

Lee Kuan Yew's thinking on 38, Oxley Road

PM Lee:

In December 2011, he (Mr Lee Kuan Yew) told the family that it was “best to redevelop 38, Oxley Road straight away”, after he died, and do what we proposed. By redevelopment, he means remove the private spaces, renovate the house without knocking it down. At around the same time, on Dec 27, 2011, he wrote to Cabinet a third time.

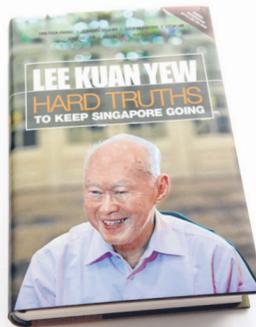
“Cabinet members were unanimous that 38, Oxley Road should not be demolished as I wanted. I have reflected on this and decided that if 38, Oxley Road is to be preserved, it needs to have its foundations reinforced and the whole building refurbished. It must then be let out for people to live in. An empty building will soon decline and decay.”

Ho Ching and I therefore proceeded along these lines. We kept the family fully informed of our considerations and our intentions. We e-mailed everyone, including my father, my sister, my brother and his wife. No one raised any objections to the plan.

In his ministerial statement, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong highlighted key discussions on the family home when his father was alive, and what happened after Mr Lee died.

Oct 27, 2010

Mr Lee wrote to the Cabinet to set on record his wish for his house to be demolished after his death. This was after his wife, Madam Kwa Geok Choo, died.



January 2011

Mr Lee's book, *Hard Truths To Keep Singapore Going* was published. In it, he said he told Cabinet: “When I'm dead, demolish it.” This drew a strong public pushback and calls from Singaporeans for the house to be preserved.

March 2011

Mr Lee asked some newspaper editors for their views on the house. All wanted it to be kept.

May 2011

Mr Lee stepped down from the Cabinet a week after the General Election on May 7.

July 20, 2011

Mr Lee wrote to the Cabinet again to reiterate that he wanted the house knocked down.

July 21, 2011

PM Lee invited Mr Lee to make his case to the Cabinet in person. Ministers unanimously said they opposed demolition.

PM Lee did not express a view, as he was both a son and prime minister, and hence conflicted.

Before and after this, Mr Lee continued to discuss the matter with his family.

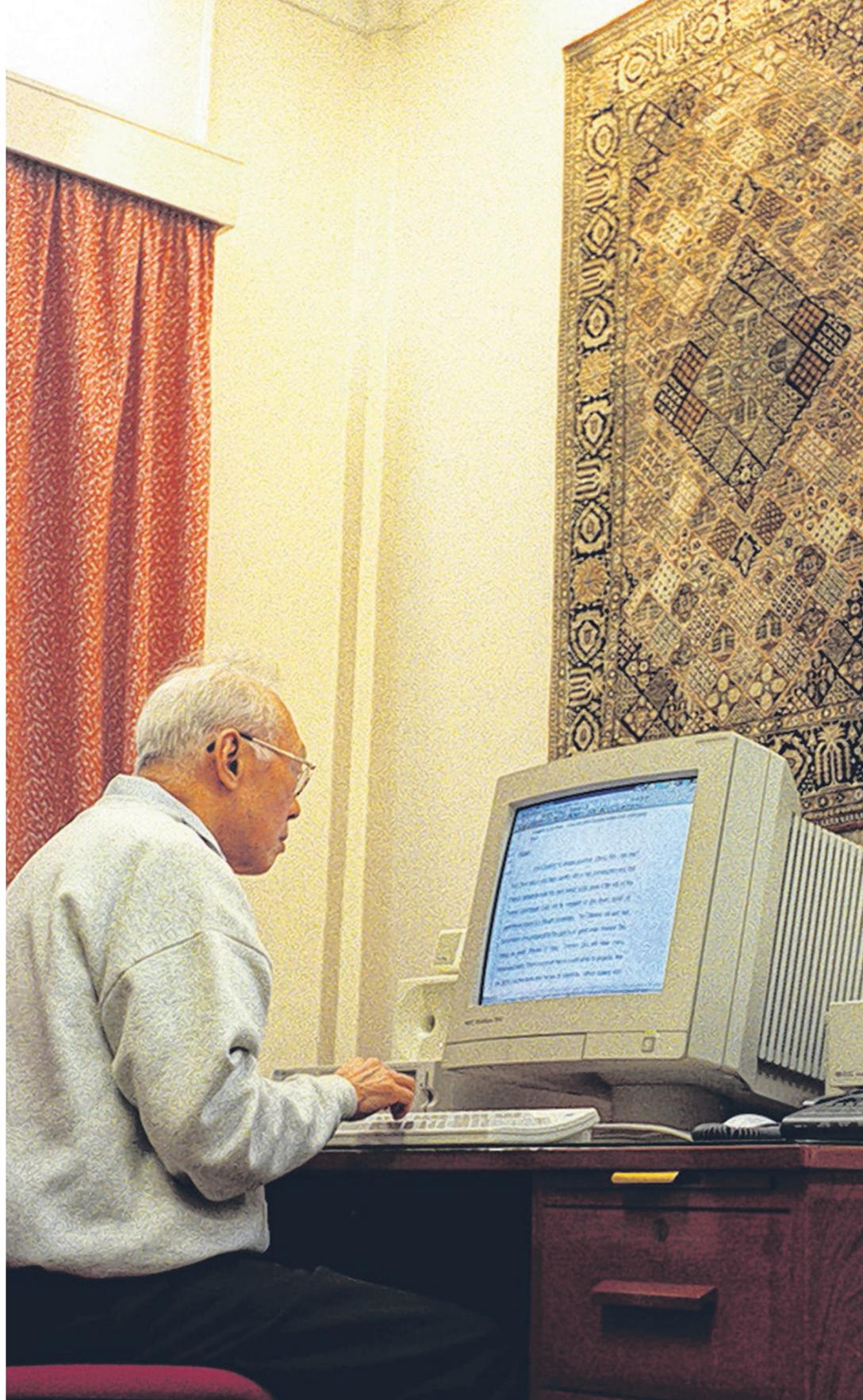
During discussions, Mr Lee Hsien Yang at one point suggested that his father gift the property to Singapore, on the condition that the house be demolished and a small public park be built in its place.

PM Lee said he thought this was worth considering but also gave another option: demolishing the house, redeveloping the site, and selling off the property and donating the proceeds to charity.

Mr Lee said he preferred PM Lee's option.

August 2011

Mr Lee decided to will 38, Oxley Road to PM Lee as part of his share of the estate, and told the family so.



2011

PM Lee and his wife Ho Ching proposed to renovate the house without demolishing it. They suggested: demolishing private living spaces to preserve the family's privacy; keeping the historically significant basement dining room; strengthening the decaying structure; creating a new living area.

December 2011

Mr Lee accepted PM Lee's proposal. He told the family it was best to redevelop the house straight away after he died, and do what PM Lee proposed.

Dec 27, 2011

Mr Lee wrote to the Cabinet that if 38, Oxley Road was to be preserved, it needed to have its foundations reinforced and the whole building refurbished.

PM Lee and Ms Ho proceeded along those lines, and kept the family fully informed. No one raised any objections to the plan.

March 28, 2012

Mr Lee signed the authorisation to submit the development application to the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA).

April 17, 2012

The URA approved the renovation plans.

March 23, 2015

Mr Lee died.



PM Lee on the issue:

“As far as I knew, that was how the family had settled the matter – rationally, amicably while Mr Lee was still alive, which was what he had hoped to achieve and strived very hard to achieve. I heard nothing to the contrary until after my father died.”



DEVELOPMENTS AFTER MR LEE KUAN YEW DIED

April 12, 2015

Mr Lee's will was formally read to PM Lee and his siblings, Dr Lee Wei Ling and Mr Lee Hsien Yang, who objected to the renovation plans for the first time. He wanted the house demolished immediately.

PM Lee wanted to read their father's Dec 27, 2011 letter to the Cabinet, as well as the full demolition clause in his will, in Parliament the next day.

Mr Lee Hsien Yang and his wife Suet Fern disagreed, but PM Lee said he would do so anyway. His younger siblings issued a statement with the full demolition clause that night.

April 13, 2015

PM Lee spoke in Parliament on how to honour Mr Lee. He told Parliament that it should not rush into making decisions on the matter, and also that his father had been unwavering in wanting the house

knocked down.

He said that as a son, he wanted to see his father's wishes carried out.

April 15, 2015

At the Cabinet meeting, PM Lee recused himself from all discussions and decisions on the house, and placed Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean in charge.

Some time after the Parliament sitting, PM Lee divested himself of the house. At first, he offered to transfer it to his sister for \$1 on the condition that all proceeds or compensation would go to charity if the house was sold or acquired. This fell through.

December 2015

PM Lee agreed to sell the house to his brother at fair market value. They also agreed to each donate half the value of the house to charity.

On top of that, PM Lee gave another donation equal to half the value of the house to charity.

PM Lee:

Why is there still an argument? One possible factor may be a difference in views between me and my siblings and the difference is over this question: What did my father think about the house, apart from demolition? Was his view black and white, all or nothing – demolish the house no matter what? Or was he prepared to consider alternatives should demolition not be possible? My siblings' view is that my father absolutely wanted to demolish the house, with no compromise... My view is that while my father wanted the house to be demolished, he was prepared to consider alternatives should the Government decide otherwise.