

# Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY MR A RAHIM ISHAK, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND CHAIRMAN, PAP MALAY AFFAIRS BUREAU,  
AT A MAB HARI RAYA PARTY AT PENTHOUSE NEGARA  
ON THURSDAY, 21 AUGUST 1980 AT 8.00 PM

Tonight as we celebrate Hari Raya in the 16th year of our Republic's independence and the 26th year of the People's Action Party, it might be not inappropriate for one of the old guard to reminisce a little about the early years of our nation and our Party. Both went through acute trials and tribulations; and the experience tempered the mettle of the leaders and members and supporters of the PAP.

The People's Action Party was formed in 1954 during the period of the anti-colonial struggle. The convenors of the Party were in the main non-communist democratic socialists. A few were pro-communist and communist united front leaders. Some of these non-communist convenors had been active either as leaders or advisors in trade unions including the Singapore Council of Joint Action, Postal Uniformed Staff Union, Telephone Board Workers' Union, the Medical Workers' Union and a few others. The pro-communist and communist founders of the PAP were likewise active in the trade unions. It was against this backdrop that Malays who were either active in the trade unions or just ordinary members, came forward to support the People's Action Party.

Comrade Lee Kuan Yew, Secretary-General of the Party, was able to draw Malays into the Party because he had worked closely with them in the unions for which he was legal advisor. They included Mohd Ismail bin A Rahim of the Postal Uniformed Staff Union, Mohamed Ariff bin Suradi, Singapore Telephone Board Workers' Union and Mofradi bin Md Noor of the Medical Workers' Union who was a member of the Singapore Council of Joint Action. Comrades Goh Keng Swee, K M Byrne and G Kandasamy were some of the leaders of the SCJA. Buang Omar Junid and Wan Daud Embong, both of

the Singapore Factory and Shop Workers' Union, which was under the direct influence of the communist United Front, were also members of the PAP from its early days. Wan Daud is still with us in the Siglap Branch Committee. Ismail Bachik, of the Postal Uniformed Staff Union, an UMNO member, was invited to speak at the inauguration of the Party at the Victoria Memorial Hall on 21 November 1954, which was attended by the President of UMNO Malaya as well.

In that period of struggle for national independence, the politically-conscious journalists and writers, particularly those in the non-English language media, lent their support to political movements and parties which called for an end to colonial rule. Utusan Melayu was unequivocally anti-colonial in policy and supported the PAP consistently until 1959 when its ownership and control changed hands. It was in these circumstances that journalists from the Malay-language press including A Samad Ismail, Othman Wok, Baharuddin Ariff and others found common cause with the PAP. Samad Ismail was one of the convenors as were Ismail Rahim and Mofradi bin Md Noor. Trusted friends and colleagues of convenors who were later associated with the Party included Ahmad Ibrahim of the Nyal Base Local Employees Union who later became the Minister for Health, Mahmud Awang of the Singapore Traction Company, Ya'acob Hj Mohamed, Roslan Hassan, Ibrahim Othman, Sahara bte Ahmat and others. Only a handful joined the Party as convinced social democrats.

When formed the PAP was itself a united front comprising the social democrats and communists. Most Malays associated with the socialist and communist convenors were not aware of this feature of the Party until several years later. One of the few who did was Samad Ismail. In the general elections held under the Rendel Constitution in 1955 and won by the Labour Front, the government formed under Mr David Marshall invited UMNO and MCA representatives to join in a coalition. This development led to the growth of communal parties as an extension of the political party arrangement in Malaya which first brought together UMNO, MCA and the MIC in an alliance in the KL Municipal elections in 1951. In Singapore some Malays who had earlier rallied round the Malay Nationalist Party, which had worked closely with the Communist Party of Malaya until it was proscribed in 1948, left the MNP to join the UMNO. They probably believed that if independence was to be achieved through merger with Malaya

the future would be bright for their association with the parent organisation in the Peninsula. However, the ardent MNP members did not join UMNO. This was the period when communal politics in Malaya began to spread to Singapore. Samad Ismail joined the UMNO after the establishment of the PAP. In 1956 he was appointed as Permanent Chairman of UMNO Singapore. In 1958 he went to Kuala Lumpur to work in Berita Harian. But then he had a different motive. He said so in 1976.

Even in 1959 when the PAP contested the general elections with a view to capturing political power, Malays, by and large, shunned our Party because they were still suspicious of its connections with the communists. An election promise made to the electorate was that if it won a majority, the PAP would not take office unless those of its members detained under the PPSO were first released. This only increased fear of the PAP among the Malays as the detainees were known communists or pro-communists. Nevertheless, seven out of nine Malays who contested on the PAP ticket won their seats, but mostly with slim majorities.

Meanwhile, the UMNO-MCA-MIC alliance concept had taken deeper root among the Malays than Singaporeans of other races. In 1957, Malaya had won independence and the UMNO as senior-most partner was in control of the country. Special privileges for the Malays in Singapore became the clarion call of UMNO. Many Malays looked for patronage to UMNO leaders across the causeway. This pattern of thinking hardened as agreement was reached with the UMNO-led Alliance Government on merger with the Federation of Malaysia. In the Referendum on merger held in 1962, Malays voted solidly for the PAP-type of merger because they and Singapore were to be taken into Peninsula Malaysia. In comparison the Indians, who comprised 8 per cent of the population, did not look outside for patronage. Those who did not retain their Indian citizenship, decided to carve out their future by themselves, alongside their fellow Singaporeans.

Notwithstanding the attempts by UMNO to woo them, in each of the crises which rocked the Party since 1959 - the Ong Eng Guan issue, the resignation of 13 MPs to form Barisan Socialis, the communal riots in 1964 and separation in 1965 - Malays in the PAP remained completely loyal. Separation was easily the most outstanding instance of their steadfastness, reason and sincerity. Indeed not only was Malay support for the Party solid and unshakeable, Singapore Malays in general also rejected the offer

made, to resettle each Malay family in Peninsula Malaysia on 10 acres of land, gratis. So far not much has been written to explain this aspect of Malay support for the PAP. I feel this is a subject worth looking into more deeply. Earlier, money and status were offered to Malay members of PAP as incentives to quit. All to no avail. Those who tried to seduce PAP Malays were unable to understand their commitment to the Party, nor the type of social, political and economic environment in which they had been nurtured. They probably used as criteria their own responses to similar offers, not realising that others could be made of sterner stuff.

The rather abrupt end to Singapore's membership of the Malaysian Federation understandably left the Malays confused and confounded. At first they could not believe that those responsible for expelling Singapore, were also abandoning the Malays. We in the PAP were quick to reiterate the need to realise that progress for Malays was not in the least dependent on the communal three-party arrangement. We stressed the fact that not only the survival of the Malays but all Singaporeans and the State of Singapore, itself depended on a common pursuit of knowledge, acquisition of skills, in science and technology in order to expand and intensify the industrialisation programme which fortunately had already been planned and was being implemented. Along with other PAP leaders, we appealed to the younger generation of Malays to go for technical, vocational, and industrial training, to learn how to operate machines and computers, while those who made it to the universities continued to receive special assistance. We explained to them that Singapore's urban setting needed skills different from those needed in predominantly rural environments. We drummed this line relentlessly because we were convinced that this was the correct political and economic policy for Singapore and one that would benefit all Singaporeans.

Tonight many who once had doubts about this particular aspect of our policy have come to join our Aidilfitri celebration. Possibly some might still hold to their past beliefs. They have the right to dissent. But I believe sooner or later they will come round to see Singapore in the context of what it has accomplished economically in a situation it never

wanted to be politically. As the PM said in his Hari Raya Puasa message of the Malay Singaporeans:

".... Instead of hovering on the sidelines, filled with anxieties about their national identity or their future, they have plunged into the mainstream of life, in the schools, VITB, Polytechnic, Ngee Ann, the University, in the factories, offices, hotels and shopping complexes. They have made steady progress in raising their education levels and in acquiring technical competence and skills to improve their socio-economic status. ...."

Let us pause here to examine the reasons for the support of the Malay Singaporeans for the PAP and the solidarity they have displayed with their non-Malay fellow citizens. Implicit in the policy adopted by the PAP Government towards Malays was the appreciation that the Malays do not relish being accepted on sufferance. They are Singaporeans, no more and no less than other Singaporeans and are able to contribute in every field of endeavour for the development and progress of Singapore. The recognition of the special position of the Malays in the Constitution did not imply that they be treated differently. What they required was equal opportunities to improve their education, skills and capabilities. This the PAP Government provided and the Malays responded. Another factor, and a crucial one, to my mind, was the ability of the PAP leaders to talk directly to the Malay Singaporeans, especially Comrade Lee Kuan Yew. This ability to communicate directly to the various ethnic groups, where necessary, is the secret of the PAP's mass support and success.

I am confident that the new generation PAP leaders represented here by our Guest-of-Honour Comrade Goh Chok Tong will continue to have the same kind of rapport with the Malays that Comrade Lee Kuan Yew and others among the older generation had. For it is only with such rapport that they will continue to enjoy the confidence of the Malay Singaporeans as much as that of the Chinese and Indian Singaporeans. Like the founding fathers of the PAP the new generation leaders of our Party are no doubt aware that we live in Southeast Asia and that the interests of the peoples of Southeast Asia are not quite the same as those of China, India the

Western powers or the Soviet Union. The Malays in Malaysia and the pribumi Indonesians are not likely to turn to communism in the foreseeable future. They will want to be convinced that Singaporeans will continue to reject communism. For Singapore, the way out was succinctly presented by the PM on Sunday night. For Malay Singaporeans the way forward is to continue in step with the rest of Singaporeans.

For the Malay members of the PAP, the Ahmad Mattars, the Sidek Saniffs and others are continuing the tradition of the Malay pioneers by being in a party dedicated to social justice through social democracy. If the Mofradis and the Ismail Rahims were trade unionists, today's new generation Malays are increasingly technocrats and professionals, like their non-Malay comrades. I am sure that in the years ahead there will be many highly qualified Malay managers and executives in the Party ranks as well. Another close similarity if not identical feature of Malays and non-Malay MP's of our Party is that there are no traders and towkays among them. Although our survival will continue to depend on capital, local and foreign, we have personally kept out of the business which have made others wealthy. At the very most we can look forward to our pensions from the State Treasury with the exception of a couple who were wealthy before they joined the Party. I believe the future of the PAP will be secured if those who take over from the present leadership continue to generate wealth for the benefit of the people by encouraging those who create the wealth while taxing their profits.

In the final analysis what has seen the PAP and Singapore through has been its incorrupt and dedicated leadership undaunted by adversity, unafraid of hard decisions and unremitting in its efforts to protect and promote the interest of all Singaporeans. It is this same kind of leadership that the new generation PAP leaders, including the Malays, must provide.

On behalf of the Malay Affairs Bureau I welcome all our guests for responding to our invitation. We say thank you to Comrade Goh Chok Tong for his presence here tonight. I wish to thank every single member of the Organising Committee and the Working Committee for the hard work they have expended in preparing for tonight's function. Selamat Hari Raya Aidilfitri.

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