

# Exhilarating journey from Third World to First

On this and the facing page are excerpts from Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day Rally speech on Sunday evening. On this page, he stresses the core principles that held the nation together in the last 50 years. On the next, he highlights what's needed for the next 50 years.

Two weeks ago, on the 9th of August, we celebrated our Golden Jubilee with a parade at the Padang. For everyone who took part at the Padang, at the Floating Platform, around the Bay, watching at home or overseas, that night was something special to remember. It was not just a birthday bash, we were celebrating something far greater.

First of all, we celebrated our resolve to defend ourselves and to survive over the last 50 years. We started out at Independence with only two infantry battalions in a rough neighbourhood. But our pioneers were determined to defend ourselves – we built up the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF). Within four years, we paraded a few of our units on National Day in 1969. Overhead, we had one Hunter aircraft and one Alouette helicopter flying the Singapore flag. In the mobile column, we had 18 AMX-13 tanks, which were appearing in public for the first time and Major Goh Yeh Choon was a second-in-command. Singaporeans cheered, everyone understood what it meant and it was not just Singaporeans who took note.

Fifty years later, our pioneer servicemen kicked off the SG50 vintage Parade.

Above us, instead of one Hunter fighter, we had 20 F-16s, flying across the Padang forming the number 50. A Chinook helicopter flew the flag, escorted by two Apaches and Colonel Goh Yeh Choon, now retired, was once against the second-in-command of the mobile column, this time on a Leopard tank. That is him. Behind Lee Choon, 178 vehicles rolled past the City Hall steps. Tanks, artillery, A4 missile launchers, special ops vehicles, Hazmat vehicles and completing the mobile column were nine vehicles carrying nine families.

They were the pioneers who had served in the SAF and the Home Team and they were on parade with their children who are presently serving and, in two cases, with their grandchildren too.

Secondly, on National Day, we celebrated how we had turned vulnerability into strength. We started off with no hinterland and a weak economy. We depended on our entrepot trade, but our neighbours were building their own ports and sought to bypass us. Our workers were unskilled and anxious about their future but we determined to make the world our hinterland. And the tripartite partnership we worked together worked hard to create the best workforce in the world. The Government, the employers and the unions, we worked together. Business Environment Risk Intelligence (Berj) every year ranked us No. 1 in the world. And with the best workforce, we made PSA and Chang the best in the world.

We were a poor Third World country; people lived in cramped and squalid slums, no modern sanitation, no utilities, but we built HDB flats to house all of us and made Singapore a First World metropolis and our beautiful home.

Nearly all our water came from Johor and every now and again, when an issue arose with Malaysia, some crazy politicians would threaten to turn off the tap, to get us in line – but we did not die of thirst. We cleaned up our rivers, we dammed them up to become reservoirs, we built Marina Barrage

and turned Marina Bay into Marina Reservoir. Our whole island became a catchment area. We invented Newater and on National Day 2002, we toasted our success, "Huat Ah!"

Thirdly, we celebrated our journey from Third World to First as one united people. When we separated from Malaysia, we were not yet one people, memories of the race riots were fresh and raw. The minorities were uncertain of their future in the new country. They saw what had happened in Malaysia, they wondered, will the new Singapore Government keep its promise of a multiracial society? But 50 years on, we celebrate as one united people. On National Day, when the siren sounded, we stood and recited the Pledge together – regardless of race, language or religion. We sang Majulah Singapura.

**WHAT GOT US TO SG50**  
What an exhilarating journey these 50 years have been. How did we get here? I will put it down to three factors. Firstly, we determined to be a multiracial society. Secondly, we created a culture, a culture of self-reliance and also mutual support. And thirdly, we kept faith between the Government and the people.

**\* Multiracialism**

First of all, multiracialism. We separated from Malaysia because we believed in this ideal of a multiracial society. We believed that before race, language and religion, we should first and foremost be Singaporean. That was the fundamental reason for our foundation as a country. So we came down hard on chauvinists and racial extremists. We built HDB estates where all the different races lived and mingled together. There are no segregated ghettos in Singapore. We made English our working language and gradually all our schools shifted to teaching in English. We created group representation constituencies (GRCs) so that minorities would always be represented in Parliament and, this way, we encouraged all the communities to come together and yet gave each community space to maintain their own cultures and their own ways of life. When delicate and awkward issues arose, we dealt with them together.

For example, when we discovered the Jemaah Islamiyah group planning to set off suicide bombings in Singapore after 9/11, we did not divide it as one people; we did not hand it to Muslims and non-Muslims.

At the same time, we made the effort to bring everybody together and to ensure that every community would be taken care of and not be left behind. So we set up self-help groups, the communities did, starting with the Council for the Development of Singapore Malay/Muslim Community (MAMUK), later the Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA), then Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC) and the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) and the Eurasian Association. The Government supported them and so we progressed together.

Therefore, for SG50, every community in Singapore is celebrating because every community has progressed with

the nation. And each group is celebrating with the other groups because we are one united people.

I have attended many SG50 celebrations this year, a Catholic Jubilee Mass at the Indoor Stadium, the SG50 Kita National Day Observance Ceremony here in this campus, led by the Malay/Muslim organisations but with other groups participating, a Buddhist celebration at the Indoor Stadium, a Protestant prayer event at the National Stadium, a joint concert organised by the Taoist Federation, the New Creation Church and others at the Star Performing Arts Centre.

Here you see one of the items – a Chinese gongfu group performing with the silat group. One function. At one dinner, I had sitting around my table representatives of all the world's major religions and I posted the picture on Facebook. It showed the Rabbi of Singapore together with the Mufti of Singapore and Mr Gurmit Singh, a Sikh leader who was then chairing the IRO, the Inter-Religious Organisation. Each had different dietary rules, each was served food that met his religious requirements, but nothing stopped them from having a meal together and being friends together. In fact, they took a selfie together, which I also posted on Facebook.

Only in Singapore. Some people may think that racial and religious harmony is not a problem any more and that I am making too much about this. But they would be wrong. Race and religion are always sensitive matters, especially for us, and, in some ways, today, more complex and difficult to handle than 20 years ago, because religiosity has gone up. Many societies, people are taking their religion more seriously, happens in developed countries, like the US, Britain, Australia, Germany where you see racial and religious tensions. Happens in Singapore too, not tensions but people taking religion more seriously and everywhere people exposed and vulnerable to extremist ideologies, like the jihadist ideology of ISIS. We are a multiracial and multi-religious society and we are always at risk of deep fault lines opening up and we must never take our present happy state of affairs for granted.

**\* Self-reliance and mutual support**

The second factor of our success, after multiracialism, is our culture of self-reliance and mutual support. We knew right from the start that to strike out and blaze a path on our own, everyone had to pull their weight and be counted, we could not afford free-riders and that is why Mr Lee Kuan Yew exhorted us over and over again to become a rugged society.

We do not use that term quite so often any more, but our people must still be robust and tough, be able to take hard knocks, always striving to be better. No one owes us a living, and when it comes to the choices that we have to make, we do not shy away from hard realities, we do not sugar-coat difficult issues. We do right by Singaporeans. In turn, our people expect the Government to perform, trust the Government to have their interests at heart and support the Government and its decisions to work for the common good. And even in tough times, we can act decisively together.

The third factor for our success is that we have kept faith between the Government and the people. We have built up this bond between the Government and the people over the past 50 years. The Government has kept its promises, what we said we would do, we did do. We have kept our politics honest, we insisted on high standards of integrity in public life, no corruption, no dishonesty. We are also honest when it comes to policies, and when it comes to the choices that we have to make. We do not shy away from hard realities, we do not sugar-coat difficult issues. We do right by Singaporeans. In turn, our people expect the Government to perform, trust the Government to have their interests at heart and support the Government and its decisions to work for the common good. And even in tough times, we can act decisively together.

together so that we succeed as one Team Singapore.

We have got to inculcate this ethos in our young people too. And that is why we encourage our children to play sports together with the Mufti of Singapore and Mr Gurmit Singh, a Sikh leader who was then chairing the IRO, the Inter-Religious Organisation. Each had different dietary rules, each was served food that met his religious requirements, but nothing stopped them from having a meal together and being friends together. In fact, they took a selfie together, which I also posted on Facebook.

Nowadays, students have many more opportunities to go for adventure learning, here and also abroad. Tanjong Katong Primary School (TKPS) had a very successful programme, the Omega Challenge. It has been going on for seven years, the students who have been, have testified to how much they benefited from it. Tragically, on their recent expedition to climb Mount Kinabalu, the Omega Challenge group was caught in an earthquake. Seven students, two teachers and a guide died. We all mourned them and grieved with their families, we held a National Day of Remembrance. It will take us a long time to get over this tragedy but life goes on and it is important that we move on. And I know that the other TKPS students and teachers who were on this trip are courageously doing so. We have to go on with the adventure training, we will take the necessary safety precautions but we must keep pushing our limits to bring up a generation who will grow up tough and able to work closely together.

**\* Trust and good government**

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It was like this with our pioneer generation, for example, on the issue of land acquisition. The Government needed land to build HDB new townships around the island to house our people. To build industrial estates like Jurong to create jobs for our people. Later on to build the MRT network to move people around. So the Government passed laws to acquire land not at the market price, without paying market prices. It was tough for the landowners who suffered financial losses, sometimes more than once. It was tough for the households who had to be resettled, lives were disrupted, thousands, maybe tens of thousands, had to change their livelihoods. But if the Government had not done this, we could not have housed our population and we could not have transformed Singapore, so there were sacrifices but, in the end, it was for the common good and everybody benefited and I thank all those who sacrificed for this common goal.

Even in recent times, we had to do tough things together. During Sars in 2003, we passed laws urgently on a certificate of urgency to quarantine people at home, to prevent community spread and we will ring you up and ask you to turn up on your camera to show that you are still there. Singaporeans understood this was necessary and they accepted it. Recently, South Korea had a serious outbreak of MERS but they had problems quarantining people. It was not so easy for them to get people to cooperate. There was one case, where a person was missing from her home, they knocked on the door, no answer, telephone no answer, tracked her down via her handphone. She was several hundred kilometres away, playing golf. You can pass the laws but people have to cooperate.

From time to time, next tough issues will come up and we will need your support to deal with them. One tough issue which we already have and which will be with us for a long time to come is immigration and foreigners.

It is a very sensitive matter, not an easy thing to talk about, even at the National Day Rally and Singaporeans understandably have strong views about it. The Government has heard them, we have adjusted our policies, upgraded our infrastructure, slowed down the inflow of foreign workers, tightened up on permanent resident (PR) and citizenship applications, made sure that Singaporeans are fairly treated at work.

But on foreign employment and immigration, there are no easy choices. Every option has a cost, has a downside. If we close our doors to foreign workers, our economy will tank. Companies

would not have enough workers. Some will close down and our own people working in these companies will lose their jobs. Also we need foreign workers to build our homes and schools, to meet our daily needs, we need foreign domestic help. So we cannot close our doors completely.

On the other hand, if we let in too many foreign workers, our society will be crowded out, workplaces will feel foreign, our identity will be diluted and we just cannot digest huge numbers. Therefore, we have got to find something in between, make a right trade-off but, even in between, there is a cost and there is a price and there is a pain.

Companies will still find their costs going up, they will have to pass some of these costs on to consumers. Things would not be as cheap. Companies will have to pass up opportunities too. When they can see the opportunities but cannot get the workers, many companies will not be able to expand. And yet because some foreign workers will still be coming in, there will be Singaporeans who will feel that Singapore is changing too fast and will resent having to compete with non-Singaporeans. Whichever option we choose, it will involve some pain.

But I believe that I am doing what Singapore needs and what best safeguards your interests. If I did not believe that, I would not be doing it. It is my responsibility to make this decision, to make this judgment and then to act on your behalf. And having acted to your behalf, to account to you for the results and for the reasons why I decided the way I did. I think I owe it to you. You have elected me. This is my duty. I cannot shrink it.

**CHALLENGES AT SG50**  
These principles have brought us here – multiracialism, self-reliance and mutual support, keeping faith between the Government and the people. These principles have made us special. They are not so easy to do. Easy to say, not so easy to do. Very difficult to do. We would transform our city, by and large, we have got to fight. And Singapore has to stay special because if we are just a dull little spot on the map, a smudge, we are going to count for nothing. We have to be a shining red dot. If we are soft and flabby, we are going to be eaten up. We have to be rugged and we have to have that steel in us. If we are divided, whether along racial lines or class lines, we cannot survive. We have to stand as one united people, we have to progress together.

**\* TOMORROW:** Excerpts from PM Lee's speech on the external environment and the need for quality leaders.



PM Lee Hsien Loong delivering his National Day Rally speech at ITE College Central on Sunday night. Three principles have brought us to SG50, PM Lee said. They are multiracialism, self-reliance and mutual support, and keeping faith between the Government and the people. Singapore had to stay special. If it remained just "a dull little spot on the map, a smudge", it would count for nothing, he said. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

## SG100 needs a nation of lion-hearted leaders and citizens

For Singapore to continue to do well, we must have that resolve to defend this land. We must have that will to make Singapore endure and to prevail and we must stand as one united people, regardless of race, language or religion.

After 50 years, this faith, this sense of togetherness and purpose is stronger than before. The Singapore spirit ignites when we celebrate our successes together. When our athletes made us proud at the SEA Games, like Shanti Pereira who won our first sprint gold in 42 years, or Ashley Quew, the marathon runner. After the other runners took a wrong turn, he slowed down and waited for them to catch up and showed sportsmanship and class.

The Singapore spirit shines when we help one another in times of need. When we were beset by severe haze in 2013, many people came forward to distribute masks and help the less-abled. When a man was run over by a truck recently, people rushed forward to push the truck, lift it up and help the man out. After a bomb exploded in Bangkok last week, Singaporeans living in Bangkok contacted the embassy to offer help.

Our spirit shone brightest when Mr Lee Kuan Yew passed away. Hundreds of thousands lined up, day and night, to pay their respects at Parliament House and at many community tribute sites. Mr Lee's passing brought out so much in us. People queued patiently, they let children and seniors through, businesses provided free chairs and refreshments to those queuing up, volunteers helped out, distributing umbrellas, food, drinks, and when the gun carriage carried Mr Lee on his final journey from Parliament House to the University Cultural Centre, tens of thousands lined the streets and then it started to rain. What do we do? Everyone stayed put. It was like the 1968 National Day Parade when it poured on the Parade after it had formed up.

The funeral procession started on time into the pouring rain. I was deeply moved to see the crowds stand their ground paying their last respects to Mr Lee. Teardrops and raindrops fell together. For all of us, this was a historic moment shared as one Singapore family. We were mourning Mr Lee's

along HDB corridors. All over the island, volunteers have beautified our shared spaces with Communities in Bloom. We said we would strengthen our safety nets, and we did. We introduced Workfare, Silver Support, ComCare, we built new hospitals – Ng Teng Fong Hospital has opened since my last Rally. Community hospitals have also opened, this is Ren Ci, and Yishun Community Hospital will soon be ready. We have made healthcare more accessible and affordable. We have CHAS (Community Health Assist Scheme) the blue card and the orange card. And we have the PG (pioneer generation) card. With MediShield Life, Singaporeans have life-long healthcare coverage. We helped each other too, going door-to-door delivering milk powder and food to needy families. Seniors have kept active, exercising to stay fit and healthy as they age. We said we would create more pathways for children to chase rainbows, and we did. We built NorthLight and Assumption Pathway for students who failed their PSLE, because we believe in our young and we will never give up on them. We built the School of the Arts, the Sports School, the School of Science and Technology to cater to varied talents. We built first-class campuses for our ITE colleges, including ITE College Central, where we are now. We built new universities, Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), NUSIM. If they were not first-class institutions, Chen Long (Jackie Chan) would not have given us these beautiful old Chinese buildings to be part of SUTD. But, we are special and we will keep it so. We said that we would transform our city, and we did. Changi Airport is upgrading. Project Jewel, T4 and T5 are coming up. The Gardens by the Bay are an iconic and popular attraction. We have beautiful park connectors and ABC waterways, like Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park. I took Prime Minister Tony Abbott there, the Australian PM, to show him how Singaporeans live and the natural environment that we all enjoy. I think it is worth

passing but also affirming what he stood for and celebrating what he had achieved. That day, something changed in us. Our shared moment of sorrow bonded us. Now we do not have to struggle to find words to define the Singapore spirit or to say what being Singaporean is. Now we know that we are Singaporean.

**TEAM SINGAPORE**

Fifty years ago, our challenges seemed insurmountable. As a small country, we could easily have flickered and faded into the darkness of history. But our pioneers were made of stern stuff, they were galvanised. Many born elsewhere but decided to make Singapore their home and their lifelong passion. They dug in their heels and built a nation together.

Fifty years on, our challenges are still formidable but they are far from insurmountable. Those people who feel daunted and think Singapore's best days are behind us, they are wrong. Our best days will always be ahead of us, provided we continue to have a strong team, a team of lions and the lion-hearted, leaders and the people.

We have had such a good team so far, started with Mr Lee Kuan Yew and his colleagues, together with the pioneer generation, who built Singapore and made sure that Singapore would thrive beyond them. They handed over to Mr Goh Chok Tong and the second generation of Singaporeans 25 years ago now.

Our generation inherited Singapore from them and, together, we took Singapore further forward to reach SG50. **ANEW CHAPTER**  
In the last 10 years, we have written perhaps, another chapter of the Singapore story. If you have been following my National Day Rallies, you will know what we have done together. We said we would build more beautiful homes that Singaporeans could afford, and we did. This is Punggol 21. This is the view from Dawson. I think it is taken from the air terrace. I went up to take a look, the city rejuvenated. We have continued the kampung spirit. During Ramadan, neighbourhoods break fast together

showing off Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park. Our volunteers have been active too, preserving nature and heritage on Pulau Ubin, keeping our rivers clean. We said we would transform Marina Bay, and we did. This was Marina Bay in 2005 with my Rally that year. I promised you that by our Jubilee year, Marina Bay would be special and this is Marina Bay today. We did this together. We had a vision, we believed in it and together, we realised our dreams.

In the last 10 years, we built on what we inherited. We put brick on brick, we climbed step by step, we kept Singapore special, delivered results for Singaporeans. How did we do that? Mr Lee and his team planned beyond their terms, beyond their lifetimes. They nurtured the next generation of leaders and the next generation of Singaporeans. They taught their successors to do the same and this is what my team and I have sought to do for the last 10 years.

We have served you to the best of our ability, you have got to know us well, we have walked this SG50 journey together with you. My team and I take very seriously our responsibility to make sure that Singapore lasts beyond us. My core team are already in our late 50s and 60s. We will not be around forever and we must have the next team ready in the wings.

The nucleus is there – brought in at the last elections and earlier. They have taken charge of important programmes like Our Singapore Conversation, like SG50 as well as different ministries, including difficult ones. They have connected with Singaporeans young and old and participated fully in the major decisions which we have made. But we need to reinforce them, to round out the team to give Singapore the best possible chance of succeeding into the future. And that is what I need to do in the next election.

Singapore is at a turning point. We have just completed 50 successful years. Now we are starting out on our next 50 years of nationhood. Soon, I will be calling elections to ask for your mandate to take Singapore into this next phase of

our nation-building. And this election will be critical. You will be deciding who is governing Singapore for the next five years but, more than that, you will be choosing the team who will be working with you for the next 15-20 years. You will be setting the direction for Singapore for the next 50 years. You will be determining the future of Singapore. What will this future be? Will Singapore become an ordinary country, with intractable problems, slow or even negative growth; overspending; heavy burdens for our children; gridlocked government, unable to act? There are so many examples around the world. Or will Singapore always stay special for our children? A multiracial society strengthened by diversity, not splintered by divisions. A rugged society where everyone strives to do his best, but looks out for his fellow men, a people who live up to our song One People, One Nation, One Singapore. If you are proud of what we have achieved together, if you support what we want to do ahead of the future that we are building, then please support me, please support my team, because my team and I cannot do anything just by ourselves. We have to do it with you in order to do it for you. In fact, we have to do it together, in order to do it for all of us, to do a good job for Singapore, so that we can keep Singapore special for many years to come, another 50 years.

Can I be sure that Singapore will still be doing well, still be special, come SG100? Nobody can be sure. Nobody can promise that we will all live happily ever after. We all have our hopes and fears, our views and our guesses. One opinion that I know everybody would have liked to know was Mr Lee Kuan Yew's. He is gone now, but some friends did ask him this question not too long ago. In his old age, a group of friends would regularly take Mr Lee out for meals. The conversation would flow, and Mr Lee would get a chance to see a different bit of Singapore he had built. The last time they had dinner together was in January this year, shortly before he was taken to hospital. After Mr Lee died, one of the Friends wrote to me, describing what happened. Let me read her letter. "As it was the start of 2015, we talked at length about the celebrations for SG50. We took turns to encourage Mr Lee to attend as many SG50 events as possible. Actually, we hoped he would be there for the SG50 National Day Parade. Mr Lee listened to our exhortations, but stopped short of saying yes to our

suggestions. At each of our gatherings, it had become a tradition to ask Mr Lee, 'Will there be a Singapore many years from now?' Once, Mr Lee said, 'Maybe.' On another, Mr Lee said, 'Yes, if there is no corruption.' "This was classic Mr Lee – ever believing in Singapore, yet ever cognisant that there was always work to be done, that we should never take things for granted. Continuing with our tradition and in the spirit of SG50, that evening we asked him, 'Will there be a Singapore 50 years from now?' Mr Lee's answer took us all by surprise. "That evening, for the first time, Mr Lee said, 'Of course, there will be, even better!'"

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