

Reflections
THE LEGACY OF
LEE KUAN YEW

Editors

Yang Razali Kassim

Mushahid Ali

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Yahya bin D. Mahathir
Abdullah.

With Good wishes

Yahya (Tanjung) /
7 Mar, 2016

TUN DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

Reflections THE LEGACY OF LEE KUAN YEW

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Yang Razali Kassim
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Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| <i>Foreword by Ong Keng Yong</i> | xi |
| <i>Preface by Yang Razali Kassim</i> | xv |
| <i>Introduction by Mushahid Ali</i> | xix |
| Chapter I LEE KUAN YEW'S LEADERSHIP | |
| <hr/> | |
| History, Heritage and the Idea of Singapore | 3 |
| <i>By Wang Gungwu</i> | |
| Reflections on Lee Kuan Yew: His Legacy on the Public Service | 9 |
| <i>By Eddie Teo</i> | |
| The Three Lee Kuan Yews I Remember | 17 |
| <i>By Chan Heng Chee</i> | |
| The Man and His Dream | 22 |
| <i>By Joseph Chinyong Liow</i> | |
| The Sage and Giant from Southeast Asia | 27 |
| <i>By Jusuf Wanandi</i> | |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| The Engine That Was Too Big for the Boat | 31 |
| <i>By Kumar Ramakrishna</i> | |

Chapter II LEE KUAN YEW AND FOREIGN POLICY

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Singapore and Lee Kuan Yew's Worldview | 40 |
| <i>By Ang Cheng Guan</i> | |
| Lee Kuan Yew and Singapore's Foreign Policy: A Productive Iconoclasm | 45 |
| <i>By Alan Chong</i> | |
| Pursuing Mutual Strategic Interests: Lee Kuan Yew's Role in Singapore-US Relations | 50 |
| <i>By Ong Keng Yong</i> | |
| A US Envoy's Impressions of Lee Kuan Yew | 56 |
| <i>By Daniel Chua</i> | |
| Lee Kuan Yew's China Wisdom | 62 |
| <i>By Hoo Tiang Boon</i> | |
| Lee Kuan Yew and India's Turn to Pragmatism | 67 |
| <i>By C. Raja Mohan</i> | |

- Lee Kuan Yew's Leadership:
Model for China?** 72
By Benjamin Ho
- A Towering Inspiration for China** 78
By Zha Daojiong
- Lee Kuan Yew and Suharto:
How Mutual Trust Fostered
Bilateral Ties** 83
By Barry Desker
- Lee Kuan Yew's Legacy:
His Impact on Singapore–Malaysia
Relations** 91
By David Han
- Lee Kuan Yew's Economic Legacy:
Lessons for Aspiring Countries** 97
*By Pradumna B. Rana &
Chia-yi Lee*
- Right Lessons, Wrong Lessons:
Africa and Lee Kuan Yew's Legacy** 102
By Greg Mills

**Chapter III LEE KUAN YEW AND NATION-
BUILDING: WHAT NEXT?**

- Politician, Lawyer: Will the Legal
Culture Endure Him?** 111
By Kevin YL Tan

| | |
|--|------------|
| Singaporean Singapore: What Next after Lee Kuan Yew? | 119 |
| <i>By Bilveer Singh</i> | |
| Reviving Lee Kuan Yew's Legacy: Malay as the National Language | 125 |
| <i>By Yang Razali Kassim</i> | |
| Singapore's Strategic Future: Lee Kuan Yew's Legacy for the Next 50 years | 137 |
| <i>By Mushahid Ali</i> | |
| Leaving a Lasting Legacy | 142 |
| <i>By Toh Ting Wei</i> | |
| What Lee Kuan Yew Means to Youth Today | 149 |
| <i>By Ang Hwee Min & Lo Yi Min</i> | |
| Singapore's Future Post-LKY: What Do Young Singaporeans Want? | 154 |
| <i>By Nur Diyanah Anwar</i> | |
| Will There Be Another LKY? | 160 |
| <i>By Dylan Loh</i> | |
| Contributors | 167 |
| About the Editors | 175 |
| About RSIS | 177 |

Foreword

Ong Keng Yong

AS WE PONDER over life after Lee Kuan Yew, the most important thing, to me, that the founding prime minister left behind is a flourishing Singapore. From a little known island, Singapore is today a prominent city-state in the global community. Most people in and outside Singapore see it as synonymous with Lee Kuan Yew and *vice versa*. Without Lee Kuan Yew, will Singapore be just as good or will it decline? Indeed, can Singapore survive Lee Kuan Yew?


I posed this question to several young Singaporean researchers at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) and they gave me a unanimous “yes”. One-third of them underlined the need for adjustment in policy and political approaches by the government in the post-Lee Kuan Yew era to win support from younger Singaporeans. Singapore has changed and Lee Kuan Yew’s People’s Action Party (PAP) must also change to remain in power. Educational progress, technological advances and a more profound wish for the future have made electoral politics more challenging. The political leadership and the government have to deal with more complexities as compared to Lee Kuan Yew’s time on the job.

I posed a second question on what is the one thing that Lee Kuan Yew bequeathed to Singaporeans. Almost all of them replied “pragmatism”. To them, he embedded in the citizens of his country a belief in Singapore’s vulnerabilities and ability to overcome adversity with practical solutions. Thinking about how to beat the odds and making the best of the situation with a creative way out is a hallmark of Singaporeans after five decades of PAP and Lee Kuan Yew.

The key to PAP’s durability in government is the trust factor. Many Singaporeans had put their trust in Lee Kuan Yew and his team. In addition, the prevention of corruption is described as setting Singapore apart from the neighbourhood and which will continue to make Singapore attractive to investors and people wanting to make a difference in their lives as they move into the future without Lee Kuan Yew.

In my opinion, the Lee Kuan Yew software is well ingrained in Singaporeans. This covers seven habits: take the world as it is; plan for the future; solve problems quickly and creatively; do it right the first time; carry out what has been decided; focus on outcome; and ensure follow-up. Therefore, the question really is, does the next generation of leaders have the gumption and gusto to govern in the best interest of Singapore and what will determine this capability?

Lee Kuan Yew and his team delivered over the years as they played “tough and care”, and shared the achievements with Singaporeans. Their successors have to find their own

“mojo” to stay in charge. The style and vocabulary will be different but they should be able to deliver in their own way. 

Ong Keng Yong is Executive Deputy Chairman at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Preface

Yang Razali Kassim

THE MORNING after the demise of Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the head of RSIS, Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, asked me what we planned to do to reflect this epochal event in *RSIS Commentary*, the School's primary platform for the articulation of views on major issues. Before we knew it, the response to this momentous point in Singapore's history flowed naturally. Immediately, Executive Deputy Chairman Ong reminisced on the imprint of Mr Lee on Singapore's bilateral relations with the United States, a strategic partner in Singapore's network of key bilateral ties, which appeared in the local media. Indeed, a number of current and previous members of the RSIS Board of Governors had equally been reflecting on the legacy of Mr Lee. Chairman Eddie Teo spoke to a gathering of senior civil servants in his capacity as Chairman of the Public Service Commission three days after Mr Lee's passing. Eminent scholar and former Board of Governors (BOG) member University Professor Wang Gungwu reflected on the history, heritage and the idea of Singapore. Ambassador Chan Heng Chee ruminated on her experiences with Singapore's first prime minister from her days as a critical young lecturer, while Ambassador Barry

Desker, Distinguished Fellow and former Singapore ambassador to Jakarta, recalled Mr Lee's pivotal role in rebuilding ties with Indonesia under President Suharto. Various other authors, starting from new Dean Joseph Liow to other members of the RSIS faculty as well as associates and younger researchers, likewise pondered over what it meant to have grown up under the towering shadow of Lee Kuan Yew, the founder of modern Singapore. A key take away is that within his huge legacy is the "Lee Kuan Yew software" that will remain to define the post-LKY era.

In the end, what we came out with was a series on The Legacy of Lee Kuan Yew, which we published in *RSIS Commentary* following his passing, and which we eventually put together as a coherent whole in this special issue of *Strategic Currents*, an RSIS periodical. This is not just a compilation of essays on a giant of a leader. It is a publication that will certainly be of value to future research on Singapore and the making of The Singapore Story. As scholars, researchers and journalists in the years to come look back to understand what made Singapore tick and rise from ordinariness to become an epitome of success in the modern world, they would find this edited volume difficult to ignore. In it they will find reflections on the various engaging facets of the charismatic and colourful personality that was Lee Kuan Yew, whom Chan Heng Chee aptly describes as the 'last of the era of the post-war great leaders'.

This book covers three chapters of almost 30 essays reflecting Lee Kuan Yew's leadership; his imprint on Singapore's foreign policy and diplomacy; and his legacy

on nation-building, including how some from the younger generation viewed him. In short, this special issue offers the reflections on modern Singapore's founding father by an array of authors from different generations who had worked closely with, or for him, as well as grown up under him — as thinkers, scholars and researchers, each providing different perspectives on the multifaceted and impressive legacy of Singapore's first prime minister. This book will hopefully also add to the collection of publications on Lee Kuan Yew's contribution to the developing world's unending quest for development and its various models — from nation-building, statehood and leadership, to governance and the management of plural societies. ❧

Yang Razali Kassim is a Senior Fellow and Editor, Strategic Currents & RSIS Commentary; and Editor, Reflections: The Legacy of Lee Kuan Yew, a Special Issue of Strategic Currents.

Introduction

The Charisma of Being Modern Singapore's Founding Father

Mushahid Ali

WHEN PANDIT Jawaharlal Nehru died as India's founding prime minister, a wise Singaporean observer wrote: "It was not the office of Prime Minister that made Nehru great, rather it was Nehru who made the Prime Minister's office great." Similarly it was not the premiership of Singapore that made Lee Kuan Yew great, it was Lee Kuan Yew who invested greatness to the Prime Minister's Office which he filled for 31 years.

When Lee died on 23 March 2015 aged 91, he had left the Prime Minister's Office for nigh 25 years; yet he commanded the respect and recognition of the people of Singapore as the founding father of the nation who had guided and sustained the tiny island state to greatness as among the richest countries in the world, one that had transformed its status from Third World to First within a span of a generation.