the 87-year-old, who serves as a minister mentor in the cabinet of his son, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Government leaders have distanced themselves from the elder Lee's controversial remarks, and have praised Muslims' efforts to integrate.

With general elections widely expected to be called before June, the government has been eager not to alienate Muslims, who represent around 15 per cent of the island state's population of 5 million.

(DPA)

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