

Mention water and Singaporeans remember Mr. Lee Kuan Yew and His beloved wife Mdm. Kwa Geok Choo. During His lifetime, Founding Prime Minister Lee of Singapore once said at His annual National Day Rally, "Even from my sick bed, even if you are going to lower me into the grave and I feel something is going wrong, I will get up." Throughout His and Mdm Kwa's lifetimes, They have championed the cause of survival in a competitive climate of a group of migrant residents in a little town deprived of bare essentials, ranging from daily drinking water as well as housing and education. Against all odds, Mr. and Mrs Lee Kuan Yew sought cooperation from neighbouring towns and regions, while he worked an entire lifetime in sustaining the livelihoods of millions while enforcing the discipline that He and His team had inherited from the former British colonial masters. Often viewed as a worthy monarch by His close associates and fond followers, Mr and Mrs Lee Kuan Yew often renounced Their royal prerogatives or privileges throughout Their lifetimes in favour of asceticism or an austere style of living. They walked the talk, and they talked the walk.

As both Mr and Mrs Lee Kuan Yew were trained as lawyers, They believed in subscribing to the international laws and governing dynamics of our planet, and this includes the United Nations. Whether water is concerned, Singapore is often in dire conditions due to our small geographical surface area, and hence water catchment areas were tremendously important to the continual survival and sustainability of Singapore as an inhabited civilisation. Ordinary citizens like me were taught since a very tender age that water is an existential issue for Singapore. From a small population of merely less than one million residents several decades ago, today Singapore boasts of an overall residential population of more than five million, nearly six. From the initial founding years too when Mdm Kwa Geok Choo helped Singapore pen the contractual document that would secure our water import deals from Malaysia till today, generations have come to live and build their families in Singapore, living till ripe and old ages.

As our beloved and wise Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong reiterates this year in 2017, "Singapore is an island, yet we are one of the most water-stressed countries in the world. We have enough water today only because of our unremitting efforts since independence. For us, water will always be a strategic resource, and a matter of national security." Our ancestors i.e. the Pioneer Generation knew this. Potable, drinking water is necessary for our survival and has to be saved. Our generations of servicemen and women who have defended Singapore too understand this. Yet, even though we do what we may in managing risks, we needed more reservoirs and today Singapore has altogether 17 water catchment reservoirs instead of just three during our initial founding years. Precipitation is part of our regular needs here in Singapore, and even though we enjoy a fair amount of rainfall locally along the equator, we still need to import immense volumes of fresh water from the Linggui River of the Johore Sultanate. In recent months, this very Linggui River has been drying up. Water levels are no longer the same as it used to be. Very boldly, as the population in Johore is also increasing, the yield of potable water production in Singapore is affected somehow.

Over the recent years, the Singapore Government has undertaken several projects including NEWater now that technology has become available since the 1970s. Also known as the third

national tap of Singapore, NEWater is reclaimed water that comes from treated used water, which comes from used water that is treated till safe to be returned to nature. NEWater today may have cleared over 150,000 scientific tests and complies with World Health Organisation requirements. Our Singapore Government under then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong completed the first NEWater plant in May 2000, which utilises a rigorous three step process that produces ultra clean reclaimed water. Following which from 2001 till today such projects that would increase water supply from unconventional sources have been keeping us hydrated. Today, five NEWater reclamation plants meet up to 40% of the nation's current water needs. We project that NEWater can and may meet up to 55% of Singapore's future water demand in 2060.

Not to be mistaken with water reclamation, the first SingSpring Desalination Plant in Tuas was opened by the Public Utilities Board in a partnership with the private sector SingSpring Pte Ltd by the end 2005. Instead of treating used water, our desalination plants are producing millions of gallons of seawater reverse-osmosis drinking water today, and the taste of the desalinated water is definitely neither salty nor fishy.

Other than the second Tuaspring desalination plant, we are anticipating a third desalination plant at Tuas by this year end but it is probably not ready yet. Even though prices of drinking water is projected to go up by 30% in Singapore over 24 months, by 2020 Singaporeans can enjoy water from a fourth desalination plant at Marina East. We are not ungrateful for the blessings that nature gives to us, and in typing this Watershed story, it is also my wish that Singaporeans never forget that 70% of homo sapiens are blood and hence water, i.e. if our desalination projects are not moving, instead of desalinating seawater our peace may not be sustainable without more blood shed at the warfront.

Most Singaporeans today grew up in a peaceful society and are clueless about fighting a war, some have hardly eaten sweet potato leaves in their lifetime, we give thanks that we have enough drinking water to savour and that peace continues to proliferate many decades ahead and beyond.

We are Remembering Lee Kuan Yew.  
Lin Rongxiang, Republic of Singapore