

Lee family to donate value of 38, Oxley Rd to eight charities

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05/12/2015

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and his brother Lee Hsien Yang have each agreed to donate half the value of Mr Lee Kuan Yew's Oxley Road house to eight charities, in honour of their father.

PM Lee, his brother and their sister Lee Wei Ling made this announcement in a joint statement issued yesterday, which PM Lee also posted on his Facebook page.

The three siblings hoped the state would honour their late father's wishes regarding the house. Mr Lee Kuan Yew died on March 23 at the age of 91.

"Dr Lee Wei Ling and Mr Lee Hsien Yang would like to honour the wish of the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew that the house at 38, Oxley Road be demolished after Dr Lee Wei Ling ceases to live in it," the statement said.

"Mr Lee Hsien Loong has recused himself from all government decisions involving 38, Oxley Road and, in his personal capacity, would also like to see this wish honoured," it added.

"Speaking as the children of the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Mr Lee Hsien Loong, Dr Lee Wei Ling and Mr Lee Hsien Yang hope the government will allow the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew's wish for the demolition of the house to be honoured and that all Singaporeans will support their cause."

The eight charities PM Lee and his brother will make the donations to were named in their father's obituary notice.

They are the Education Fund, the NTUC-U Care Fund and the Garden City Fund, as well as five community self-help groups: the Chinese Development Assistance Council, Mendaki, the Association of Muslim Professionals, Singapore Indian Development Association and the Eurasian Association.

The issue of 38, Oxley Road was in the news several weeks after Mr Lee's death, when Dr Lee Wei Ling and Mr Lee Hsien Yang issued a statement as executors and trustees of their father's last will.

They outlined their father's wishes regarding the house, and asked that Singaporeans respect his wish regarding the pre-war bungalow, which the late Mr Lee had lived in since the 1940s.

PM Lee also touched on 38, Oxley Road in Parliament in April, when he said a decision on the fate of the house was not required now as Dr Lee Wei Ling would continue to live there.

PM Lee said his father knew about calls from the public to turn the house into a museum and a memorial, but was adamant that it be demolished after his death.

PM Lee explained that his father was averse to the idea as he had seen too many houses of famous people "kept frozen in time... as a monument with people tramping in and out", and they invariably "become shabby".

The late Mr Lee wrote to the Cabinet at least twice to put his wishes on the record.

But if and when his sister no longer lives in the house, it was his father's wish that it should be demolished, PM Lee added.

"At that point, speaking as a son, I would like to see these wishes carried out," he said. "However, it will be up to the government of the day to consider the matter."

The issue of 38, Oxley Road continued to be discussed. In a commentary in The Straits Times later in April,

sociologist Terence Chong and architectural historian Yeo Kang Shua called for relevant government agencies to form a panel of experts to determine if the house was worthy of preservation.

They said the debate on the property was "an opportunity to strengthen our state heritage institutions and due process, and consider the ramifications of carrying out the wishes of the owner of a potentially important building at the expense of national heritage".

In response, the Urban Redevelopment Authority and the National Heritage Board said in a joint

letter to ST's Forum pages that if the house is to be demolished, "the Government is likely to not allow the site to be redeveloped in a way that would diminish its historical significance, for example, for commercial or intensive residential development".

Some observers have suggested that while the house might be torn down, out of respect for Mr Lee's wishes, the site might be kept as a memorial to Mr Lee and the place where he founded the party that led Singapore to independence.

The site is zoned for a two-storey landed property. SLP International executive director Nicholas Mak said the zoning of land along this stretch of Oxley Road is unlikely to change in the medium term.

The lot area of 38, Oxley Road is 1,120.5 sq m, or 12,060 sq ft.

If the plot is sold, property consultants say it could fetch at least \$24 million at \$2,000 per sq ft, the lower end for landed property prices in the area.