

Singaporeans fondly remember former DPM Toh Chin Chye

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Singaporeans on Friday lamented the loss of a “great leader” and “national hero” following news of the passing of former deputy prime minister Toh Chin Chye that morning.

Tributes have since poured in for Toh, a founding member of the ruling PAP and also one of the founding fathers of modern Singapore.

Commented *Yahoo!* user Tan Kok Tim on a Facebook thread, “He should be remembered as the person who single-handedly decided the fate of many that followed years later with his one casting vote that tilted the balance in the most critical moment in the founding history of modern Singapore.”

Another user, David Lim, described Toh as an “unselfish leader when I was a kid, (and) who cared a lot for S’poreans”.

53-year-old manager John Tan, who shared with *Yahoo! Singapore* that he was “very sad” to hear of Toh’s passing, said “We know him, he’s a good man... I must say, he’s one of those strong pillars who supported Lee Kuan Yew during the fight for independence.”

“I guess the younger generation may not know him well. But the older generation that is at least 50 years old, 60 or 70, those people will remember him... because he was part of the team that made Singapore what it is today.”

The first chairman of PAP, Toh became the deputy prime minister after the country's independence in 1965, and held the government post till 1968. Toh also took on the roles of Science and Technology Minister as well as Health Minister.

He was also in charge of the committee created to design the state crest, state anthem and state flag which were unveiled on 3 December 1959 at City Hall and became the National Flag and National Anthem when Singapore gained independence in 1965.

'Younger ones unaware'

Analysts whom *Yahoo! Singapore* spoke to also acknowledged that Toh’s great name probably resonated less with the younger generation.

“He’s been out of the scene for quite a long time, so I think that people who are more senior, people who are more aware of political history of Singapore – certainly that of the PAP – will have some impression of him,” said Gillian Koh, a senior research fellow at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. “But I think that for most of the younger generation, they may not have much impression of him, so I think it will be a generational thing.”

Assistant professor Eugene Tan from the Singapore Management University agreed, saying, “I think older Singaporeans, those who were born pre-Independence, will probably know of Dr Toh’s contributions, and after he retired as DPM, as a backbencher critic of his own party.”

Tan said he hoped that for younger Singaporeans, Toh’s death will provide an opportunity for them to learn more about the older generation of political leaders.

“I think there seems to be this collective amnesia where our beginnings are not given enough emphasis,” said a nostalgic Tan. “It’s a pity if Singaporeans were to let his passing not be an opportunity to once again reacquaint ourselves with the trials and tribulations of Singapore in those early years.”

News of Toh’s passing also got veteran editor PN Balji questioning why the founding chairman of the PAP was never given as much coverage as the other founding fathers – Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Keng Swee and S Rajaratnam.

“If you look at the other founding fathers... we all know their contributions to government. But somehow, Toh Chin Chye doesn’t seem to have made any such impact... He seems to have played an important role in the party, but not in government, which is quite unusual.”

Echoing similar thoughts many have shared on social media platforms, the media consultant also added, “The unfortunate thing about Singapore’s history is that we only remember Lee Kuan Yew. There’re other players too. So to many people – especially the younger ones – they may not even remember Toh Chin Chye’s name, they won’t even know who he is.”

“This is a sad part of Singapore’s development, that we really don’t have a good knowledge of our founding fathers. And that’s because one man has taken centre stage all the while, from the past to more or less the present.”