

## WE BUILT A NATION



Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew planting a yellow flame tree sapling at the Tanjong Pagar Community Centre, 12 December 1971

Ministry of Communications & Information Collection. Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

Singapore's Golden Jubilee is an opportunity for Singaporeans to reflect on our history and the contributions of the pioneer generation of leaders in the early independence years. Through a selection of more than 100 artefacts, many never seen before, and archival images and documents, this exhibition explores the leadership of Singapore's first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and his team who laid the foundations for modern Singapore.

The exhibition is dedicated to an exploration of the first ten pivotal years of independence (1965–1975) that shaped Singapore's history, and the important roles played by the founding leaders in developing Singapore's economy, foreign policy and diplomacy, security and defence, education and infrastructure. It pays tribute to Lee Kuan Yew's contributions to Singapore, and the ideals and convictions that shaped him and his generation of leaders.

Highlights include artefacts from a major donation from the Estate of Lee Kuan Yew, recently declassified material from Dr Goh Keng Swee from the National Archives of Singapore, as well as donations and loans from the families of many of the founding leaders.

Cover image: Reclamation works at Marine Parade, preceding the construction of Housing & Development Board (HDB) flats for Singapore's first residential estate to be built entirely on reclaimed land, 4 September 1974

Mak Kian Seng/The Straits Times

## VISITOR INFORMATION

### Exhibition Venue

Stamford Gallery & Concourse Gallery, Level 1  
National Museum of Singapore

### Opening Hours

Daily from 10am to 7pm

### Admission

Free admission for Citizens, Permanent Residents  
and visitors aged 6 years and below.

### Others

\$10	Adults
\$5	Students & Seniors aged 60 years and above with valid ID

Each ticket also includes admission to the Singapore History Gallery and all the Level 2 galleries. Tickets are available from the National Museum Visitor Services Counter and SISTIC. Please present proof of eligibility to enjoy concessions or free admission.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### Advisor

Associate Professor Albert Lau

### Major Donor

The Estate of Lee Kuan Yew

### Lenders

Puan Noor Aishah  
Mrs Gloria Barker and Family  
Mr Janadas Devan  
Mr and Mrs Goh Kian Chee  
The Family of the late Goh Keng Swee  
The Hon Family  
Mr Mun Chor Seng  
Mr Othman Wok

### Guided Tours

Please enquire at the Visitor Services Counter for guided tours on this gallery.

### Wheelchair Access and Lockers

Lifts provide easy access to galleries. Lockers are available for visitors' use. Please enquire at the Visitor Services Counter.

### National Museum Online

[www.nationalmuseum.sg](http://www.nationalmuseum.sg)  
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### Enquiries

6332 3659 or 6332 5642

### Other Donors

Mr Lim Kiat Seng  
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In keeping with the wishes of the Estate of Lee Kuan Yew, the following extract is reproduced from *the Last Will and Testament of the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew, 17 December 2013*:

"It is my wish, and the wish of my late wife Kwa Geok Choo, that our house at 38 Oxley Road, Singapore 238629 be demolished immediately after my death or, if my daughter, Wei Ling, would prefer to continue living in the original house, immediately after she moves out of the House."

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WE  
BUILT  
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NATION

## BIRTH OF A NATION

Singapore was born on 9 August 1965 out of the crucible of post-war anti-colonial nationalism and Communist insurgency. The founding generation of leaders overcame great odds to build a nation out of a disparate collection of migrant sojourners from China, India, Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. From self-government in 1959, they led the country through a short-lived experiment of merger with Malaysia in 1963, and negotiated separation from it in 1965. They were the driving force behind Singapore's transformation from a Third World country to First.



**Yang di-Pertuan Negara Yusof Ishak at the National Day Parade at City Hall, 3 June 1961**  
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection.  
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

### Shared Values

In the words of Lee Kuan Yew, the founding leaders stood for “a government which is honest, effective and efficient in protecting its people and allowing opportunities for all to advance themselves in a stable and orderly society, where they can live a good life and raise their children to do better than themselves”. They shared values such as integrity, incorruptibility, hard work and commitment. The earlier experience of racial riots convinced them that Singapore must strive to be a multiracial and multicultural society that accorded equality to all citizens regardless of race, language or religion. These leaders laid the foundations upon which Singapore would continue to thrive in the generations to come.



**Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew with Deputy Prime Minister Dr Toh Chin Chye touring the Crawford, Rochor and Kampong Glam constituencies, 20 July 1963**  
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection.  
Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

### A Mission to Serve

As Lee Kuan Yew observed in 2000, “running a government is not unlike conducting an orchestra. No prime minister can achieve much without an able team ... The single decisive factor that made for Singapore's development was the ability of its ministers and the high quality of the civil servants who supported them.” This team of first generation leaders were men of honour and moral courage. Mr Lee referred to them collectively as “an extinct breed of men who went into politics because of the passion of their convictions”. As he declared in a press conference soon after Independence, “We are equals: each one of them with their little slide rule, and each one of them an intellect in their own right.”

**“I have a responsibility for the survival of the two million people in Singapore ... my overriding, my paramount duty is the survival of my own people ... I am determined that they will survive and I think they've got enough grit in them.”**

LEE KUAN YEW, INTERVIEW WITH FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS, 14 AUGUST 1965



**Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew with Tunku Abdul Rahman at Paya Lebar International Airport before Tunku's departure for the Singapore-Malaysia merger talks in London, 16 November 1961**

The Straits Times. Courtesy of Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission.

**“In a democracy there can be no distinction between majority rights and minority rights. There can only be equality of rights, the same rights for all, without regard to race, colour, language or creed.”**

S. RAJARATNAM, PARLIAMENTARY SPEECH ON THE REPORT OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL COMMISSION 1966,  
16 MARCH 1967



**Minister for Culture S. Rajaratnam delivering a speech at the Merdeka Celebration at City Hall, 5 June 1960**  
Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection. Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.

**“There is another aspect to our defence effort. This is a contribution it can make to nation-building ... Nothing creates loyalty and national consciousness more speedily and more thoroughly than participation in defence and membership of the armed forces.”**

DR GOH KENG SWEE, PARLIAMENTARY SPEECH ON THE NATIONAL SERVICE (AMENDMENT) ACT, 1967



**Minister for the Interior and Defence Dr Goh Keng Swee inspecting contingents at the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute (SAFTI) Commissioning Parade at Pasir Laba, Jurong, 16 July 1967**

Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection. Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore.