

SINGAPORE '78



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This edition covers events and developments
in Singapore during 1976-77.

The Big Splash at East Coast Park





Shenton Way





SINGAPORE '78

PSA Towers



CONTENTS

GENERAL REVIEW 1 1977 1 1976 29

HISTORY 58

LAND AND PEOPLE 95 Physical Features 95 Climate 96
Flora and Fauna 96 Births and Deaths 98 Demographic
Background 99 Population 100 Marriages 100 Registration of
Persons 101 Citizenship 101 Immigration 101

GOVERNMENT 103 Legislature 105 Parliament 105
Executive 106 Ministries 106

LAW 114 Administration of Justice 115 System of Courts 117
Attorney-General's Chambers 118 The Constitution of
Singapore 122

DEFENCE AND INTERNAL SECURITY 125 Defence 125
The Police Force 128 Central Narcotics Bureau 129 CISC 130
The Vigilante Corps 131 Prisons 131 SCORE 132

FINANCE 133 Public Finance 135 Development
Expenditure 136 Revenue 137 Tax System 138 Customs and
Excise 141 Monetary Policy and Developments 143 Financial
Institutions 145 International Loans 148 Post Office
Savings Bank 148

ECONOMY 150 Industrialization 151 Manufacturing 153
Economic Development Board 157 Trade 158 Co-operatives 160
Jurong Town Corporation 160 Singapore Tourist Promotion
Board 162 Sentosa Development Corporation 163 Primary
Production 164 Technical Assistance 166

LABOUR 168 Employment 170 Industrial Relations 170
Trade Unionism 171 Terms of Employment 172 Labour
Enforcement 173 Workmen's Compensation 173 Central
Provident Fund 174 Employment Services 175

EDUCATION 177 Schools 179 Curricula 181 Teachers 184
Services 186 Industrial Training 187 Ngee Ann Technical
College 188 Singapore Polytechnic 189 University of
Singapore 190 Nanyang University 191 Institute of
Education 192 Institute of Southeast Asian Studies 192
Adult Education 193 Administration and Finance 194
Regional and International Co-operation 194

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY 199 Department of Scientific Services 200 Metrication 200 Science Centre 201 Science Council 201

SOCIAL SERVICES 203 Health Services 203 Welfare Services 212 Singapore Council of Social Service 214 Legal Aid Bureau 215 Environment 219 Drainage 221

COMMUNICATIONS 225 Shipping 227 Port 228 Civil Aviation 230 Road Transport 232 Postal Services 232 Telecommunications 233 Meteorological Services 234

URBAN RENEWAL 236 Planning Department 236 Urban Renewal Programme 237 Urban Redevelopment Authority 238 Car Parks Division 239 Public Housing 239 Public Works 241 Building and Development Control 243 Architectural Projects 244 Parks and Recreation Department 245 Public Utilities 245

CULTURAL AFFAIRS 248 Broadcasting 249 The National Library 251 Victoria Theatre and Memorial Hall 254 National Theatre 255 Singapore Conference Hall 255 National Museum 255 People's Association 257 Singapore Sports Council 258 Film Censorship 261

BIBLIOGRAPHY 262 General 262 History 264 Government, Law and Politics 265 Economics, Commerce and Industry 267 Social Services 270 People, Customs and Culture 272 Natural History 274

APPENDICES 277

GENERAL REVIEW: 1977

1977 was a confident but not complacent year for a Singapore which had demonstrated its political stability, its social cohesion, and its economic resilience, in face of the new political balance in Southeast Asia, and the continuing global economic recession with little prospect of recovery.

The solid majority given to the PAP Government in the general election of 1976, and the absence of significant strength or new personalities or policies among the opposition parties, created a climate of internal stability in which there could be coherent and confident planning with its ASEAN neighbours, adjustments to a disturbed and disturbing world economy and the planning of the transfer of leadership and responsibility to the new Singapore-created and Singapore-centred generation which had matured since Singapore achieved self-government.

The world pattern of power was changed with a new President in the USA and a new chairman in the People's Republic of China, a more assertive USSR, a Europe concerned with its own Common Market problems, and a Vietnam seeking survival after success. In a world lacking economic confidence, capital investment was hesitant and the developed countries retreated into defensive protectionism which clogged the channels of trade. Meanwhile, other developing countries, with lower wages and higher technology, increased competition in a shrinking and sluggish world market.

Singapore had to lower its expectations, and expand its efforts to maintain internal firmness and flexibility, while seeking external co-operation, in adapting itself to situations beyond its control. The fact that growth had been maintained gave confidence that it would continue and carry out the tasks of the turbulent and difficult years ahead.

Government

There were no changes in the holders of the offices of Minister or Minister of State, though one Senior Parliamentary Secretary

and one Political Secretary were not appointed. Parliament re-elected Dr Yeoh Ghim Seng as its Speaker. As a consequence of the election, three men, one a defeated candidate, were sentenced to a total of 14 months in gaol for criminal libel of the Prime Minister in their election speeches. On July 1, as required by law, the polling papers of the general election were burned.

The direction of government was set out in the Presidential Address. It was telecast live at the opening of the newly-elected Parliament, Singapore's fourth since independence, on February 8: "My government will exercise its authority to govern with circumspection and moderation."

The electorate, the President said, had rejected the issues of communist interest – unconditional release of detainees, and abolition of the National Security Act and of National Service. The government had received a clear-cut mandate to reject the "soft-headed pernicious policy that all the good things in life, from bus rides to Public Utilities Board charges, can be given for free". Only education, medical service and housing would be subsidized. "My government holds firm to the simple truth that to get from each his best, rewards and recognition must go to those who excel in consistently high performance ... We have to formulate our way of life, taking what is best from the West and fitting it into the Singapore context."

During the year, two by-elections were held – in Radin Mas constituency in May following the death of its parliamentary representative, and in Bukit Merah in July due to the incapacity of the representative. In the Radin Mas constituency, the PAP candidate obtained 69.21 per cent of the 17,415 votes cast, winning by a majority of 7,032 over the Workers' Party candidate. The PAP candidate for Bukit Merah – another newcomer to the political scene – polled 11,625 votes (97.31 per cent of 16,482 votes cast) against 4,473 obtained by his rival from the Barisan Sosialis.

During the year, changes were made in the ministries to test and give ministerial experience to younger MPs. The Minister for Social Affairs, Mr Othman Wok, was appointed Ambassador to Indonesia, while retaining his ministerial rank, and his place was taken by Dr Ahmad Mattar, formerly Parliamentary Secretary in the Education Ministry, who was appointed to act as Minister for Social Affairs while holding the substantive post of Minister of State in the same ministry. Mr Jek Yeun Thong, the Minister for Culture, was appointed High Commissioner in London, retaining his ministerial status. Mr Ong Teng Cheong was appointed to act in his place while remaining Senior Minister of State in the Ministry of Communications. The Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, Haji Ya'acob bin Mohamed, while retaining his rank, was

appointed a High Commissioner to New Delhi. Mr E W Barker, Minister for the Environment and for Law, took over Mr Jek's responsibility as Minister for Science and Technology. Mr Goh Chok Tong, a newly elected MP, was appointed Senior Minister of State for Finance, while Mr Bernard Chen Tien Lap, a former Deputy Secretary in the Finance Ministry, on his election in the Radin Mas by-election, was appointed Minister of State in the Ministry of Defence. All the new appointees were in their 30s.

Security

On February 10, a lawyer was detained under the Internal Security Act on the ground that he had acted as the "link" between the pro-communists in Singapore and Euro-communist groups. The lawyer said in a public statement that their joint purpose had been to exert pressure, through the Socialist International, on the Singapore Government to release the communist detainees. He also said he had tried to instigate groups of workers and students, including student leaders from the University of Singapore Students' Union in Singapore, to re-build, through agitation, the Communist United Front in Singapore. Nine further arrests for questioning were made on February 17, six of them former detainees. Eight of the detainees had regular meetings with the lawyer for communist indoctrination and evaluation of the political situation, and to provide a regular supply of tendentious information to two Euro-communists leaders in London. Among those detained for questioning were an accountant, a hotel company secretary, a property manager, and an airline marketing officer.

The Singapore correspondent of a Hong Kong weekly journal, who sympathized with the pro-communist group was arrested the following day. He said in a public statement that he had used his articles in the journal to discredit the Singapore Government as "elitist and fascist, oppressive and dictatorial" to assist the Euro-communists in the Socialist International. One of the members of the group also alleged that the editor of the journal had allowed circulation of a tape-recording of an interview with Mr Lee Kuan Yew, for the purpose of embarrassing relations with the Malaysian Government. All the members of the group, except the lawyer, were released in 1977. The lawyer was released some months later.

Between late July and September 1977, 52 persons, including several leading cadres of the Malayan National Liberation Front (MNLF), were arrested by ISD from information supplied by the Malaysian Special Branch. The arrest had uncovered and disrupted four units of the MNLF, a militant satellite of the Communist Party of Malaya. These units were operating in Singapore under

the direction of a full-fledged CPM member with the rank of State Committee Member in the MNLF. They had recruited members, raised funds for the MNLF through sub-contracting, and supplied medicine, military equipment, transmitters and books to the Malayan National Liberation Army in the Malaysian jungle. Except for a few who refused to recant, the rest were given conditional or unconditional release.

Foreign Affairs

1977 was a year of intense ASEAN activity, with Singapore acting as host of the ASEAN Standing Committee, on its search for greater regional co-operation.

The Second Summit Meeting of ASEAN was held in Kuala Lumpur on August 4 to 5, 1977, to promote expanded and intensified economic co-operation within the region. The Heads of Government of Australia, Japan and New Zealand were invited to Kuala Lumpur to meet the ASEAN leaders. General agreement was reached with them on assistance to ASEAN in economic development, including a pledge by Japan, of a sum of US one billion dollars to finance the five ASEAN industrial projects.

The visit of the then Prime Minister of Japan, Mr Takeo Fukuda, to Singapore from August 14 to 15, 1977, was a significant step in the promotion of bilateral co-operation. Prime Minister Fukuda's visits to all ASEAN countries following the Kuala Lumpur ASEAN Summit paved the way for a new and constructive phase of ASEAN-Japan co-operation.

To promote Singapore's international and regional foreign policy, the Prime Minister undertook a series of overseas visits to meet the Heads of States. He visited the Republic of the Philippines on January 16 to 20, and Thailand on January 30 to February 2. In the Philippines, agreement was reached with President Marcos to implement mutual across-the-board preferential tariff reductions of 10 per cent of existing tariffs on all products traded between the two countries, within the framework of ASEAN economic co-operation.

In Thailand, an Investment Guarantee Agreement was concluded to facilitate and promote the flow of investments between the two countries. Other forms of bilateral assistance and joint projects were also discussed. As with the Philippines, agreement was reached to implement a 10 per cent across-the-board preferential tariff reduction of existing tariffs of all products traded between the two countries.

While the world economic recovery remained sluggish, Singapore was successful in attracting foreign investments, including the two-billion-dollar Sumitomo petrochemical project. The establish-

ment of this project was agreed to in principle during the Prime Minister's visit to Tokyo on May 29 to June 1.

The Prime Minister led a delegation to the biennial Commonwealth Heads' of Government Meeting in London on June 8-15. Political and economic issues, especially those affecting Commonwealth countries, were discussed. The 33-member countries reaffirmed their commitment to seek global accord through the use of the Commonwealth relationship. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew delivered a keynote address on "Changing Power Relations". Noting that the Communist and the competitive non-Communist systems were engaged in a test of stamina and will, he said, "Leaders in industrial and developing countries must face up to the new problems that have sprouted in a world brought into close contact and constant interaction by rapid transportation and instant communications. It is a world where diverse peoples and their leaders are in ceaseless competition to get more of the apparently finite resources for their own constituents. However, the world needs more than selfish, self-serving policies to survive, and to overcome the problems of this one inter-linked, inter-dependent world that Western science and technology, trade and industry have brought about."

Throughout the year, Singapore was watchful over the growing trend towards protectionism and its attendant impediments to the flow of trade and investments. It lobbied together with the other ASEAN countries against the protectionist measures implemented by the EEC, the US, Australia and Canada. To alleviate the prospective dangers arising from protectionism, Singapore sought to improve its economic relations with the developed countries. The Prime Minister visited the United States and Canada in October for talks with President Carter and Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. He learned at first hand the views of the Carter Administration as well as those of Senate and Congressional leaders on political and economic issues. President Carter reassured the Prime Minister of his government's interest, and continuing presence, in the region. The US also reaffirmed its support for ASEAN and its policy of encouraging investments in the ASEAN countries. With the ASEAN countries, Singapore urged the retention of the US Tax Deferral System and the Overseas Private Insurance Corporation (OPIC) which provides insurance coverage for overseas American enterprises.

The EEC countries remained important to Singapore, both as trading partners and as investors. EEC investments in Singapore in 1977 totalled \$1,280 million. Total trade between Singapore and the EEC amounted to \$4,991 million. Together with its ASEAN partners, Singapore has since 1972 held a dialogue with the EEC

Commission on economic co-operation. One of the results has been improved access for ASEAN products to EEC markets, through improvement to the EEC GSP scheme, sending of trade missions to European countries, and participation in trade fairs. Other areas of co-operation were in agriculture, industry and technical assistance. In April 1977, the ASEAN-EEC Joint Study Group with the European Bank of International Corporation (EBIC) organized a high level conference in Brussels on industrial co-operation between ASEAN and the EEC. The conference was successful in bringing together government officials and private businessmen of the two regions and making European industrialists aware of investment opportunities in Singapore and the other ASEAN countries.

In an attempt to diversify its political and economic contacts, Singapore further strengthened relations with West Asia. The Bahraini Prime Minister and Jordanian Crown Prince visited Singapore in April and October respectively. To promote trade and investments Singapore despatched several trade missions to West Asia. The growing importance of Saudi Arabia was manifested in November when the status of diplomatic relations between Singapore and Saudi Arabia was raised to ambassadorial level, with plans to establish a Singapore mission in Saudi Arabia.

Relations between Singapore and the Democratic Republic of Kampuchea developed with the visit of the Kampuchean Deputy Premier and Foreign Affairs Minister, Mr Ieng Sary, to Singapore in March 1977. Singapore and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam strengthened their economic ties through the visits to Vietnam by an economic mission organized by the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in April 1977 and an INTRACO-led delegation in August 1977.

In line with Singapore's policy to make the Straits of Malacca and Singapore safe for international navigation, the government has co-operated actively with Malaysia and Indonesia on the implementation of a Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS) for the straits. As a result of this co-operation, the TSS was submitted to, and adopted by, the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization (IMCO) in September 1977. Being one of the major users of the straits, Japan has held frequent consultations with the littoral states on matters pertaining to the implementation of the TSS.

Defence

The SAF went through a consolidation phase to improve its efficiency. A stringent economy programme was vigorously pursued. In addition, servicemen were encouraged to contribute

new ideas under the SAF Suggestion Scheme whereby cash awards were given for cost saving and operationally effective suggestions. At the same time, the SAF continued to upgrade the educational levels of its personnel. Early school leavers who were interested in soldiering as a career were given training at the SAF Boys' School. To combat drug abuse in the SAF, an intensive detection and rehabilitation programme was implemented. With the setting up of the Drug Abuse and Rehabilitation Unit, the drug problem within the SAF was contained. On their part, servicemen participated regularly in community projects and in rendering assistance to more than 30 adopted homes as their contribution to the community.

Police

For the Police Force, 1977 was a year of innovation and adjustment to the changing social pattern and rising living standard of the people. The manpower situation improved with the gradual integration of the full-time Police National Service element with the force. In addition, the corps of Women Police was being strengthened and they would be expected to hold certain positions hitherto held by men. The crime situation continued to be kept in check although there was a slight increase over the rate of 713 per 100,000 of population in 1976 which was the lowest in two decades and the lowest in the world for a city of comparable size. However, the number of serious crimes – offences against the person and offences involving violence – declined while there was a 23 per cent increase in theft of property cases, the majority of which were thefts of vehicles.

The new Toa Payoh Divisional Headquarters Station, which was completed during the year, was the first step in a new concept in the planning of divisional headquarters to meet the massive shifts of population. In addition to two new Police Reserve Units being established, the Police Tactical Team was also formed to deal with dangerous situations involving armed criminals. The Police Dog Unit was expanded and dogs were being trained in the detection of drugs. Two specialized units namely, the Scene of Crime Unit and the Crime Prevention Branch that went into full operation during the year, highlighted the latest developments in the Criminal Investigation Department. The establishment of these new units represented a significant step towards greater specialization and professionalism in the force.

During the year, the Police mounted a nation-wide Road Safety education campaign to introduce the newly gazetted Pedestrian Crossing Rules. Sustained and concerted efforts were made by the Police to reduce traffic accidents and road toll.

In the fight against the growing drug menace, the Police together with the Central Narcotics Bureau launched a massive operation to ferret out drug abusers.

The Drug Problem

Drug abuse, which continued to be a major social problem, was tackled with renewed vigour in 1977. Tough laws and unrelenting enforcement disrupted the flow of illicit drugs, especially heroin into, and its distribution within, Singapore. On April 1, 1977, Operation Ferret was launched with co-ordinated and sustained efforts by both the Central Narcotics Bureau and the Police Force. Death sentences were passed on 10 drug traffickers and by the end of the year, another 32 were awaiting trial. Out of 13,392 persons arrested on suspicion of consuming drugs, 5,471 had positive urine tests; of these 4,444 were detained at the Drug Rehabilitation Centres and 650 were prosecuted in court. An advisory committee on treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts and a review committee were set up to advise on the treatment and rehabilitation programme and to review the response of inmates at the centres to the programme respectively. Persons released from the centres were placed on 2-year supervision undertaken by the Probation and Aftercare Service of the Ministry of Social Affairs and assisted by the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association's volunteer counsellors. The Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association also jointly set up a Job Placement Committee with the Ministry of Labour and NTUC to obtain employment for ex-drug addicts.

Road Transport

The points demerit scheme was consolidated by the inclusion of 10 additional offences. More pedestrian bridges and crossings and walkways were provided. A campaign against jaywalking was initiated on July 1, 1977. A national seat belt campaign was launched in September 1977 to encourage the use of seat belts. Legislation was enacted requiring all new cars to be fitted with seat belts from 1978 and making their use mandatory by 1983. The advice and co-operation of the National Safety First Council was also sought in promoting road safety. These efforts aimed at making the roads safer for motorists and pedestrians alike yielded encouraging results. The number of fatalities dropped to 269, the lowest in ten years. This was 31 per cent less than the highest figure of 390 recorded in 1972. There were 9,275 traffic accident casualties in 1977 compared with 11,894 in 1972.

Problems of traffic congestion were contained. The Area Licensing Scheme reduced by 72 per cent the number of cars entering