MEDIA ANNOUNCEMENT

The ‘Battleship’ has Arrived

Telegram from the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew and additional items to go on display at

In Memoriam: Lee Kuan Yew from 10 April onwards

Telegram from Lee Kuan Yew, 26 September 1958

Singapore, 9 April 2015 – From 10 April 2015 onwards, some personal items and new speeches delivered by the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew will be showcased at the In Memoriam: Lee Kuan Yew exhibition at the National Museum of Singapore.

Among the personal items to be displayed are the telegram with the cryptic message ‘ARRIVING TODAY BATTLESHIP’, which Mr Lee had sent. While sorting through his father’s things, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong came across an old telegram which his parents had kept all these years. Dated 26 September 1958, Mr Lee had sent a telegram for the family while in Sibu (Sarawak). It simply read, “ARRIVING TODAY BATTLESHIP – LEEKUANYEW”. In a Facebook post on 6 April 2015, Prime Minister Lee related that no one knew what Mr Lee meant until he returned home to explain that he used ‘battleship’ instead of ‘steam boat’ to save telegram word costs.
The telegram alongside other personal documents such as the Cambridge University Reporter (18 June 1949) - the official journal of the University of Cambridge which listed Lee Kuan Yew and Kwa Geok Choo graduating together with first class honours after the Law final examination; a memorandum from the Director of Posts to the Secretary of the Postal and Telecommunications Uniformed Staff Union (11 February 1952), as well as a Letter from John Laycock to Lee Kuan Yew (13 April 1953) will be put on display at the memorial exhibition. (Please refer to Annex A)

Besides the new items, visitors can also listen to archival recordings of significant speeches delivered by the late Mr Lee in Mandarin, Malay and Hokkien during his career. For instance, the 1959 People’s Action Party Victory Rally by Mr Lee after the party assumed majority of the seats from the nation’s first Legislative Assembly General Election and Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s 1982 National Day Rally speech are some of the featured recordings.

In Memoriam: Lee Kuan Yew is open daily from 10am to 8pm (until 10pm on Fridays and Saturdays) at the Glass Atrium, Level 2, National Museum of Singapore until Sunday, 24 May 2015. Admission to this exhibition is free for all visitors. The exhibition brochure is available in all four languages - English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil – for visitors to take home. Visitors are advised that queues are expected on weekends and public holidays.

Since it opened on 25 March, over 38,000 people have visited the exhibition. In addition to the exhibition, visitors can visit the Museum Label shop to purchase books on Mr Lee’s life.
Annex A
Captions for four personal objects from Mr Lee Kuan Yew

The Cambridge University Reporter, 18 June 1949
The Cambridge University Reporter is the official journal of the University of Cambridge. This issue lists the results of the Law final examination of 1949, with both Lee Kuan Yew and Kwa Geok Choo graduating together with first class honours, and Mr Lee earning the only distinction of his class. Mr Lee had completed his studies in three years, while Ms Kwa completed hers in two, as she had arrived a year later at Cambridge. Either Mr Lee or Ms Kwa had underlined both their names on their personal copy of this issue, which they brought back on their return to Singapore in 1950.

The Memorandum from the Director of Posts to the Secretary of the Post and Telegraph Uniformed Staff Union, 11 February 1952
On 30 January 1952, the Post and Telegraph Uniformed Staff Union wrote to the Director of Posts, W A Cooper, on their appointment of Lee Kuan Yew as their legal counsel. This memorandum by Cooper replies to that letter, confirming that the Colonial Secretary W L Blythe had no objection to Mr Lee acting on behalf of the union in negotiations. Following a strike by postmen and telegraph messengers in May 1952, Mr Lee succeeded in negotiating revisions to their salary scales. The following year, Mr Lee represented the clerical workers from the Singapore Union of Postal and Telecommunications Workers.

Letter from John Laycock to Lee Kuan Yew, 13 April 1953
Two days after successfully negotiating the award of 28 months’ back pay for the clerical workers of the Singapore Union of Postal and Telecommunications Workers, Lee Kuan Yew received this letter from his employer John Laycock. Upon discussion with partner T W Ong, Laycock expressed his concern on the heavy backlog of work left behind by their lawyers who were involved in lengthy arbitrations on wages, and insisted they should no longer take up such cases except by special request. This became a catalyst for Mr Lee to set up his own firm, Lee & Lee, in September 1955 with his wife Kwa Geok Choo and his brother Lee Kim Yew.
Telegram from Lee Kuan Yew, 26 September 1958

Less than a year before becoming Singapore’s first Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew travelled to Sibu in Sarawak for one of his last cases with Lee & Lee. On the morning of his return to Singapore, he sent this telegram to his office at the telegraph address KYLEGAL SINGAPORE. The cryptic message (“ARRIVING TODAY BATTLESHIP”) confused both his wife and the office secretary, who checked with the Naval Base at Sembawang if there was indeed a battleship returning from Sarawak (there was not). Mr Lee did return that day, but not on battleship. As he explained later, he had wanted a “steam boat” dinner, but used “battleship” instead to save words and telegraph fees.

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About the National Heritage Board

The National Heritage Board (NHB) was formed on 1 August 1993. Its mission is to foster nationhood, promote identity building, and champion the development of a vibrant cultural and heritage sector in Singapore. As the custodian of Singapore’s heritage, NHB is responsible for telling the Singapore story, sharing the Singaporean experience and imparting our Singapore spirit. NHB manages the national museums, heritage institutions, the Language Councils Secretariat and sets policies relating to heritage sites, monuments and the national collection. Through the national collection, NHB curates heritage programmes and presents exhibitions to connect the past, present and future generations of Singaporeans. NHB is a statutory board under the Ministry of Culture, Community, Youth and Sports. Please visit www.nhb.gov.sg for more information.
About the National Museum of Singapore
With a history dating back to its inception in 1887, the National Museum of Singapore is the nation’s oldest museum with a progressive mind. Its galleries adopt cutting-edge and multi-perspective ways of presenting history and culture to redefine conventional museum experience. A cultural and architectural landmark in Singapore, the Museum hosts innovative festivals and events all year round—the dynamic Night Festival, visually arresting art installations, as well as amazing performances and film screenings—in addition to presenting thought-provoking exhibitions involving critically important collections of artefacts. The programming is supported by a wide range of facilities and services including F&B, retail and a Resource Centre. The National Museum of Singapore re-opened in December 2006 after a three-year redevelopment, and celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2012. It is currently undergoing a revamp of its permanent galleries. For more details, please visit www.nationalmuseum.sg