

**TRANSCRIPT OF SENIOR MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG'S COMMENTS
TO SINGAPORE MEDIA AT WULING VILLAGE IN YONGCHUN, CHINA
ON 28 OCTOBER 2009**

Mr Goh: "Well, I decided to come to my ancestral village because there is a hot debate going on in Singapore about new immigrants. So, I thought I'd be this issue in context by visiting my ancestral village and, of course, it's also on the way ... (indistinct)... So, it's convenient. I thought it's important, first of all, for us to know where our ancestral origins would be. So, in my case, my ancestral home is in Yongchun in a small village called Wuling and it's in a way humbling to know that my origin was that humble, a small village, a small room where my father was born in some, I would say, unknown place in a county in China and my father left for Singapore when he was about eight years old. So, in a sense, I am a second-generation Singaporean. First generation would be my father. He came with his own father, that's my grandfather.

"So, the first question for us when we are debating this question of new immigrants is where did we all come from. So, we've got to know that we all were all immigrants somewhere, whether it's India, Malaysia, Indonesia or China. Second question, of course, we've got to ask ourselves will be why do we need to have another wave of new immigrants and the reason is simple -- our population is not going to grow in future because of the low birth rate and the low total fertility rate and if we want the economy to grow by, in future, at least, say, four, five per cent, we need to have human resource, we need to have manpower. So, we need top up people in Singapore so that we can generate more growth. And, of course, the last question which is very important is whilst we welcome new immigrants, how do we integrate them so that the friction between them and Singaporeans who are there would be minimal? So, these are three questions we've got to understand in order to debate this issue. Otherwise, we get a little emotional debating this. In fact, if all Singaporeans trace where they came from, I think they will be humbled by a sense of their origin.

"I am quite happy that I could trace my family roots to 1304. I'm the 17th generation and they have kept records of each generation and when I talked to my relatives over here, from their names, I know that we are related because I still follow the pattern of naming my children after the generational chart which my second uncle had from this village. So, my son is named after the generation. So, when he came over here, he could identify with the people from that generation and likewise, my grandchildren also followed the generational chart. So, that shows how close we are in terms of building this extended relationship."

Q: "And what is the message that you want Singaporeans to take home about immigrants and those who want PR status in Singapore?"

Mr Goh: "Well, I think the first message should be we've got to welcome selectively new immigrants. We just can't open our floodgates to all and sundry and Singapore will be overwhelmed, but selectively, we should choose the right people to come to Singapore to help contribute to Singapore. That's key. If they can contribute to Singapore, then they should be welcomed. Of course, if we have a choice, we choose those who can contribute more than those who can contribute less. And what's the second question?"

Q: "And for those who are seeking PR status in Singapore?"

Mr Goh: "I think we welcome them. That's the first step to getting them to become Singapore citizens. I know there's some debate over this Chinese girl who's a PR in Singapore who took part in a parade, the 60th anniversary of China, PRC parade. I think it's right for her to do so. She has been invited. She's, after all, a Chinese citizen and, of course, being a Chinese citizen, if she's invited, it is something grand for the young person to be taking part in such a momentous event. So, I would, in fact, think that she has done the right thing. She's a PR, but PR is only one step to becoming a Singapore citizen. In our case, we have many PRs in other countries, like in Australia, in the UK and every National Day, we invite Singapore citizens who are PRs of other countries to take part in our National Day, whether it's a dinner reception, maybe saying the Pledge or with our flag raising. I don't think the host countries of PRs who are Singaporeans would allege that they are not being patriotic to the country where they are, just because they attended our National Day to say the Pledge and sing Majallah Singapura.

"So, likewise, that must be our attitude, try and entice these people to take the next step and become a Singapore citizen. And, of course, once a person becomes a Singapore citizen, we will not expect him or her to go and march in other countries' parades because you have decided that this new country will be the one you're going to be loyal to. But that doesn't mean you should cut ties with the country of origin. If you cut ties with the countries of origin, Singapore is a very small place, so we encourage Singaporeans to try and, in fact, establish a link, but remembering that you're Singaporean with your ancestral countries. Then we are part of a larger whole.

"So, I'm proud that although Singapore's modern history, if you trace back to the British times, it's 1819, Singapore's independence since 1965, that we are part of a larger civilization. So, that gives me a sense of gravitas that I am part of a 5,000-year history. If I think I'm just Singaporean, I forsake China, I have no roots over here, I will feel very inadequate that I'm a Singaporean with a very short history, there's no sense of pride, whereas my culture, I might not speak Mandarin, I might speak limited Hokkien, but my make-up, my culture, my values are very Chinese. That's because we have 5,000 years of history. In my case, I can trace my ancestral tree to about 600 years ago, nearly 700 years ago, 1304."

Q: "Are you concerned about the younger generation of Singaporeans, third, fourth generation Chinese, for example, who may not be able to trace their family tree and they don't have that language, the dialect background to give them a cultural link back to China?"

Mr Goh: "No, we've got to recognise that we are a sovereign state, a new nation and we have to evolve a Singapore identity and that Singapore identity must embrace elements of China, from India, from Malaysia and so on. So, we are not, in a sense, uniquely Chinese. We are uniquely Singaporean. In fact, if we speak Hokkien to the people over here, they would not be able to understand us. If I tell them ... (remarks in Hokkien)... they won't understand a word of what I said. So, that's Singaporean

Hokkien, but, nevertheless, there are many words where we would understand one another. Maybe, I'll say a few words in Mandarin?"

(Interview continues in Mandarin).

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