Prime Minister, Republic of Singapore (1965–1990)[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Lee_Kuan_Yew&action=edit&section=20" \o "Edit section: Prime Minister, Republic of Singapore (1965–1990))]

Lee began to seek international recognition of Singapore's independence. Singapore joined the United Nations on 21 September 1965, and founded the [Association of Southeast Asian Nations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ASEAN) (ASEAN) on 8 August 1967 with four other South-East Asian countries. Lee made his first official visit to Indonesia on 25 May 1973, just a few years after the [Indonesia–Malaysia confrontation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indonesia%E2%80%93Malaysia_confrontation) under [Sukarno](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukarno)'s regime. Relations between Singapore and Indonesia substantially improved as subsequent visits were made between the two countries.

Singapore has never had a dominant culture to which immigrants could assimilate even though Malay was the dominant language at that time.[[209]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-multi-216) Together with efforts from the government and ruling party, Lee tried to create a unique Singaporean identity in the 1970s and 1980s—one which heavily recognised racial consciousness within the umbrella of [multiculturalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiculturalism).

Lee and his government stressed the importance of maintaining religious tolerance and racial harmony, and they were ready to use the law to counter any threat that might incite ethnic and religious violence. For example, Lee warned against "insensitive evangelisation", by which he referred to instances of Christian proselytising directed at Malays. In 1974 the government advised the Bible Society of Singapore to stop publishing religious material in Malay.[[210]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-217)

**Defence**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Lee_Kuan_Yew&action=edit&section=21" \o "Edit section: Defence)]

The vulnerability of Singapore was deeply felt, with threats from multiple sources including the communists and Indonesia with its confrontational stance. Adding to this vulnerability was the impending withdrawal of British forces from [East of Suez](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_of_Suez). As Singapore gained admission to the United Nations, Lee quickly sought international recognition of Singapore's independence. He appointed [Goh Keng Swee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goh_Keng_Swee" \o "Goh Keng Swee) as [Minister for the Interior and Defence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ministry_of_Interior_and_Defence) to build up the [Singapore Armed Forces](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singapore_Armed_Forces) (SAF) and requested help from other countries, particularly Israel and Taiwan, for advice, training and facilities.[[211]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-FOOTNOTELee200014-218) In 1967, Lee introduced conscription for all able-bodied male Singaporean citizens age 18 to serve National Service (NS) either in the SAF, [Singapore Police Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singapore_Police_Force) or the [Singapore Civil Defence Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singapore_Civil_Defence_Force). By 1971, Singapore had 17 national service battalions (16,000 men) with 14 battalions (11,000 men) in the reserves.[[212]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-FOOTNOTELee200041-219) In 1975, Lee and Republic of China premier [Chiang Ching-kuo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiang_Ching-kuo) signed an agreement permitting Singaporean troops to train in Taiwan, under the codename "Project Starlight".[[213]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-220)

**Economy**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Lee_Kuan_Yew&action=edit&section=22" \o "Edit section: Economy)]

One of Lee's most urgent tasks upon Singapore's independence was to address high unemployment. Together with his economic aide, [Economic Development Board](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_Development_Board) chairman [Hon Sui Sen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hon_Sui_Sen), and in consultation with Dutch economist [Albert Winsemius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Winsemius), Lee set up factories and initially focused on the manufacturing industry. Before the British completely withdrew from Singapore in 1971, Lee also persuaded the British not to destroy their dock and had the British naval dockyard later converted for civilian use.

Eventually, Lee and his cabinet decided the best way to boost Singapore's economy was to attract foreign investments from [multinational corporations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multinational_corporations) (MNCs). By establishing First World infrastructure and standards in Singapore, the new nation could attract American, Japanese and European entrepreneurs and professionals to set up base there. By the 1970s, the arrival of MNCs like [Texas Instruments](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Texas_Instruments), [Hewlett-Packard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hewlett-Packard) and [General Electric](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Electric) laid the foundations, turning Singapore into a major [electronics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electronics) exporter the following decade.[[214]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-FOOTNOTELee200080-81-221) Workers were frequently retrained to familiarise themselves with the work systems and cultures of foreign companies. The government also started several new industries, such as steel mills under 'National Iron and Steel Mills', service industries like [Neptune Orient Lines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neptune_Orient_Lines), and the [Singapore Airlines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singapore_Airlines).[[215]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-FOOTNOTELee200066-68-222)

Lee and his cabinet also worked to establish Singapore as an international financial centre. Foreign bankers were assured of the reliability of Singapore's social conditions, with top-class infrastructure and skilled professionals, and investors were made to understand that the Singapore government would pursue sound [macroeconomic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macroeconomics) policies, with [budget surpluses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balanced_budget), leading to a stable valued Singapore dollar.[[216]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-FOOTNOTELee200089-102-223)

Throughout the tenure of his office, Lee placed great importance on developing the economy, and his attention to detail on this aspect went even to the extent of connecting it with other facets of Singapore, including the country's extensive and meticulous tending of its international image of being a "Garden City",[[217]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew" \l "cite_note-224) something that has been sustained to this day.

**Anti-corruption measures**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Lee_Kuan_Yew&action=edit&section=23" \o "Edit section: Anti-corruption measures)]

Lee introduced legislation giving the [Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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.[[218]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-FOOTNOTELee2000159-163-225) Lee believed that ministers should be well paid in order to maintain a clean and honest government. On 21 November 1986, Lee received a complaint of corruption against then Minister for National Development [Teh Cheang Wan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teh_Cheang_Wan" \o "Teh Cheang Wan).[[219]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-226) Lee authorised the [CPIB](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corrupt_Practices_Investigation_Bureau) to carry out investigations on Teh, but Teh committed suicide before any charges could be pressed against him.[[220]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-227) 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.[[221]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-natgeojan10-228)

**Population policies**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Lee_Kuan_Yew&action=edit&section=24" \o "Edit section: Population policies)]

In the late 1960s, fearing that Singapore's growing population might overburden the developing economy, Lee started a "[Stop at Two](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stop_at_Two)" [family planning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_planning) campaign. Couples were urged to undergo [sterilisation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sterilization_(medicine)" \o "Sterilization (medicine)) after their second child. Third or fourth children were given lower priorities in education and such families received fewer economic [rebates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tax_refund).[[221]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-natgeojan10-228)

In 1983, Lee sparked the "Great Marriage Debate" when he encouraged Singapore men to choose highly educated women as wives.[[222]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-FOOTNOTELee2000136-229) He was concerned that a large number of graduate women were unmarried.[[223]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-FOOTNOTELee2000140-230) Some sections of the population, including graduate women, were upset by his views.[[223]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-FOOTNOTELee2000140-230) Nevertheless, a match-making agency, the [Social Development Unit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Development_Network) (SDU),[[224]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew" \l "cite_note-FOOTNOTELee2000138-231) was set up to promote socialising among men and women graduates.[[221]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-natgeojan10-228) In the Graduate Mothers Scheme, Lee also introduced incentives such as [tax rebates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tax_rebate), 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.

Lee suggested that perhaps the campaign for [women's rights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_rights) had been too successful:

*Equal employment opportunities, yes, but we shouldn't get our women into jobs where they cannot, at the same time, be mothers...our most valuable asset is in the ability of our people, yet we are frittering away this asset through the*[*unintended consequences*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unintended_consequences)*of changes in our education policy and*[*equal career opportunities*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equal_opportunities)*for women. This has affected their traditional role ... as mothers, the creators and protectors of the next generation.*

— *Lee Kuan Yew, "Talent for the future", 14 August 1983*[[225]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-Natalism-232)

The uproar over the proposal led to a swing of 12.9 percent against the PAP government in the [1984 general election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1984_Singaporean_general_election). In 1985, some especially controversial portions of the policy, that gave education and housing priorities to educated women, were abandoned or modified.[[226]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-LOC1989-233)[[221]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-natgeojan10-228)

By the late 1990s the birth rate had fallen so low that Lee's successor [Goh Chok Tong](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goh_Chok_Tong" \o "Goh Chok Tong) extended these incentives to all married women, and gave even more incentives, such as the "baby bonus" scheme.[[221]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-natgeojan10-228)

**Water resources**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Lee_Kuan_Yew&action=edit&section=25" \o "Edit section: Water resources)]

Singapore has traditionally relied on water from Malaysia. However, this reliance has made Singapore subject to the possibility of price increases and allowed Malaysian officials to use the water reliance as political leverage by [threatening to cut off supply](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water_conflicts_between_Malaysia_and_Singapore). To reduce this problem, Lee decided to experiment with water recycling in 1974.[[227]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-water-234) As a result of such efforts, Singapore has achieved self-sufficiency with its water supply since the mid-2010s.[[228]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-235)

**Foreign policy**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Lee_Kuan_Yew&action=edit&section=26)]

Lee looked forward to improving relationships with [Mahathir Mohamad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahathir_Mohamad) upon the latter's promotion to Deputy Prime Minister. Knowing that Mahathir was in line to become the next [Prime Minister of Malaysia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Malaysia), Lee invited Mahathir to visit Singapore in 1978. The first and subsequent visits improved both personal and diplomatic relationships between them. Then [UMNO](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Malays_National_Organisation)'s Secretary-General Mahathir asked Lee to cut off all links with the [Democratic Action Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Action_Party); in exchange, Mahathir undertook not to interfere in the affairs of [Malay Singaporeans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malay_Singaporeans).[[*citation needed*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citation_needed)]

In June 1988, Lee and Mahathir reached an agreement in [Kuala Lumpur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuala_Lumpur) to build the Linggui dam on the [Johor River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johor_River).[[229]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-236) Lee said he had made more progress solving bilateral issues with Dr Mahathir from 1981 to 1990 than in the previous 12 years with the latter's two predecessors, Tun [Abdul Razak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdul_Razak) and Tun [Hussein Onn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hussein_Onn).[[192]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-A_close_but_difficult_relationship-199) Mahathir ordered the lifting of the ban on the export of construction materials to Singapore in 1981, agreed to sort out Malaysia's claim to [Pedra Branca](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedra_Branca,_Singapore" \o "Pedra Branca, Singapore) island and affirmed it would honour the 1962 Water Agreement.[[192]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-A_close_but_difficult_relationship-199)

One day before Lee left office in November 1990, Malaysia and Singapore signed the [Malaysia–Singapore Points of Agreement of 1990](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysia%E2%80%93Singapore_Points_of_Agreement_of_1990) (POA). [Malayan Railways (KTM)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keretapi_Tanah_Melayu) would vacate the [Tanjong Pagar railway station](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanjong_Pagar_railway_station" \o "Tanjong Pagar railway station) and move to [Bukit Timah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bukit_Timah_railway_station) while all KTM's land between Bukit Timah and Tanjong Pagar would revert to Singapore. Railway land at Tanjong Pagar would be handed over to a private limited company for joint development, the equity of which would be divided 60% to Malaysia and 40% to Singapore. However, Prime Minister Mahathir expressed his displeasure with the POA, for it failed to include a piece of railway land in Bukit Timah for joint development in 1993. Not until 2010 was the matter resolved, under Malaysia's [Najib Razak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Najib_Razak" \o "Najib Razak) and Lee's son, [Lee Hsien Loong](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Hsien_Loong).

Following Lee's death, Mahathir posted a blog post that suggested his respect for Lee despite their differences, stating that while "I am afraid on most other issues we could not agree [...] [h]is passage marks the end of the period when those who fought for independence lead their countries and knew the value of independence. ASEAN lost a strong leadership after President Suharto and Lee Kuan Yew".[[23](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Kuan_Yew#cite_note-237)