

# Lee Kuan Yew Mourned In Singapore

BY STEPHEN WRIGHT AND JEANETTE TAN  
Associated Press

SINGAPORE — Singaporeans wept and world leaders paid tribute Monday as the Southeast Asian city-state mourned the death of its founding father Lee Kuan Yew.

The government announced that Lee, 91, "passed away peacefully" early Monday at Singapore General Hospital. An increasingly frail Lee was hospitalized in February with severe pneumonia.

State television broke away from regular programming with a hagiographic tribute to Lee's life. In a live broadcast, one of its reporters called Lee's death the "awful and dreaded" news.

Lee commands immense respect among Singaporeans, who this year will celebrate the country's 50th anniversary of independence. He led multiracial Singapore with an iron grip for more than three decades until 1990, and is credited with transforming the resource poor island into a wealthy bustling financial hub with low crime and almost zero corruption.

His son, the current prime minister Lee Hsien Loong, struggled to hold back tears in a televised address to the nation.

Speaking in Malay, Mandarin and English, the prime minister said Lee built a nation and gave Singaporeans a proud national identity.

"We won't see another man like him. To many Singaporeans, and indeed others too, Lee Kuan Yew was Singapore," he said.

At the hospital where Lee spent the last weeks of his life, 55-year-old Maligah Thangaveloo cried as she clasped her hands in prayer before an expansive array of flowers and cards left by Singaporeans. Calling Lee "father," she recalled shaking hands with him as a 9-year-old when he visited her school.



THEN CHIH WEY/XINHUA/ZUMA PRESS/TNS  
Singapore's former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew attends his new book launch in August 2013. Singapore government officials announced Lee's death Sunday. He was 91.

President Barack Obama called Lee a "visionary" in a statement, saying he was "deeply saddened" to learn of his death. Obama, who met Lee during a visit to Singapore in 2009, said his "remarkable" leadership helped build "one of the most prosperous countries in the world today."

He said Singapore's success meant that Lee's counsel was sought by political leaders around the world. Lee was also "hugely important in helping me reformulate our policy of rebalancing to the Asia Pacific," Obama said.

The Singapore government has declared seven days of national mourning and flags will fly at half-staff on state buildings. A private wake for the Lee family will take place on Monday and Tuesday. After that, Lee will lie in state at parliament until a state funeral Sunday.

Sayed Hussain, an IT executive, said Lee was a "great hero" to Singaporeans as he paid respects at Singapore General Hospital.

"It is our duty to respect him and recognize him as a great hero in the world," said Hussain. "This is our last chance to do so."

Under Lee and his successors, Singapore was known around the world for its strict social order including a ban on chewing gum, restrictions on free speech and canings for crimes some countries would rule as minor. In recent years, it has become socially more liberal and the fragmented political opposition made gains in Singapore's last elections in 2011.

After stepping down as prime minister, Lee remained part of the Cabinet and an influential figure in Singapore and the region.

Australian prime minister Tony Abbott said Lee was a "giant of our region."

## Afghanistan Pullout Hinged To Developing Forces

BY DEB RIECHMANN  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The pace of U.S. troop withdrawals from Afghanistan will headline Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's visit to Washington, yet America's exit from the war remains tightly hinged to the abilities of the Afghan forces that face a tough fight against insurgents this spring.

President Barack Obama has promised to end the longest U.S. war — it began in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks — and get the remaining troops out of Afghanistan by the end of his presidency. Deficiencies in the Afghan security forces, heavy casualties in the ranks of the army and police, a fragile new government and fears that Islamic State fighters could gain a foothold in Afghanistan have combined to persuade Obama to slow the withdrawal.

Instead of trimming the current U.S. force of 9,800 to 5,500 by the end of the year, U.S. military officials say the administration now might keep many of them there well into 2016. Obama had said that after that, the U.S. would only maintain an embassy-based security force in Kabul of perhaps 1,000 troops. But on Friday, Jeff Eggers of the White House's National Security Council said that too could be changed. He said the post-2016 plan will be considered on an on-going basis.

At stake is the U.S. taxpayers' more than \$60 billion investment — so far — in the Afghan forces. The 327,000-member force performs much



Obama

better than before, but still needs work. While praising their ability to operate mostly independently and securing the nation during a protracted election, U.S. military officials say the Afghan forces still suffer from a host of problems: attrition, drug abuse, desertions, illiteracy, poor record-keeping, a lack of management and logistical skills, intelligence, a shortage of top-notch leaders and less-than-optimal cooperation between policemen and soldiers.

They also are suffering massive casualties as they ramp up operations.

More than 1,300 members of the Afghan army were killed in action and another 6,200 were wounded in action between October 2013 and September 2014, according to a report this month from the special inspector general for Afghan reconstruction. Casualties in the ranks of policemen are even higher. In nearly 14 years of fighting, at least 2,200 U.S. military service men and women have been killed.

"They are now leading the fight, but they still need our support, and that support is critical to enabling them to hold the key cities ... and to hold off a still bubbling insurgency, particularly in the rural areas," Michele Flournoy, former undersecretary of defense for policy, said last week at an event organized by the Alliance in Support of the

Afghan People.

Afghan leaders also worry that Islamic State militants could push into the region and bring guns and money that would spark competition among insurgents disenchanted with the Taliban leadership and eager to prove their prowess with heinous acts of violence. Afghan and U.S. officials say some Afghan militants have rebranded themselves with IS, raising its black flag and even clashing with Taliban fighters.

Army Gen. John Campbell, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, told a congressional panel recently that the Afghans repeatedly ask the U.S. for close air support, which has been critical in their ability to fend off Taliban fighters battling to capture territory.

"What I tell the Afghans is, 'Don't plan your operation wholly dependent upon close air support. The Taliban doesn't have close air support. The Taliban doesn't have up-armored Humvees. The Taliban doesn't have D-30 Howitzers. The Taliban doesn't have, you know, the weapons that you have,'" Campbell said.

The Afghan Air Force, which currently has about 100 aircraft, is slated to receive 20 light-attack aircraft used for counterinsurgency, close air support and aerial reconnaissance, but more than half aren't slated to arrive until 2017 and 2018.

"That's another reason we need to continue to have this train, advise and assist (mission) for the next several years," Campbell said.

Nearly 14 years after the U.S. invaded after 9/11 to root out al-Qaida and oust its host, the Taliban, Afghanistan remains a dangerous country.

The United Nations reports that 3,700 Afghan civilians were killed and another 6,850 were injured in the conflict last year, more than any year since it started documenting civilian casualties.

Going forward, lawmakers must weigh the risks that come with cutting the purse strings amid reports of wasteful spending, fraud and corruption. Rep. Walter Jones, R-N.C., suggested at a House committee hearing that the U.S. might want to "stop pounding money down the rat hole."

"When that rat hole is Afghanistan," he said, "the billions are essentially without end."

So far, Congress has appropriated more than \$60 billion to build, equip, train, and sustain the Afghan forces, and the Defense Department has asked for an additional \$3.8 billion for fiscal 2016.

Robert Hathaway, former director of the Asia program at the Woodrow Wilson Center, said financing Afghanistan is likely to become a contest of endurance between the Taliban, and the U.S. taxpayer and members of Congress.

"I think inevitably — both because of fiscal pressures and because of the nature of the warfare in Afghanistan — we are going to see, a few years down the road, a smaller, leaner sleeker Afghan army," Hathaway said.

## Greece Counters German Demands

BERLIN (AP) — It was 1943 and the Nazis were deporting Greece's Jews to death camps in Poland. Hitler's genocidal accountants reserved a chilling twist: The Jews had to pay their train fare.

The bill for 58,585 Jews sent to Auschwitz and other camps exceeded 2 million Reichsmark — more than 25 million euros (\$27 million) in today's money.

For decades, this was a forgotten footnote among all of the greater horrors of the Holocaust. Today it is returning to the fore amid the increasingly bitter row between Athens and Berlin over the Greek financial bailout.

Jewish leaders in Thessaloniki, home to Greece's largest Jewish community, say they are considering how to reclaim the rail fares from Germany — with seven decades of interest.

## Confederate Flag At Center Of Dispute

WASHINGTON (AP) — Texas commemorates the Confederacy in many ways, from an annual celebration of Confederate Heroes Day each January to monuments on the grounds of the state Capitol in Austin. Among the memorials is one that has stood for more than a century, bearing an image of the Confederate battle flag etched in marble.

But you're out of luck if you want to put that flag on your license plate. Texas says that would be offensive.

Now the Supreme Court will decide whether the state can refuse to issue a license plate featuring the battle flag without violating the free-speech rights of Texans who want one. The justices hear arguments Monday in a challenge brought by the Texas division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans.

The group sued over the state's decision not to authorize its proposed license plate with its logo bearing the battle flag, similar to plates issued by eight other states that were members of the Confederacy and Maryland.

The First Amendment dispute has brought together some unlikely allies, including the American Civil Liberties Union, anti-abortion groups, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, civil libertarian Nat Hentoff and conservative satirist P.J. O'Rourke.

## Shiite Rebels Seize Taiz, Yemen

ADEN, Yemen (AP) — Yemen's Shiite rebel leader escalated his attack Sunday against the country's embattled president, vowing to send fighters to the south where Abed-Rabbo Mansour Hadi has taken refuge. The fiery speech came hours after his militia seized the third-largest city of Taiz, an important station in its advance.

Abdel-Malik al-Houthi, who is backed by supporters of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, said the mobilization is aimed at fighting al-Qaida and other militant groups, as well as forces loyal to Hadi who are in the south intending to further destabilize Yemen.

In his one-hour speech on al-Masirah TV, al-Houthi called Hadi a "puppet" to international and regional powers who want to "import the Libyan model" to Yemen. He named the United States, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Qatar as conspirators against Yemen and other countries in the region.

Libya is torn by warring militias with rival parliaments on either end of the country claiming legitimacy and radicals from the Islamic State group taking root.

Yemen's turmoil has deepened since the Shiite rebel group, known as the Houthis, seized Sanaa in September, putting Hadi under house arrest and eventually dissolving the country's parliament. They now control at least nine of the country's 21 provinces.

## Orthodox Community Mourns Deaths

NEW YORK (AP) — An ultra-Orthodox Jewish community shattered by the deaths of seven siblings in a house fire carried out their funerals Sunday, a day after a hot plate left on for the Sabbath is believed to have sparked the fire that killed them.

The tragedy had some neighborhood Jews reconsidering the practice of keeping hot plates on for the Sabbath, a common modern method of obeying tradition prohibiting use of fire on the holy day.

The bodies of the children from the Sassoon family, ages 5 to 16, were to be flown to Israel after the funeral for a prompt burial. Flames engulfed their two-story, brick-and-wood home in Brooklyn's Midwood neighborhood early Saturday, likely after a hot plate left on a kitchen counter set off the fire that trapped the children and badly injured their mother and another sibling, investigators said.

The service at the Shomrei Hadas funeral home began with prayers in Hebrew, accompanied by the wailing voices of mourners. They could be heard through speakers that broadcast the rite to hundreds of people gathered outside on the streets in traditional black robes and flat-brimmed hats.

## 'Insurgent' Seizes Top Spot At Box Office

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Sean Penn's "The Gunman" was no match for the rebel kids of "Insurgent."

The second installment in the "Divergent" series easily topped the box office with \$54 million from 3,875 theaters, according to Rentrak estimates Sunday. Penn's geopolitical thriller stumbled with only \$5 million.

While the second films in both the "Hunger Games" and the "Twilight" series boasted opening weekend gains over the first, "Insurgent's" opening nearly matches that of its predecessor, "Divergent," which debuted to \$54.6 million just last year.

Many predicted a bit of growth for this second film, which sees the return of stars Shailene Woodley, Theo James, and Kate Winslet to author Veronica Roth's dystopian world. But, both distributor Lionsgate and box office analysts see the consistency as a good thing.

# Obama Takes Netanyahu 'At His Word' On Palestinian State

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama said he takes Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "at his word" for saying that an independent Palestinian state will never co-exist with Israel as long as he is in office, yet another sign of the strained relations between longtime allies.

Netanyahu has backpedaled since he stunned the U.S. and the international community by announcing that dramatic policy reversal on the eve of his re-election Tuesday. But in his first public comments on the election outcome, Obama suggested that he

does not believe the Israeli leader's softer position on the Palestinian state issue.

"We take him at his word when he said that it wouldn't happen during his prime ministership, and so that's why we've got to evaluate what other options are available to make sure that we don't see a chaotic situation in the region," Obama told The Huffington Post in an interview released Saturday.

Obama, who placed a congratulatory telephone call to Netanyahu on Thursday, said he indicated to the prime minister that the U.S. remains

committed to a two-state solution as the only way to keep Israel secure.

"And I indicated to him that given his statements prior to the election, it is going to be hard to find a path where people are seriously believing that negotiations are possible," Obama said.

Tensions between the Obama administration and Netanyahu escalated as the March 17 Israeli elections neared. The White House was particularly annoyed when Netanyahu accepted an invitation from Republican House Speaker John Boehner to address lawmakers

earlier this month. Boehner had not consulted the administration before extending the invitation, which an infuriated White House said was a break from standard practice. Netanyahu sharply criticized a deal being negotiated among the U.S., Iran and other world powers over Iran's nuclear program.

Obama said U.S.-Israeli military and security cooperation would remain unchanged, regardless of disagreements on policy.

"But we are going to continue to insist that, from our point of view, the status quo is unsustainable," he

said. "And that while taking into complete account Israel's security, we can't just in perpetuity maintain the status quo, expand settlements. That's not a recipe for stability in the region."

Obama also criticized Netanyahu for saying as the election neared that Arab voters were heading to the polls "in droves." Obama's spokesman Josh Earnest previously denounced the rhetoric as a "cynical Election Day tactic" and a "pretty transparent effort to marginalize Arab Israeli votes."

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