Why Are Singaporeans Queuing Up for Hours to Pay Their Respects to Lee Kuan Yew?

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A number of people have been asking me if itâ??s worth going to see Lee Kuan Yewâ??s body before he gets cremated on Sunday. Some of the more common questions included,

â??Can you see his face? Cannot? Then maybe I wonâ??t go thenâ?¦â?•
â??How long did you wait?â?•
â??I donâ??t know if I should go downâ?¦thereâ??s so many things I need to do.â?•

With all the media coverage and live updates surrounding the sheer number of people queuing up to pay their last respects to the late Lee Kuan Yew, Iâ??ve also been seeing plenty of critics and skepticism on the whole issue.

While queuing on Wednesday, many office folks (mostly foreigners) who passed by also looked at us in the queue with amusement. They probably donâ??t understand why we are willing to spend hours in the hot sun to pay our last respects to someone who is no more.



I wanted to write my own response, but then I woke up this morning to read a very moving eulogy by Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen which left me in tears, and a sharp retort by a local Straits Times journalist. Thus, I reproduce parts of their speeches here.

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Dr Ng said: â??Why this deep sorrow for one man? Why do tears flow uncontrollably for thousands on his passing and memory?

No one moved Singapore as Mr Lee did â?? not in life, sickness or death.

He was that bright night star that guided us all, an impoverished and fearful nation through independence. He envisioned, then drove Singapore to become a success story â?? as he promised, from â??mudflats to a thriving metropolisâ?• that countries all over have sought to emulate.

He coaxed, pushed Singaporeans to do what was difficult, but ultimately right and good for their long-term interests.

We in Government and as MPs on the ground know how difficult it is to carry unpopular policies, even if they are right.

In return for the peopleâ??s trust and willingness to do what was needed, Mr Lee and his Government promised a better Singapore after these reforms. It seemed an unattainable dream when Mr Lee gave these promises in 1968. Singaporeâ??s per capita GDP then was around Myanmar today. But at the end of it, Mr Lee and his Government delivered.

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There will not be another Lee Kuan Yew who made us better than we are or could be. Mr Lee Kuan Yew founded, moved and lifted a nation. Because of his unwavering devotion and a life poured out for Singapore, he has made all our lives better and for many generations to come. Few mortals have accomplished so much in their lifetime.

Read the full speech here.



Some of my Western friends who have never lived here for any period of time have sometimes self-righteously proclaimed, no doubt after reading the cliches in the media, that they could never live under the â??stifling and draconianâ?• laws that we have.

My answer to them is simple: Are you the sort to urinate in public when a toilet isnâ??t available, the sort to vandalise public property, the sort that would leave a mess in a public toilet that you share with others? Are you the sort who would throw rubbish on the streets for others to pick up, the sort that would stick gum on train doors or leave them on the floor to dry up into one ugly black scar in the

pavement? Are you perhaps a drug smuggler? Because we execute those. Or maybe you molest women? Because we would whip you. Are you the sort that would get drunk and then get into fights and maybe beat up a stranger in the bar? Back home you may get away with it but if you are that sort, then maybe this place isnâ??t for you.

In short, are you a civilised person who wants to live in a civilised society? Because the things you cannot do in Singapore are precisely the sort that civilised people should not do anyway. If you are, you have nothing to fear.

Do you want to come here and insult other peopleâ??s race and religion? But then again, why would you want to purposely offend others anyway?

So where is the trade-off? How are we unfree?

I tell you what freedom is.

Freedom is being able to walk on the streets unmolested in the wee hours in the morning, to be able to leave oneâ??s door open and not fear that one would be burgled. Freedom is the woman who can ride buses and trains alone; freedom is not having to avoid certain subway stations after night falls. Freedom is knowing our children can go to school without fear of drugs, or being mowed down by some insane person with a gun. Freedom is knowing that we are not bound by our class, our race, our religion, and we can excel for the individuals that we are â?? the freedom to accomplish. Freedom is living in one of the least corrupt societies in the world, knowing that our ability to get things done is not going to be limited by our ability to pay someone. Freedom is fresh air and clean streets, because nothing is more inimical to our liberty of movement than being trapped at home because of suffocating smog.

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These are the freedoms that Singaporeans have, freedoms that were built on the vision and hard work of Mr Lee, our first Prime Minister. And we have all of these, these liberties, while also being one of the richest countries in the world.

There was no trade-off.

Not for us.

Read the full rebuttal here.

Category

1. Family