

Release No. : 01/SEP  
01-1/93/09/01

93-07C-1

**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT ONG TENG CHEONG  
AT THE SWEARING IN OF THE FIFTH PRESIDENT  
AT THE ISTANA ON WEDNESDAY, 1 SEPTEMBER 1993 AT 8.00 PM**

To be elected President is to take on a weighty duty. This is especially so now that the President is no longer solely a ceremonial position, but has custodial powers to protect the reserves, and to safeguard the integrity of the public service. As a Cabinet minister, I took part in the discussions which resulted in the legislation creating the Elected Presidency. I know what an important role the elected President plays in our Constitution. I am therefore acutely conscious of the responsibility which the people of Singapore have entrusted to me.

During the election campaign, I explained how I saw my role as President:

I will do my best to rally all Singaporeans to build a gracious and caring society, and to make Singapore a nation of distinction. But the President does not initiate his own programmes or policies. That is the Government's job. The President's task is to decide when to say no to the Government, and when to say yes, taking everything into account and holding Singapore's interests uppermost. That I promise to do to the best of my ability.

The President's powers are custodial powers. He only exercises them when the Government wants to take certain important actions, and needs the President's concurrence to proceed. This will not happen routinely, but only on exceptional occasions, for example:

- o When the Government spends reserves accumulated by previous governments;

- o When the Government makes certain key appointments such as a new Chairman of the Public Service Commission, Accountant-General, or Chief of Defence Force;
- o When the Government detains someone under the Internal Security Act against the recommendation of the advisory board;
- o When the Government issues a restraining order under the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act against the recommendation of the Presidential Council for Religious Harmony; or
- o When the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) wants to carry out investigations, but the Prime Minister has refused them permission to do so.

On such occasions, it will be my duty to exercise the powers wisely, and in the higher interests of all Singaporeans.

By their vote in the Presidential elections, Singaporeans have given me the mandate and authority to carry out my duty without fear or favour. The experience I have gained as a Member of Parliament (MP), a minister, and in the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) will help me to reach the right decisions. But as President, my perspective will be different from that of MPs, ministers, or union leaders. The President must be above partisan politics, even though the decisions he makes are, in the wide sense of the word, political ones. He must protect the interests of Singapore as a whole.

As President, I will benefit from the advice of the Council of Presidential Advisors. I also intend to maintain my ties and friendships with my fellow Singaporeans from all walks of life, whom I have had the privilege to know over the years. This will keep me in touch with the people - their aspirations, hopes and fears. But having listened to the best advice available, I must make up my own mind what to do.

The legislation creating the institution of the Elected President is still new. While its philosophy and intent are clear, the detailed Constitutional provisions have not been fully tested out. Nor is there established precedent on how the Elected President actually exercises his powers. Both the President and the Government will have to feel their way forward.

I look forward to developing a sound working relationship with the Prime Minister and his Government. The purpose of the Elected President is to institute judicious checks and balances in our political system, not to create unworkable conflict and gridlock. As we accumulate experience with the new system, we can refine the arrangements, and define through practice and precedent how the Elected President will function. In time, the Presidency should grow into an institution which strengthens our political stability, guarantees high standards of government, and assures Singaporeans of a secure and prosperous future.

oooooooooooooooooooo

National Archives of Singapore

From: INFORMATION5 (8812:GVT224)  
Subject: [President Ong Teng Cheong]  
Posted: Fri 3-September-93 14:46 SING  
Delivered: Fri 3-September-93 14:46 SING (55 lines)  
Msg ID: IPM-8812-930903-132975100

**SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS RELEASES**

**DISTRIBUTION LIST**

1	Mr Yatiman Bin Yusof, Parliamentary Secretary (Foreign Affairs)	GVT 047
2	Mr Lim Boon Heng, Senior Minister of State (MTI)	GVT 090
3	Dr Yeo Ning Hong, Minister for Defence	GVT 200
4	Mr Ch'ng Jit Koon, Senior Minister of State (Community Development)	GVT 234
5	Dr Ahmad Mattar, Minister for Environment	GVT 080
6	BG George Yeo, Second Minister for Foreign Affairs	GVT 049
7	Mr Harun A Ghani, Political Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs	GVT 710
8	Library Officer, Auditor-General Office	GVT 370
9	Library. Ministry of Education	GVT 036
10	Mr Lee Chiong Giam, Chief Executive Director (PA)	GVT 615
10a	Mr Soon Low Boon, Library (PA)	
11	Library, Parliament House	GVT 251
12	National Archives	GVT 237
13	Mr Aziz Champion, Ministry of Law (PS's copy)	GVT 125
14	Budget Division, Ministry of Finance	GVT 052
15	Mrs Elaine Swinn-Tan, Head, Public Relations, MOL	GVT 168
16	Economics Dept, MAS	GVT 721
17	PSD, Ministry of Finance	GVT 111
18	The General Manager, Board of Commissioners of Currency	GVT 611
19	Library, Ministry of Community Development	GVT 235

20	Commissioner for Lands, Land Office, Ministry of Law	GVT 463
21	Library, Jurong Town Corporation	GVT 390
22	Public Relations Dept, Ministry of Home Affairs	GVT 137
23	Resource Centre, Ministry of Trade & Industry	GVT 091
24	Public Relations Dept, VITB	GVT 480
25	Registry Supervisor, Ministry of National Development	GVT 240
26	The Chairman, Singapore Institute of Standards and Industrial Research	GVT 325
27	Librarian, NTUC Research Unit	GVT 351
27a	PA to Mr Ong Teng Cheong, Deputy Prime Minister	
28	Mindef Library	GVT 207
29	Director, Community Relations Dept, Ministry of Community Development (Kindly make copies and distribute to all the secretariats)	GVT 470
30	Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence	GVT 560
31	Dr Lee Boon Yang, Minister for Labour & Second Minister for Defence	GVT 205
32	Dr Tay Eng Soon, Senior Minister of State for Education	GVT 030
33	Mr Wong Kan Seng, Minister for Foreign Affairs	GVT 044
33a	Mr Peter Ho, DS (SEA) Min. of Foreign Affairs	GVT 044
34	Dr Richard Hu, Minister for Finance	GVT 017
35	Mr Yeo Cheow Tong, Minister for Health & Minister for Community Development	GVT 172 GVT 230
36	Mr Sidek Bin Saniff, Minister of State for Education	GVT 680
37	Mr J. A. Nathan, Globalink, TDB	GVT 817