

Lee Kuan Yew

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[The Honorable](#)

Lee Kuan Yew

[GCMG CH SPMJ](#)

1st [Prime Minister of Singapore](#)

In office

5 June 1959^[1] – 28 November 1990

President [Yusof Ishak](#)
[Benjamin Sheares](#)
[Devan Nair](#)
[Wee Kim Wee](#)

Governor [Sir William Goode](#)

Deputy [Toh Chin Chye](#)
[Goh Keng Swee](#)
[S Rajaratnam](#)
[Goh Chok Tong](#)
[Ong Teng Cheong](#)

Preceded by [Lim Yew Hock](#) (as [Chief Minister](#))

Succeeded by [Goh Chok Tong](#)

[Minister Mentor of Singapore](#)

In office

12 August 2004 – 21 May 2011

Prime Minister [Lee Hsien Loong](#)

Preceded by Position established

Succeeded by Position abolished

2nd [Senior Minister of Singapore](#)

In office

28 November 1990 – 12 August 2004

Prime Minister [Goh Chok Tong](#)

Preceded by [S. Rajaratnam](#)

Succeeded by [Goh Chok Tong](#)

1st [Secretary-General of the People's Action Party](#)

In office

21 November 1954 – 1 November 1992

Preceded by Position established

Succeeded by [Goh Chok Tong](#)

**Member of Parliament
for [Tanjong Pagar GRC](#)
[Tanjong Pagar SMC \(1965-1991\)](#)**

In office

9 August 1965 – 23 March 2015

Preceded by Parliament established

Succeeded by [Indranee Thurai Rajah](#)

Member of the [Legislative Assembly](#) for [Tanjong Pagar](#)

In office

2 April 1955 – 9 August 1965

Preceded by Constituency established

Succeeded by [Legislative Assembly](#) renamed to [Parliament of Singapore](#)

1st [Leader of the Opposition of Singapore](#)

In office

22 April 1955 – 31 March 1959

Preceded by Position established

Succeeded by [Lim Yew Hock](#)

Personal details

Born	<div>Harry Lee Kuan Yew</div> <div>16 September 1923</div> <div>Singapore, Straits Settlements</div>
Died	<div>23 March 2015 (aged 91)</div> <div>Singapore General Hospital, Singapore</div>
Cause of death	Pneumonia
Resting place	Mandai Crematorium
Citizenship	Singaporean
Nationality	Singaporean
Political party	People's Action Party (1955–2015)
Spouse(s)	<div>Kwa Geok Choo</div> <div>(m. 1950; died 2010)</div> <div>Lee Hsien Loong (son)</div>
Children	<div>Lee Wei Ling (daughter)</div> <div>Lee Hsien Yang (son)</div>
Mother	Chua Jim Neo (mother)
Father	Lee Chin Koon (father)
Alma mater	<div>Raffles Institution</div> <div>London School of Economics</div> <div>Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge</div>

Lee Kuan Yew

Lee's name in Chinese characters

[Chinese](#)

Transcriptions

[Standard Mandarin](#)

[Hanyu Pinyin](#) Lǐ Guāngyào

Wade-Giles	Li ³ Kuang ¹ -yao ⁴
Tongyong Pinyin	Lǐ Guāngyào
Yale Romanization	Lǐ Gwāngyào
IPA	[lǐ kwán.jâu]
Hakka	
Romanization	Lí Kông-yeu
Yue: Cantonese	
Yale Romanization	Leíh Gwōngjiuh
IPA	[ləi kʷóŋ.jì:u]
Jyutping	Lei ⁵ Gwong ¹ -jiu ⁶
Southern Min	
Hokkien POJ	Lí Kong-iāu

Lee Kuan Yew (born **Harry Lee Kuan Yew**; 16 September 1923 – 23 March 2015), often referred to by his initials **LKY**, was a [Singaporean statesman](#) who served as the first [Prime Minister](#) of the [Republic of Singapore](#) from 5 June 1959 to 28 November 1990. He had also served as the second [Senior Minister](#) from 28 November 1990 to 12 August 2004 and [Minister Mentor](#) from 12 August 2004 until his retirement from the [executive](#) branch of government on 21 May 2011. ^{[2][3]}

Lee was born in Singapore during British colonial rule, which was part of the Straits Settlements. He had top grades in his early education, gaining a scholarship and admission to Raffles College. During the Japanese occupation, Lee worked in private companies and as an administration service officer for the [propaganda](#) office. After the war, Lee first attended the [London School of Economics](#), but transferred to [Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge](#), graduating with starred-first-class honours in law in 1947. He became a [barrister](#) of the [Middle Temple](#) in 1950 before returning to Singapore, and began campaigning for Britain to give up its colonial rule of his place of birth.

He was the co-founder and first secretary-general of the [People's Action Party](#) (PAP), and led the party to a landslide electoral victory in 1959. During his leadership, Lee campaigned for a merger with other former British territories in a national [referendum](#) to form the [Federation of Malaysia](#) in 1963. However, racial issues and [ideological](#) differences led to Singapore's being forced to leave from the federation, and it became its own country on 9 August 1965.

As leader of an independent Singapore, Lee guided the country by helping it grow from an underdeveloped outpost with no natural resources into a rich highly [developed country](#), becoming known as an [Asian Tiger](#). Lee died on 23 March 2015 from [pneumonia](#), and the country went into a week of national mourning. He was 91 years old.

Family

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Lee said in his [autobiography](#) that he is a fourth-generation Chinese Singaporean: his [Hakka](#) great-grandfather, Lee Bok Boon (born 1846), emigrated from the Dapu county of [Guangdong](#) province to the Straits Settlements in 1860s.

Lee Kuan Yew was born at 92 Kampong Java Road in Singapore. He was the oldest child of Lee Chin Koon and Chua Jim Neo. As a child he was strongly influenced by British culture, partly because of the influence of his grandfather Lee Hoon Leong, who had given his sons an English education.

Lee and his wife Kwa Geok Choo were married on 30 September 1950. They have two sons (Lee Hsien Loong and Lee Hsien Yang) and one daughter (Lee Wei Ling). ^{[4][5]}

His elder son Lee Hsien Loong has been Prime Minister of Singapore since 2004.

Many of Lee's family have important positions in Singaporean society, and his children hold high government or government-linked posts. His elder son [Lee Hsien Loong](#), a former [Brigadier General](#), has been the Prime Minister since 2004. He is also the Deputy Chairman of the [Government of Singapore Investment Corporation](#) (GIC), of which Lee himself is the chairman. Lee's younger son, [Lee Hsien Yang](#), is also a former Brigadier General and is a former President and [Chief Executive Officer](#) of [SingTel](#), a pan-Asian telecommunications giant and Singapore's largest company by market capitalisation (listed on the [Singapore Exchange](#), SGX). Fifty-six percent of SingTel is owned by [Temasek Holdings](#), a prominent government [holding company](#) with controlling stakes in a variety of very large government-linked companies such as [Singapore Airlines](#) and [DBS Bank](#). Temasek Holdings was until 2009 run by Executive Director and C.E.O. [Ho Ching](#), the wife of Lee Hsien Loong. Lee's daughter, Lee Wei Ling, runs the [National Neuroscience Institute](#). Lee's wife, [Kwa Geok Choo](#), used to be a partner of the prominent legal firm Lee & Lee.

Early life

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Lee studied at Telok Kurau Primary School, [Raffles Institution](#) (where he was a member of the 01 Raffles Scout Group), and Raffles College (now [National University of Singapore](#)). He was stopped from going to university by [World War II](#) and the 1942-1945 [Japanese occupation of Singapore](#). During the occupation, he ran a successful [black market](#) business selling [tapioca](#)-based glue called *Stikfas*.^[6] Because he had taken [Chinese](#) and [Japanese](#) lessons since 1942, he was able to find work transcribing [Allied](#) wire reports for the [Japanese](#), as well as being the [English language](#) editor on the Japanese

Hodobu (– an information or [propaganda](#) department) from 1943 to 1944.^{[7][8]}

Political career

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Decisions and policies

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Lee had three main concerns — national security, the economy, and social issues — during his post-independence administration.

National security

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The vulnerability of Singapore was deeply felt, with threats from multiple sources including the communists, Indonesia (with its Confrontation stance), and UMNO extremists who wanted to force Singapore back into Malaysia. As Singapore gained admission to the [United Nations](#), Lee quickly sought international recognition of Singapore's independence. He declared a policy of [neutrality](#) and non-alignment, following [Switzerland](#)'s model. At the same time, he asked [Goh Keng Swee](#) to build up the [Singapore Armed Forces](#) (SAF) and requested help from other countries for advice, training and facilities.

Government policies

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Like many countries, Singapore was not immune to [political corruption](#). Lee introduced legislation giving the [Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau](#) (CPIB) greater power to conduct arrests, search, call up witnesses, and investigate bank accounts and income-tax returns of suspected persons and their families.

Lee believed that ministers should be well paid in order to maintain a clean and honest government. In 1994 he proposed to link the salaries of ministers, judges, and top civil servants to the salaries of top professionals in the private sector, arguing that this would help recruit and retain talent to serve in the public sector.^[9]

In the late 1960s, fearing that Singapore's growing population might overburden the developing economy, Lee started a vigorous 'Stop-at-Two' [family planning](#) campaign. Couples were urged to undergo [sterilisation](#) after their second child. Third or fourth children were given lower priorities in education and such families received fewer economic [rebates](#).^[9]

In 1983, Lee sparked the 'Great Marriage Debate' when he encouraged Singapore men to choose highly-educated women as wives. He was concerned that a large number of graduate women were unmarried. Some sections of the population, including graduate women, were upset by his views. Nevertheless, a match-making agency [Social Development Unit](#) (SDU) was set up to promote socialising among men and women graduates.

^[9] Lee also introduced incentives such as [tax rebates](#), schooling, and housing priorities for graduate mothers who had three or four children, in a reversal of the over-successful 'Stop-at-Two' family planning campaign in the 1960s and 1970s. By the late 1990s, the [birth rate](#) had fallen so low that Lee's successor [Goh Chok Tong](#) extended these incentives to all married women, and gave even more incentives, such as the 'baby bonus' scheme. ^[9]

On 13 September 2008, Lee, 84, underwent successful treatment for abnormal heart rhythm ([atrial flutter](#)) at [Singapore General Hospital](#), but he was still able to address a [philanthropy](#) forum via video link from hospital. ^[10]

He retired from politics in 2011.

Death

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On 5 February 2015, Lee was hospitalised with "severe [pneumonia](#)" and was put on a ventilator at the intensive care unit of Singapore General Hospital, although his condition was reported as "stable". ^{[11][12]} A 26 February update stated that Lee was again being given antibiotics, while being sedated and still under mechanical ventilation. ^[13] On 23 March 2015, Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced the death of Lee Kuan Yew, at the age of 91. ^{[14][15]} His state funeral was held at the University Cultural Centre, [National University of Singapore](#) at 2 p.m. local time on 29 March 2015. ^[16]

Legacy

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During the three decades in which Lee held office, Singapore grew from being a [developing country](#) to one of the most [developed nations](#) in Asia, despite its small population, limited land space and lack of [natural resources](#). Lee has often stated that Singapore's only natural resources are its people and their strong work ethic. He is widely respected by many Singaporeans, particularly the older generation, who remember his inspiring leadership during independence and the separation from Malaysia.

On the other hand, many Singaporeans have criticized Lee as being authoritarian and intolerant of dissent, citing his numerous mostly

successful attempts to sue political opponents and newspapers who express an unfavorable opinion. International media watchdog [Reporters Without Borders](#) has asked Lee, and other senior Singaporean officials, to stop taking libel actions against journalists.^[17]

Memoirs

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Lee has written a two-volume set of memoirs: *The Singapore Story* (ISBN 0-13-020803-5), which covers his view of [Singapore's history](#) until its separation from [Malaysia](#) in 1965, and *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story* (ISBN 0060197765), which gives his account of Singapore's subsequent transformation into a developed nation.

Awards

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- Lee has received a number of [state decorations](#), including the [Order of the Companions of Honour](#) (1970), Knight Grand Cross of the [Order of St Michael and St George](#) (1972), the [Freedom](#) of the [City of London](#) (1982), the [Order of the Crown of Johore First Class](#) (1984), the [Order of Great Leader](#) (1988) and the [Order of the Rising Sun](#) (1967).^[18]
- Lee was awarded the [Ig Nobel Prize](#) in 1994.^[19]
- In 2002, Lee was formally admitted to the Fellowship of [Imperial College London](#) in recognition of his promotion of international trade and industry, and development of science and engineering study initiatives with the UK.^[20]
- In 2006, Lee was presented with the [Woodrow Wilson Award for Public Service](#) by the [Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars](#).
- In 2007, Lee was conferred an honorary Doctorate in Law at the [Australian National University](#) in [Canberra](#), albeit amid protest from students and staff.^[21]
- In October 2009, Lee was conferred the first Lifetime Achievement award by the U.S.-Asean Business Council at its 25th anniversary gala dinner in [Washington, D.C.](#). In his tribute, former [United States Secretary of State](#) and 1973 [Nobel Peace Prize](#) winner, Dr [Henry Kissinger](#) said:^[22]

"He has become a seminal figure for all of us. I've not learned as much from anybody as I have from Mr Lee Kuan Yew. He made himself an indispensable friend of the United States, not primarily by the power he represented but by the quality of his thinking.

Meeting the [U.S. President](#) at the [White House Oval Office](#) a day later, President [Barack Obama](#) introduced him as:^{[23][24]}

"... one of the legendary figures of Asia in the 20th and 21st centuries. He is somebody who helped to trigger the Asian economic miracle."

- On 15 November 2009, Lee was awarded the Russian [Order of Friendship](#) by [President Dmitry Medvedev](#) on the sidelines of [APEC Singapore 2009](#).^[25]

Controversies

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Devan Nair

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[Devan Nair](#), the third [President of Singapore](#) and who was living in [exile](#) in [Canada](#), remarked in a 1999 interview with the [Toronto The Globe and Mail](#) that Lee's technique of suing his opponents into [bankruptcy](#) or oblivion was an abrogation of political rights. He also remarked that Lee is "an increasingly self-righteous know-all", surrounded by "department store dummies". In response to these remarks, Lee sued Devan Nair in a Canadian court and Nair countersued. Lee then brought a motion to have Nair's counterclaim thrown out of court. Lee argued that Nair's counterclaim disclosed no reasonable cause of action and constituted an inflammatory attack on the integrity of the [government of Singapore](#). However, the [Ontario Superior Court of Justice](#) refused to throw out Nair's counterclaim, holding that Lee had abused the litigating process and therefore Nair has a reasonable cause of action.^[26]

Islam

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In 2011, [Wikileaks](#) published diplomatic cables attributing controversial comments on [Islam](#) to Lee. Wikileaks quoted Lee as having described Islam as a "venomous religion". Lee later denied making the comments.^[27]

The incident followed hot on the heels of Lee's controversial book release *Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going*. In the book, Lee claimed that Singaporean Muslims faced difficulties in integrating because of their religion, and urged them to "be less strict on Islamic observances". He has said:

"I have to speak candidly to be of value, but I do not wish to offend the Muslim community.

I think we were progressing very nicely until the surge of Islam came, and if you asked me for my observations, the other communities have easier integration - friends, intermarriages and so on, Indians with Chinese,

Chinese with Indians - than Muslims. That's the result of the surge from the Arab states.

I would say today, we can integrate all religions and races except Islam.

I think the Muslims socially do not cause any trouble, but they are distinct and separate...

But now, you go to schools with Malay and Chinese, there's a halal and non-halal segment and so too, the universities. And they tend to sit separately so as not to be contaminated. All that becomes a social divide...

Be less strict on Islamic observances and say 'Okay, I'll eat with you.'^[28]

According to former PM Goh Chok Tong, Singaporean Muslims adjusted their religious practices according to the unique circumstances in Singapore.^{[29][30]}

The ethnic integration policy was also implemented to avoid the formation of ethnic ghettos in Singapore's [HDB](#) flats. Every precinct had to have inhabitants from all the ethnic groups according to national proportions.

Defamation judgment

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On 24 September 2008 the [High Court of Singapore](#), in a [summary judgment](#) by Justice [Woo Bih Li](#), ruled that the [Far Eastern Economic Review](#) (FEER) magazine (Hugo Restall, editor), defamed Lee and his son, [Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong](#). The court found the 2006 article "Singapore's 'Martyr': [Chee Soon Juan](#)" meant that Lee Kuan Yew "has been running and continues to run Singapore in the same corrupt manner as [T. T. Durai](#) operated the [National Kidney Foundation](#) (NKF) and he has been using libel actions to suppress those who would question to avoid exposure of his corruption."^[31] The court sentenced FEER, owned by [Dow Jones & Company](#) (in turn owned by [Rupert Murdoch's](#) News Corp), to pay [damages](#) to the complainants. FEER appealed^[31] but lost the case when the Court of Appeal ruled in October, 2009 that the *Far Eastern Economic Review* did defame the country's founder Lee Kuan Yew and his son Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.^[32]

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Other websites

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- [Charlie Rose interview LEE KUAN YEW - 58 mins interview video](#)
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- [Memories of Asia](#)

Political offices

New title	<u>Prime Minister of Singapore</u> 3 June 1959 – 28 November 1990	Succeeded by <u>Goh Chok Tong</u>
Preceded by <u>Hon Sui Sen</u>	<u>Minister for Finance</u> 1983	Succeeded by <u>Tony Tan</u>
Preceded by <u>S. Rajaratnam</u>	<u>Senior Minister</u> 1990–2004	Succeeded by <u>Goh Chok Tong</u>
New title	<u>Minister Mentor</u> 2004–2011	Vacant

Party political offices

<p>New political party</p>	<p><u>Secretary General of People's Action Party</u> 1954-1992</p>	<p>Succeeded by <u>Goh Chok Tong</u></p>
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Prime Ministers of Singapore

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Singapore

Lee Kuan Yew • [Goh Chok Tong](#) • [Lee Hsien Loong](#) • [Lawrence Wong](#)

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