

# A massive PR boost for MM Lee: ex-UN Chief Kofi Annan joins LKY School of Public Policy

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## From our Correspondent

Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy has pulled off a major publicity coup by securing the academic services of the respected ex-United Nations Secretary-General Mr Kofi Annan.

Mr Annan and the UN jointly received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2001 for working for human rights and to defuse global conflicts.

The 71-year-old, who served as UN secretary-general from 1997 to 2007, will be the first Li Ka Shing professor at the school, which is an autonomous graduate school of the National University of Singapore (NUS). More details about Mr Annan's professorship will be announced later.

The professorship was established in the name of Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka Shing, who donated \$100 million to the school's endowment fund in March 2007.

The Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy was established in 2004 with the mission of educating and training the next generation of Asian policymakers and leaders.

Its objectives are to raise the standards of governance throughout the region, improve the lives of the region's people and, in so doing, contribute to the transformation of Asia.

The Dean of the school, Mr Kishore Mahbubani was upbeat about the future prospects of the school. During a gala dinner marking the fifth anniversary of the school last night, he said:

"The success of the LKY School owes a lot to the founding fathers of Singapore whose legacy of principles, policies and institutions continues to amaze and often inspire the rest of the world."

MM Lee Kuan Yew who was Singapore's Prime Minister from 1965 to 1990, was widely credited with transforming Singapore from a colonial backwater at independence into a modern first world country within a single generation.

Singapore's remarkable success has and continue to attract admirers from other countries, particularly China, which sends its senior civil servants and administrators to study at the LKY school about public governance and business management yearly.

Though Lee was a consummate politician and an internationally renowned statesman, he was often criticized in the western media for being an authoritarian leader who resorted to defamation lawsuits to bankrupt his political opponents.

ex-New York Times columnists and Pulitzer Prize winner William Safire once described Lee as a "tinpot dictator" in the 1990s. Surprisingly, he was never sued by the litigious Lee who even granted him the rare honor of a personal face-to-face interview.

Lee is the irreplaceable old man of Singapore politics. At the age of 86, he is the oldest minister in the cabinet where he still retains significant influence. His speeches and activities were given prominent coverage by the state media almost every other day.

Since Singapore's recent 44th National Day, Lee had dominated the headlines from his exhortations to Singaporeans to embrace foreigners, an unfounded outburst against the speech of an idealistic NMP Viswa for his "highfalutin ideas" to his latest denial that he would send in the army in the event of a "freak election" in response to writer Catherine Lim's question during a dialogue session.

Lee's continued dominance of Singapore political scene is unhealthy for the fledging nation in the long run. Being a "big tree" which overshadows all under its shade, it will retard the emergence of potential leaders in the future as it had already happened with the ruling party encountering difficulties in recruiting capable and qualified young Singaporeans into its ranks.

Kofi Annan's endorsement of the LKY School of Public Policy is another feather in his cap and a great boost to the elder statesman's international reputation. He will surely be remembered in history as an enlightened leader who lifted millions of his people out of poverty, rather than a dictatorial despot who detained a political opponent without trial for 32 years.