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**Headline: Sense of loss over Lee Kuan Yew bridges Singapore's generations**

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## **Sense of loss over Lee Kuan Yew bridges Singapore's generations**

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Lee Kuan Yew bonded with older Singaporeans because they went through the same trials and trauma of war, and merger with and then separation from Malaysia. But those aged below 25 never knew him as their prime minister.

Lee, who died on Monday aged 91, stepped down as prime minister in 1990. But these past few days, many young people are part of the waves of mourners who have lined up for hours to pay their respects or to fill up the community halls paying tribute.

In schools, students are spending lesson time watching videos of him, penning farewell cards and making a trek for the exhibitions on his life in many corners of the island.

They had heard of him before, but now they are relearning all over again the impact and influence of the country's first prime minister.

Those whom the South China Morning Post spoke to mostly had high regard for Lee, but a few wished for a more liberal Singapore in future, in keeping with its status as a global city.

Vincent Tan, a Catholic born in the 1980s, said his feelings for Lee were complicated. "There is a mix of grief and neutrality and a lot of gratitude," said Tan, who described himself as a struggling entrepreneur.

"I didn't experience the 1960s. When I travel abroad, I see the difference. A lot of youngsters have taken the freedom to travel without danger for granted. [Overseas] we see the things we take for granted," said Tan.

Tan was speaking at about noon yesterday at St Joseph's Roman Catholic church in Singapore, an hour or so before a requiem mass for Lee Kuan Yew was held at the church.

Well before the service began, the congregation had spilled over to the space outside the church.

In the spirit of religious harmony that Lee fostered, this mass was open to people of all denominations, with prayers said for a man believed not to have followed any religion. Old Catholic hymns sung in English could be heard outside, emanating from inside the church.

Looking to the future, Tan said he would like a more entrepreneurial Singapore.

"The global economy is moving towards creativity and the knowledge economy. We have to move fast like Hong Kong, which is moving very fast," he said.

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"The difference between Hong Kong and Singapore is that there is a lot more ownership of business at the grass-roots level in Hong Kong. Singapore does not have a totally free market, with a lot of command from the top," said Tan, who is in the design business.

"Lee Kuan Yew felt he was running a very tight ship with little margin for error. For entrepreneurship to flourish, there has to be some loosening of structures."

Marie Luo, a 27-year-old civil servant, said she had been made much more aware of Lee's deeds through the recent publicity in Singapore's media about his life.

"That visionary leadership and compassion in him inspires me," said Luo.

Asked whether critics would consider him compassionate, given the arrest of young students and dissidents under his premiership, Luo replied she did not know enough about the 1960s and 1970s to comment.

During the 1970s for example, Tan Wah Piow, then a University of Singapore Students' Union leader, was arrested for unlawful assembly and rioting, but fled the city state to gain political asylum in the UK, where he still lives, no longer young.

"The amount of freedom available in Singapore now is just right," said Nicholas Goh, a final-year economics student at the Singapore Management University. "People can start speaking out, so it's OK."

"If people speak out too much, then you have a case like the United States, where the government spends so much time fighting the opposition and people go against the government for the sake of going against the government, not because the policy is wrong," Goh argued.

Abel Ong, a 16-year-old student at St Patrick's School said: "Lee was a great man, as he was the founder of our nation. Without him, we would still be a third-world nation.

"I disagree that he was too authoritarian. What he did was for the good of the nation, even if some people disapproved of him."

Ong learned about Lee Kuan Yew from his teachers and parents. He added: "My dad and mum told me he was a good man. My parents told me he shaped the nation with his life."