

Biographical Notes

Lim Kim San (30 November 1916 – 20 July 2006) – Businessman/politician

Lim Kim San was born into a Peranakan Chinese family. His father, Lim Choon Huat, was a businessman involved in shipping and commodities. Lim was educated in Anglo-Chinese School, after which he worked for a while before studying economics at Raffles College. There, he forged a friendship with Goh Keng Swee.¹

In 1940, Lim married Pang Gek Kim with whom he had two sons and four daughters.² After the marriage, Lim became involved in managing the businesses of his father-in-law, Pang Cheng Yeon. These included the Soon Hin Sago Factory as well as businesses in diamonds, jewellery, pawnshops and banking.³

During the Japanese Occupation (1942-1945), Lim was captured and tortured by the Japanese. After the war, Lim focused his attention on his business to make up for lost time.⁴ Although, Lim was friendly with the leaders of the People's Action Party (PAP) and was supportive of their cause, he declined their invitation to stand for the 1959 elections.⁵ But Lim offered to help the party in any other way he could.

After the PAP won the elections, Lim was appointed to the Public Service Commission. In 1960, Lim was made chairman of the newly formed Housing and Development Board (HDB), which aimed to provide low-cost housing for Singapore's growing population. Lim was credited with the early success of the Board which managed to build around 26,000 flats in three years, which was slightly more flats built by the Singapore Improvement Trust in its 32 years of existence.⁶ To recognise Lim's work in housing, Lim was awarded the Order of Temasek, the state's highest honour and the Philippines honoured him with the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership.⁷

Lim entered politics in 1963 when he contested and won the seat of Cairnhill as a PAP candidate. Between 1963 to 1980, Lim was a cabinet minister, helming these key ministries: National Development (1963-65; 1978-79), Finance (1965-67), Interior and Defence (1967-70), Education (1970-72), and Environment (1972-75; 1979-81), National Development and Communications (1975-78).⁸

Lim also provided leadership for major statutory boards serving as chairman for the Public Utilities Board (1971-78), the Port of Singapore Authority (1979-1994), and the Monetary Authority of Singapore (1981-82).⁹

Although Lim stepped down from the government in 1980 when he declined to stand for re-election,¹⁰ he remained active in public service. From 1988 to 2002, Lim was Executive Chairman of Singapore Press Holdings (SPH), and has been credited with making the organization more efficient, financially

¹ Lam Peng Er & Kevin YL Tan, *Lee's Lieutenants: Singapore's old guard* (Singapore: Allen & Unwin, 1999) p. 16; Asad-ul Iqbal Latif, *Lim Kim San: a builder of Singapore* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2009), pp. 12-17.

² "The man who helped to house a generation", *The Straits Times*, 21 July 2006.

³ Asad-ul Iqbal Latif, *Lim Kim San*, pp. 19-20.

⁴ Chew, Melanie, "Lim Kim San", *Leaders of Singapore* (Singapore: Resource Press, 1996), p. 161.

⁵ Asad-ul Iqbal Latif, *Lim Kim San*, p. 41.

⁶ Lam Peng Er & Kevin YL Tan, *Lee's Lieutenants*, p. 19; "The man who helped to house a generation", *The Straits Times*, 21 July 2006.

⁷ Asad-ul Iqbal Latif, *Lim Kim San*, p. 100.

⁸ Tommy Koh, ed., *Singapore: The encyclopedia* (Singapore: EDM and NHB, 2006), p. 309.

⁹ Tien Mui Mun, "Lim Kim San", *Singapore Infopedia website* (2016), retrieved from:

https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_645_2005-01-11.html; Lam Peng Er & Kevin YL Tan, *Lee's Lieutenants*, p. 20.

¹⁰ "11 MPs opt out of polls", *The Straits Times*, 28 Oct 1980.

sound and profitable.¹¹ From 1992 to 2003, Lim was Chairman of the Council of Presidential Advisers.¹²

Lim Kim San died on 20 July 2006 from pneumonia and old age.¹³

¹¹ Lam Peng Er & Kevin YL Tan, *Lee's Lieutenants*, p. 22.

¹² Tien Mui Mun, "Lim Kim San", *Singapore Infopedia website* (2016), retrieved from: https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_645_2005-01-11.html

¹³ Asad-ul Iqbal Latif, *Lim Kim San*, p. 224.