

# 40 YEARS ON

**Editor's Note:** This year marks the 40th anniversary of the launch of China's reform and opening-up policy. China Daily profiles people who experienced or witnessed the important drive.

## BORN

May 20, 1941  
Married with two children

## EDUCATION

- 1964: First-class honors in economics from the University of Singapore (now the National University of Singapore)
- 1967: Master of arts in development economics from Williams College, United States



## Goh Chok Tong

Emeritus senior minister, Singapore

## CAREER

- 1964: Joins the Singapore government administrative service
- 1969: Joins national shipping company Neptune Orient Lines, going on to serve as managing director from 1973 to 1977
- 1976: Elected to Parliament, where he remains an MP
- 1979-90: Serves, successively, as minister of trade and industry, health, and defense
- 1985: Appointed deputy prime minister
- November 1990: Becomes prime minister, succeeding Lee Kuan Yew
- August 2004: Relinquishes the premiership
- August 2004-May 2011: Remains in Cabinet as senior minister, also serves as chairman of the Monetary Authority of Singapore. Upon leaving the Cabinet, given honorary title of emeritus senior minister and appointed senior adviser to the monetary authority
- April 2017: Appointed chairman of the governing board of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore.

# 'China has done everything right'

Former Singapore prime minister Goh hails results of Beijing's commitment to reform and opening-up



**Goh Chok Tong** (right), emeritus senior minister of Singapore, and his wife, Tan Choo Leng, attend an exhibition by a Singaporean photographer in Shanghai on Oct 26, 2007. CHEN FEI / XINHUA

By **KARL WILSON** in Singapore  
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**W**hen Goh Chok Tong made his first trip to China in 1971, he described the experience as like "going to an alien country".

Singapore's emeritus senior minister and the man who succeeded Lee Kuan Yew to become the country's second prime minister (1990-2004) said: "China was a totally different country back then."

Sitting in the West Drawing Room of The Istana, the ornate colonial home of former British governors set in lush green gardens and now the office of Singapore's president, Goh described how it took three to four days to get from Singapore to

Beijing in the past.

"You flew from Singapore to Hong Kong, stayed overnight. Then took a train to Guangzhou where you also stayed overnight, before flying to Beijing if the weather permitted," he said.

He described how men and women wore Mao suits, how workers were assigned places of work, and bicycles were everywhere. Cities were run-down and the people poor.

Goh said China back then was still halfway through the "cultural revolution" (1966-76) and its economic impact on the world was "minimal".

Since Deng Xiaoping introduced his reforms 40 years ago, the opening-up of China has had "a big impact on the world, positively", Goh said.

"Men and women wear the latest

fashions and cars have replaced bicycles. Cosmetic sales flourish. People now travel freely in search of jobs, motivated by profit and wages rather than being bound to assigned places of work. Social habits have changed."

In terms of education, Goh said the biggest change has been in the large number of students now going overseas to study.

"English is now more widely spoken. Admission to university is now based on academic merit rather than ideology," he said. "This has raised the standard of education, intellectual discourse and research."

He said in diplomacy, China is now more active and has a presence in "all parts of the world".

"Before, it conducted diplomacy from behind a 'bamboo curtain', so-called by Western journalists."

Asked whether he had thought China would emerge as the great nation it is today, Goh thought about the question, leaned back in his chair and said: "Frankly, no."

"My father came to Singapore (from Yongchun county in East China's Fujian province) at the age of 7. I grew up in Singapore so my knowledge of China at that time was one of poverty. My grandmother would describe how cold the winters were and how difficult life was in China. My grandmother sent old clothes to relatives in China. So my impression was one of a poor country."

Goh's first meeting with Deng was in 1978 when he was part of an official Singapore delegation led by Lee. The meeting was in November, just one month before Deng announced

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