



Press Statement: 23 March 2015

The Royal Commonwealth Society is saddened today by the death of the founding father of the modern Singapore and great supporter of the Commonwealth, former Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew.

Prime Minister Lee became the first prime minister of a newly independent Singapore from 1965, holding power for three decades until 1990. During that time the dominant, and in many ways authoritarian, Prime Minister turned the former British colony into an Asian ‘tiger’ and financial powerhouse, which is now one of the richest and most expensive places in the world.

In 1965, Singapore became a member of the Commonwealth; it hosted the first Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 1971. Prime Minister Lee tackled corruption and cracked down heavily on crime, raised social and moral standards and, while to many he was seen as dictatorial, he also built a first-class education system, built a strong economic base and attracted foreign companies with low taxes.

President of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Lord Howell of Guildford, said that Mr Lee was responsible for creating an economic giant out of a tiny nation:

“Lee Kuan Yew was an inspirational and powerful figure. He was, by his efforts and message, proof that size and scale are not everything; that small can be beautiful and that motivation, innovation, development of the highest skills and sheer sense of purpose, can make the smallest state great and equal with the biggest. Singapore may have been a tiny island but it is an immense hub in the modern Commonwealth network and in the fast-changing global pattern of trade, investment and influence”.

Mr Lee died today from pneumonia at the age of 91.

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