

Excerpt



Lee Kuan Yew and members of his cabinet after swearing-in in 1959.

It's been an honour, Mr Lee

WHEN Lee Kuan Yew stepped down from the Cabinet in May 2011 in the immediate aftermath of a general election, it set off yet another round of musings on the future of Singapore "post-LKY".

The former Prime Minister, after all, defined Singapore. His dominating influence and hand in Singapore policies remained intact long after he handed over the leadership in 1990, when he took a backseat advisory role in government as Senior Minister and later, Minister Mentor. But the man himself rejected even any "statesman" label, telling journalists just a few years ago, in his own inimitable way, that "anybody who thinks he's a statesman needs to see a psychiatrist".

He had been asked, in an interview for the 2011 book *Lee Kuan Yew: Hard Truths To Keep Singapore Going*, if he hoped to

be remembered by young Singaporeans as perhaps a great statesman, one with tremendous guts. "No, I don't," he said brusquely. "First of all, I do not classify myself as a statesman. I put myself down as determined, consistent, persistent. I set out to do something, I keep on chasing it until it succeeds. That's all. That's how I perceive myself. Not as a statesman. It's utter rubbish."

One doesn't "become a statesman", according to him, and he would not have been one at all, he said. "It was circumstances that created me: the defeat of the British, the complete collapse of morale, the Japanese brutality, the re-occupation, the struggle for power between the communists and us as the British were withdrawing. That's what created what I am."

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