

TRANSCRIPT OF PRIME MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG'S DOORSTOP INTERVIEW WITH THE LOCAL AND FOREIGN MEDIA AT RAFFLES COUNTRY CLUB ON 18 JULY 2004

Mr Goh: "My golf game is not that hot and I'm not Tiger Woods. So I wonder why you're so interested in following me."

Q: "What were some of the considerations in making the announcement of the August 12 handover date?"

Mr Goh: "I wanted to close this chapter of Singapore's history, my chapter, and I thought the best way to do so is to make a valedictory message on National Day and then, thereafter, the new Prime Minister, that is Lee Hsien Loong, will open his chapter, or the new chapter for Singapore, with a National Day Rally. So, that's the consideration in choosing the particular day."

Q: "Any particular reason why August 12?"

Mr Goh: "If you work it out, there's no other choice, because you can't take the 9th, 10th is the President's reception. Then 11th you need the staff of the Istana to rest. Then 13th is a Friday, 14th is a Saturday and thereafter it gets too close to 22nd August. If you go through logically, 12th is the only day I could have chosen."

Q: "Any particular feeling at this point?"

Mr Goh: "I feel very happy because I'm coming to the end of I would say glorious 14 years. Of course, there were difficult moments. All in all, I thought my team and I have done, shall I say, a fair job for Singapore."

Q: "What will be your priorities?"

Mr Goh: "My first priority is to work on the National Day Message which I'm doing so now and I intend to for the first time also deliver a message in Mandarin and Malay. So I'm working on the delivery as well."

Q: "What role do you see yourself playing in the new Cabinet? Have you discussed this with DPM Lee?"

Mr Goh: "Not extensively. He has asked me to stay back in Cabinet, so I've told him if I have a role to play, I'll stay back. Otherwise, I'm quite happy to leave Cabinet and be a backbencher. He told me there'll be a role for me to play. Let him spell out the role in his Cabinet announcement."

Q: "How do you see the transition? What does it mean for Singapore?"

Mr Goh: "It means we are moving into a new phase and I'm very confident that the new Prime Minister will take Singapore to a higher level. And you need to have a change from time to time. You need to have fresh initiatives and that's best to come from a new person."

Q: "Have ministers of your batch indicated any interest to step down. Earlier you wanted to do a Cabinet reshuffle but you shelved it. What about the ministers who came with you, your batch?"

Mr Goh: "I think those questions are best left to the announcement to be made by the new Prime Minister. Otherwise, there's nothing new for you to report."

Q: "Of course they would like to hear you have a farewell message to the nation. Will the National Day Message on August 8 be this since you won't be delivering the National Day Rally?"

Mr Goh: "As I said, it will be a valedictory message. Therefore, it's not sort of a farewell message, but of course, it goes beyond just a farewell message because I'm not going to fade away."

Q: "How long ago was this August 12 date decided?"

Mr Goh: "Not too long ago because I was actually planning to leave earlier around May or so but one thing happened after another. There were so many trips to make and jobs unfinished. By the time we came to August, it was either before National Day or after National Day or after the National Day Rally. Then somewhere along the way, I thought it's best to do it this way. So it was not too long ago. But I did give indications somewhere that I have decided on the date. I think that was the time when I decided on the date."

Q: "How do you think DPM Lee is going to deal with China after that?"

Mr Goh: "He's going to be the new Prime Minister. You watch how he'll deal with it. I shouldn't pre-empt the way he's going to govern Singapore. So just watch him."

Q: "When you first took over from SM Lee, you said that he would play the role of goalkeeper, what role do you see yourself playing?"

Mr Goh: "I will leave it to the new PM to give me the role. As I said, when I decided to step down, I never decide for me any role to play. Otherwise, it's negotiating with the new Prime Minister which is not my style, which is not the PAP's style. I'll be quite happy to leave Cabinet. So let him decide for me what role I should play and he says I will be able to play a role. So I leave it at that at this moment."

Q: "The relevance of Singapore as an Asian financial centre, you mentioned that you were concerned about the future of Singapore because of China and India?"

Mr Goh: "Such questions are not meant for today. Today is a doorstep interview before a golf game."

Q: "Fourteen long years now, any special moments do you think you would like to..?"

Mr Goh: "Of course, I have, but you better wait for my National Day Message."

Q: ".Describe your feelings in detail when the announcement first went out yesterday?"

Mr Goh: "My feeling? No, it was just a simple announcement. There was no particular feeling. I was working in the office until 6 pm. Then the message came out and I'm very happy that I've come to this stage where I could relinquish my position knowing that Singapore will be in very good hands. That's more than I can ask for."

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