

Perspectives - Singapore An Independent District

Singapore District **308-A1** has initiated and concluded its two domestic constitutional procedural steps, to becoming an Independent District to cease affiliation with Multiple District 308. The delegates voted overwhelmingly, at the respective, 22nd District Convention (65.1%) and the recent 59th MD Convention (87%) to complete the 2-step procedure. Lions Clubs International (LCI) has since been officially advised of the development. The District is now awaiting LCI's direction to complete the final independence procedure.

It is important at the onset to reiterate the independence proceeding is a well-conceived decision to address Singapore District's future development, not any binary competition with the Malaysian Districts.

Perhaps, it is important for our members especially the newer ones to learn of the District's history since its inception from 1958 and the factors behind this independence initiative.

In order to give a brief but concise history of our 64-year growth, easiest way is to relate it under three broad headings — **History, Divergence and Future Growth**.

History

The very first Lions Club - indeed in the whole MD308 - was organised and chartered in Singapore on 5th November 1958. Lions Club International (LCI) assigned **D308** as the provisional District number to clubs formed under the then British ruled Singapore, Peninsula Malaya (W Malaysia), British N Borneo (E Malaysia) and Brunei. In 1961, **D308** was designated a full District, when it achieved the stipulated criteria.

At the Bifurcation proceeding in FY1982/83 to address continuing growth, **D308** became a Multiple District with two Sub Districts, namely:

D308A covering Singapore, South Johore up to Kluang, East Malaysia and Brunei.

D308B covering the rest of Peninsula West Malaysia.

Again, with steady growth, at the FY1998/99 Redistricting proceeding **MD308** was reconfigured into four Sub Districts:

With steady growth, MD308 was further reconfigured into four Sub Districts at the FY1998/99 Redistricting proceeding as follows:

D308-A1 (Singapore); **D308-A2** (East Malaysia and Brunei); **D308-B1** (East Coast states of Peninsula Malaysia from Kelantan down to Johore); **D308-B2** (West-Northern states of Peninsula Malaysia including Penang)

The 4-District **MD308** continues with steady growth, especially in the 3 Malaysian Districts, that brought with them inevitable rising expectation from their grassroots level. Notwithstanding the rising expectation, the 4-District **MD308's** configuration remains unchanged since 1999, and as at end June 2021.

Divergence

The living and social environment in **MD308** has undergone rapid changes over the years. However, the differing services and needs between the 4 districts, remain relatively little change, from one another.

The Singapore District notable and stark differences with the other three Districts are that Singapore's community services and needs remain largely urban in context, structured and with much emphasis on elderly care. Besides, the relevant Government authorities providing adequate

financial support, there are growing number of privately initiated community out-reach programs, also provide useful source of financial support.

The three Malaysian Districts cover very wide geographical spread, from E. Malaysia to peninsula W. Malaysia. Their community services and needs are varied, though primarily more of suburban town and rural context. Each individual area, however, identifies its own local community needs. Authority's support though sporadic but responsive to appeals. The districts generally dependent more on their own local business community and organisations, for support.

Singapore District's aspiration to become an Independent District, has remained ever since the Bifurcation in FY1982/83. The issue was again raised, debated and voted upon in two occasions, in FY1992/93 and FY1994/95, respectively.

In the first occasion, the voting conducted through postal means with majority of the members voted in favour for an Independent District. However, the results could not be formalised under the then CBL.

In the second occasion, there were intense debates, prior to an independence Resolution being tabled for decision, at the District EOGM. It was very narrowly defeated, not due to its lack of merits. At the debates, Past Officers (POAs) urged members to go with D308B's views of needed suitable time to address the then disparity in the numbers of Past Officers in the MD, which was then in Singapore's favour.

That thorny issue, among others, had been amicably resolved at the Redistricting proceeding in FY1998/99. Equitable parity in numbers of Past Officers had been addressed, resulting with the larger membership growth in the three Malaysian Districts.

The District's record showed the numbers of Past Officers (POAs) in the two countries, as of April 2020, were: (*Refer to active POAs, not inclusive of the VDGs*)
Singapore = 25; Three Malaysian Districts, total = 88. (Ratio 1:3.5)

Total membership strength:
Singapore = 2534; Three Malaysian Districts total = 10,272. (Ratio 1:4)

The larger Malaysian membership, invariably, has altered the dynamics of MD308's intra-district relationship. Singapore members are now more aware of MD's shift in its perspective, that tilts more toward Malaysian centric in decisions and actions.

In the recent few years, the Malaysian Districts are also actively planning to redistrict among themselves, to address their continued growth. It is very likely to seeing five new districts emerging from among the Malaysian Districts, in the next few years.

As referred earlier, the services in Singapore and those in the Malaysian Districts remain different and stark. Therefore, it is understandable with Singapore not featuring in any of their redistricting plans. Their simmering desire is to seeing Singapore to be its own District, which is quite revealing.

Future Growth

An Independent Singapore District, would entail inevitable adjustments to its future growth path and services direction such as align more closely and ability to swiftly respond to the continuing changing domestic environment.

In the past few years, more Singapore members are feeling less comfortable with the incremental MD's perspective shift. To addressing the discomfort, District tabled a Resolution, at the April 2018 Convention, to set up a Review Committee to study the best way forward. Members decisively voted for the Resolution, with the Committee to set up in FY2018/19. The Redistricting Committee, under the purview of the District Long Range Planning Committee, however, was finally set up in FY2019/20.

The Redistricting Committee comprised of Past Officers with substantial experience on past MD's development and growth. It substantively reviewed the range of the inherent issues, as referred to in **Divergence**.

The Redistricting Committee's suggested plan-of-work served well as pivotal guide, enabling to smoothly complete the two (2) domestic Constitutional Procedural steps.

With the Redistricting Committee completed its role, the current team of Senior District Leaders shall continue to liaise with LCI to complete the final Independence procedure.

The Redistricting Committee, however, would humbly like to offer few helpful suggestions, for Singapore Independent District, to achieving healthy and sustainable growth in the years ahead.

1. Appeal officially to LCI allowing the new Singapore Independent District's number to retain the number '308', in some form, to serve as historical link, reflecting the roots of MD308's Lionsism, began with Singapore 64 years ago. It is also a good psychological impetus for Singapore's future growth.
2. In spite of Singapore's small population size with a very competitive environment, it is viable to have a 2-district MD in the near future. Importantly, members must prepare to accept shared burden to build a genial and inclusive District. Firmly discard the decades of self-defeating and archaic intractable "big-divide" mindset.
3. Make determined effort returning to the friendly amicable practices of the 1980s, to having an orderly district's leadership succession process.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Redistricting Committee, I would like to thank all those who have rendered much help, one way or another, to complete the Independence Procedural Initiative.

Warm regards
PCC Lim Hon Chee
Moderator
Redistricting Committee
June 2021