

LKY commemoration left siblings divided

Ronald Loh

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It was unfortunate that the differences between Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Dr Lee Wei Ling over how to remember their late father were made public.

"For most families, such would be a private matter. But not in the case of Lee Kuan Yew, who was first among equals in the founding generation of leaders, and remains writ large and deeply etched in the Singapore psyche," said Singapore Management University law don Eugene Tan.

The disagreement between the siblings was revealed yesterday in a Facebook post by Dr Lee.

At about 1pm, she published a series of e-mail exchanges between herself and The Straits Times editors over the draft of a commentary she had written, which criticised the commemorations for the first anniversary of her father's death. (See report, right.)

This post comes two weeks after she published a commentary on her Facebook page, saying her father would have "cringed" at the commemorations.

Last month, a series of activities were held to mark the one-year passing of Mr Lee .

These included the giving out of artillery shell casings from the 21-gun salute fired during the state funeral to 21 organisations and individuals to express PM Lee's gratitude for their part in Mr Lee's life and Singapore.

A portrait, made up of 4,877 erasers of Mr Lee, was also showcased at The Red Box in Somerset Road.

In one of the e-mails, Dr Lee referred to her brother, PM Lee, as "HL" and said they were at odds on "a matter of principle".

She wrote in the e-mail: "HL has no qualms abusing his power to hv a commemoration just one year after LKY died, 'least (sic) we forget'.

"Let's be real, last year's event was so vivid no one will forget it in one yr. But if the power that be wants to establish a dynasty, LKY's daughter will not allow LKY's name to be sullied by a dishonourable son."

On the same day as Dr Lee's post, PM Lee's wife, Temasek Holdings CEO Ho Ching, posted on Facebook a picture of a monkey showing a rude gesture. It was later taken down.

It is not clear why or at exactly what time the picture was posted.

But local socio-political website The Independent said Ms Ho's posting has raised speculation of a feud in the Lee family.

Dr Lee's post was also removed by 5.30pm yesterday, but not before it sent netizens into a tizzy.

The original essay by Dr Lee has garnered over 7,000 shares, and subsequent posts have also been shared thousands of times.

The post has also been picked up by international media agencies such as Xinhua and AFP.

At about 5.30pm, PM Lee rebutted Dr Lee's allegation as untrue in a Facebook post.

He wrote: "The idea that I should wish to establish a dynasty makes even less sense. Meritocracy is a fundamental value of our society, and neither I, the PAP, nor the Singapore public would tolerate any such attempt."

He also said the Cabinet had discussed how we should mark the occasion and that his advice was to leave it to "ground-up efforts" and that groups "should keep their observances in proportion...". (See report, above.)

CARRIED AWAY

Commenting on the commemorations, National University of Singapore sociologist Tan Ern Ser said some may have been somewhat carried away in their praises.

"Even, unintentionally, coming close to borderline hero worship or promoting a nascent (cult of) personality, but I do not believe this was encouraged by our top leaders," he added.

Dr Gillian Koh, deputy director for research at the Institute of Policy Studies, said Dr Lee's posts highlighted an important issue — the divide over what is the most appropriate way to commemorate Mr Lee's death.

"Dr Lee's wish was to remind people that her father was adamant against building a cult of personality around him," she said.

Dr Koh added that Dr Lee's concerns were understandable as the bereaved daughter and someone who does not face political pressure.

"It's about how we carry on from here beyond Mr Lee's first death anniversary. Will the late Mr Lee be honoured by us honouring his wishes, is her worry, although expressed in such a controversial manner."

Associate Professor Eugene Tan said the removal of Dr Lee's Facebook post could be the first sign that the dispute is being taken offline.

"The matter will soon fade away from the public eye. Singaporeans empathise with the Lee family and look forward to their having a meeting of hearts and minds before long."