

Singapore PM warns Taiwan of isolation

Straits Times/ ANN



Mr Lee Hsien Loong addresses the National Day Rally in Singapore on Sunday. — AFP

SINGAPORE, Aug. 23. — Reiterating Singapore's commitment to the One-China policy, Prime Minister Mr Lee Hsien Loong said Singapore could not support Taiwan if the latter provoked a cross-strait conflict.

"If a war breaks out across the straits, we will be forced to choose between the two sides. As a friend of both sides, any decision will be painful. But if the conflict is provoked by Taiwan, then

Singapore cannot support Taiwan," Mr Lee said during his National Day Rally speech here yesterday.

He devoted fully 20 minutes to Singapore's relations with China and Taiwan, a subject which has been a hot talking point since Mr Lee's visit to Taiwan from 10-13 July, when he was still Deputy Prime Minister.

A livid Beijing asserted that the visit damaged "China's core interest and the political foundation for China-Singapore relations, and hurt the feelings of 1.3 billion Chinese people".

Mr Lee said: "I regret that my visit to Taiwan caused this severe reaction from China, which affected relations. I also regret the way the Taiwanese media chose to play up my private and unofficial visit."

Noting that the saga was not the first time Singapore's relations with "an important friendly power" had been strained, he said while Singapore strove for good relations with all countries, hiccups would occur. "When interests diverge... they have to put theirs first, and so must we."

Lee paints a bold vision

SINGAPORE, Aug. 23. — Prime Minister Mr Lee Hsien Loong last night painted a vision of a Singapore brimming with promise and opportunity, and pledged a major overhaul of policies to get Singaporeans moving to that future.

He declared that "fresh and bold" changes would have to be made to the way Singapore traditionally does things. "It's a new generation and it's got to take Singapore another step forward, another level higher. To do that, we need a fresh and bold approach. We've been successful, wildly successful, otherwise we wouldn't be sitting here today."

Mr Lee slaughtered several policy sacred cows during his three-hour address. One was the notion upheld by the government that since the man is the "head of the household", medical benefits should be extended only to dependents of male, not female, civil servants. But Mr Lee said this would change and the benefits would be equalised. — ANN

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AFTER 14 YEARS, there has been another smooth transition of power in Singapore. The city-state's second Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, has handed over the baton to the chosen successor, Lee Hsien Loong. There is absolutely no surprise in this change of leadership. It is a play out of a clear policy of renewal that the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) has followed. It is no coincidence that the new Premier happens to be the son of Singapore's founding father, Lee Kuan Yew. After studying abroad and going through military training, which is compulsory for Singaporeans, Brig. Gen. Lee joined the PAP in 1984 and was named one of the two Deputy Prime Ministers when Mr. Goh took over the mantle in 1990 from Mr. Lee Kuan Yew. The founding father had presided over the building of modern Singapore for 25 years before he decided it was time to step down. But in his vision for the city-state, the elder statesman had reasoned that the experience and expertise of retiring leaders and officials should not be lost to the nation. He became a Senior Minister in Mr. Goh's Cabinet, a position that has now gone to Mr. Goh. Mr. Lee Kuan Yew will continue to guide Singapore and his son, as 'Minister Mentor'.

Just as it was a huge struggle for the elder Lee to build a new city-state from scratch after Malaysia abruptly granted it independence in 1965, Mr. Goh also played a stellar role in the development of this efficient entrepot. Taking over from Mr. Lee was by itself a challenge. But Mr. Goh not only steered the country through a phase of rapid and high growth in the early 1990s, but also saw it through one of the worst economic and fiscal crises that South-East Asia

has witnessed. Though Singapore went through a rough patch during this meltdown, it emerged unscathed when compared with its neighbours. Much of the credit should go to Mr. Goh and his team. From an Indian perspective, he was among the earliest to identify and recognise the potential of India and the need for Singapore to build a strong bilateral relationship with New Delhi. He was the prime mover to get India fully engaged with the Association of South East-Asian Nations (ASEAN). The challenge for his successor is to strengthen those close ties and make the economic partnership even more rewarding.

It is not going to be an easy task for Mr. Lee Hsien Loong to drive the city-state further ahead in its path to achieve 'developed nation' status. Over the next decade, Singapore will go through a demographic transition with fewer babies and swelling ranks of senior citizens. It is with such a depleting workforce that he has to build a vibrant, dynamic Singapore that can remain competitive. He will also have to contend with a new generation that has seen more of the world and has its own aspirations. There are bound to be louder voices for more political space and a liberal dispensation. Mr. Goh has already initiated that process and his successor must take it forward. There can be no going back on political liberalisation, because any clampdown on human and social rights will only be counter productive. For now, the new Prime Minister has chosen to stick with the old Cabinet. Perhaps he will recast his team after the next general elections. The challenge before Mr. Lee Hsien Loong is to build a liberal and outward-looking Singapore, without compromising on its security concerns as a city-state.

Lee Kuan Yew made 'Minister Mentor'

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, AUG. 12. Lee Hsien Loong was today sworn in Singapore's Prime Minister at an impressive ceremony.

Heralding the change of guard at the helm, the City State's President, S. R. Nathan, appointed the new Prime Minister, who was then administered the oath of office by the Chief Justice. The other important leaders sworn in were the outgoing Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, as Senior Minister, a distinctive position in the country's politics and public administration and the elder statesman, Lee Kuan Yew, who served as Senior Minister in Mr. Goh's Cabinet, as "Minister Mentor", an altogether new position. The architect of the country's politics and fortunes, Mr. Lee is expected to continue to guide its destiny in his new position.

Prominent among the others sworn in were two Deputy Prime Ministers. One of them, Tony Tan, who retains his old post, will remain in office until retirement by June-end 2005. The other Deputy Prime Minister, S. Jayakumar, was Foreign Minister in Mr. Goh's Cabinet.

Mr. Lee Hsien Loong, son of Mr. Lee, was himself a Deputy Prime Minister before his assumption of office as Prime Minister. He retains his old Finance portfolio in the new line-up, as already indicated by him.



CHANGE OF GUARD: Singapore's founding father Lee Kuan Yew congratulates his son and newly-installed Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong (centre), at the Istana presidential palace in Singapore on Thursday. The President, S. R. Nathan, looks on. — AFP

Halliburton in trouble over accounting

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, AUG. 12. In a development that puts the Halliburton in bigger trouble with the Department of Defence and adding to the political woes of the U.S. President, George W. Bush, in an election year, auditors at the Pentagon have come to the conclusion that nearly \$2 billion of work done in Iraq and Kuwait has not been accounted for properly by the Houston based firm.

Halliburton's subsidiary Kellogg Brown and Root has thus far billed the Pentagon some \$4.18 billion for feeding and housing troops in the area and the \$1.8 billion in question would represent more than 40 per cent of what has been billed thus far. This has come to light in a Pentagon audit which has been reported in the on-line edition of *The Wall Street Journal*.

It is pointed out that a move on the part of the Pentagon to withhold payments put Halliburton in a bigger financial mess as the KBR has already filed for bankruptcy court protection on pres. from the billions of dollars in bestos claims. Halliburton warned its shareholders recently that any move by the Department to withhold payments could 'adversely' affect the liquidity situation.