

PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE HELD ON 26TH

AUGUST, 1965, AT CITY HALL.

Press : (local) Why have you been so silent over the last few weeks?

Prime Minister: First, there was a tremendous amount of work to be done.

This is a radically different situation and, you know, my colleagues and I -- we like to calculate the consequence of each and every move and overture that we make or that is being made to us. And there are times when silence is golden. And you can take it from me that what Mr.

Rajaratnam, the Foreign Minister, and Mr. Lim Kim San, the Finance Minister, have been saying, is said after the closest

consultation with me and my colleagues. He speaks for us all... So, it does not mean that because I do not speak, we are not thinking or working.

I am meeting you today because I had to meet the Chambers of Commerce and the Trade Unions, the Manufacturer's Association, because economics is the basis of successful

democracy and also because I think we have cleared the hump. You know what Africans think about bases and the British bases. You know my position is on that. And although I am not a stranger to President Nasser, it took about two weeks for him to accord recognition, knowing full well what my position is. All of Asia now, except for Indonesia, has recognised us and I think so will the O.A.U. (The Organisation for African Unity). All the member-states, will, I think, recognise us. I have no need for concern that I am a neo-colonialist stooge.

Question 2 : (The Chinese Press) PM translates:

He said from the statements I have made, my colleagues and I, it appears that we still consider that one day we will be back in Malaysia, and that although we were pushed out or asked to walk out of Malaysia, we walked out with every intention, one day, of walking back into Malaysia.

Briefly, I said that students of geography, of history, of economics -- any keen student -- must know that you cannot,

by a legislative act, cut bonds between people who feel the same, who are the same. It is not just Chinese here and Chinese in Malaya, but Malays here and Malays in Malaya, Eurasians here and Eurasians in Malacca. Mr. Devan Nair is technically a foreigner now. But do you believe that in my heart, although legally I can say nothing, I can do nothing -- do you believe that in my heart and in the heart of my colleagues, he is anything other than one our closest comrades? There are bonds which cannot be broken; and what is more... you know, economics? Interdependence makes it inevitable, that maybe in ten years, maybe less, maybe more, it must come back together again, perhaps under somewhat different conditions and circumstances. But I have not the slightest doubt that that must be so.

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Question 3 : (The Malaya Press) Translated by PM.

I will just translate briefly. He said what is my view of Tunku's statement that Malaysia will have trade relations with Russia. And I said it must be so; again one of those things in history... In 1962, I visited Moscow; and I met the Minister

for Trade and Commerce. He wanted very much to send a rubber-buying mission to Singapore because otherwise he had to buy dearer through London. I wanted very much to let that rubber-buying mission come in, but at that time the Internal Security Council consisted of the British, the old Federation of Malaya, and ourselves and we were told "No".... So it was "No" then. But I have already send word to the Minister for Trade and Commerce... I do not know if it is the same man, Russian names are a bit difficult for me. But I have passed word through diplomatic channels that this rubber buying mission would be welcome in Singapore, and so would TASS, and so would TANJUK from Yugoslavia, and the Yugoslavia Ambassador in Djakarta, formerly Mr. Berber, was quite a friendly person. We knew him quite well. He used to come and go through Singapore. I met President Tito in 1962. He made a point of meeting me in spite of the fact that it was May Day, May the 1st. I hope that he will still know that what I was in 1962 is only stronger now, not weaker. I am nobody's stooge. I am not here to play somebody else's game. I have a few million people's lives to account for. And Singapore will survive, will trade with the whole world and will remain non-communist.

Question 4 : (The Chinese Press) -- PM translates.

Can I first translate? He says, very briefly, what about my security and my safety? What is being done? Do I intend to move house to a safer area? Let me first reply to him, then I will give you my reply.

(PM replies in Chinese, then translates)

I said briefly: one of the impressions which will be in everybody's mind if I move to a safe, comfortable residence, would be one of irresponsibility: looking after my personal safety, lowering morale. Yes, it is easy to come from the Rhio Islands. And if we do not want to get rid of the British bases, people can come; you know, volunteers ... If we are influenced by these considerations, my colleagues and I -- We should be selling peanuts: it is a better life. If we are afraid to die, then don't do this. The risk is there as you know: and you will know from today's conference arrangements, that nobody in this room and nobody outside

this room can possibly be an enemy. I am sorry if any of you have been put to any inconvenience, but it was necessary.

(PM here continues in Chinese)

I said there are several sources, not only Indonesians, who wants to get rid of British bases, "volunteers" of course. My relations with the Indonesian Government are what I call "correct". I am also waiting their decision not with undue anxiety.

There are Malay extreme elements, followers of the six wild men in the Peninsula, and there are communists who are in league with these Indonesians, who may find it convenient to get rid of my colleagues and I. From the days we proclaimed ourselves, from that moment, our position changed. If I was knocked down by a bus on the 8th of August, it would not be so difficult to keep things as usual as if I were knocked down today, or even on the 9th of August after the proclamation.

You know when I visited Nasser in 1962, he made quite an impression on me. I was taken not to the Quebay Palace -- old King Farouk's Palace -- but to a little modest villa in the suburbs of Cairo where he lived when he was just a colonel. And I see no reason whatsoever why the arrangements cannot be made to ensure the security of my residence. And not just mine, but also my neighbours; because they may miss me and get my neighbours, and my neighbours are my very close friends. In front of me is the President of the Hakka Association, Mr. Chong Moong Seng. You know I am a Hakka. To my right, is a Teochew merchant, my clansman, also Mr. Lee. To my left, is a small trader, a petty trader. But we are all friends. Behind me is a piece of vacant land. I am sorry for the owner of that land because I think they were asking for planning approval to build a five-storey flat which will overlook my house and make it easy for what happened to President Kennedy to happen me. Well, it will remain vacant land... It could serve a useful purpose there, having a meterological office or a meteorological station and other things.

And the most important thing of all is the morale of the people and of the administration. If I expect Singapore's workers to make sacrifices, to work hard; if I expect my officials to give of their best and I move to Sri Temasek -- and I have got every right, it is my official residence, there is the vote -- you know, it seeps down the line. Everybody then wants the good life. Then the flat which we now build, average cost per unit \$4,000. -- becomes \$8,000-- as in some neighbouring countries. It goes down the line. You know my officials? Some of them have not slept a full night's sleep for the last two weeks; Mr. Stewart for instance, he is 55; I am 42. I can take it better. Some of my junior officials who have been running around getting things done: it is a tremendous job learning how to code message to foreign countries. Worse, we have got very few French translators, and half of Africa is French-speaking. It is a tremendous business, and they have been working 24 hours flat. And if you expect that kind of effort, then I say the Ministers -- my colleagues and I -- must be prepared to make the same effort.

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And I have not the slightest doubt that the Singapore Police Force under the Minister for Defence and Security, Dr. Goh, will be competent, businesslike, polite but thorough.

And all will be well. Let me put it to you this way. The first fear, and real anxiety was August 9th, 10th, 11th, because the Indonesians or followers of the six and mad Mullahs could have started riots and destroyed our image internationally.

And I think some of them were thinking of doing that: make it appear that we are a Chinese city, beating up Malays; riots -- Malays are massacred, running into Johore where there is a lot of vacant land. Then we would have had it, isn't it? I would find it very difficult explaining to President Nyerere, Sekou Toure and all the Arab and Muslim States in Africa that although we are a secular state, we respect the Muslim

religion. After people have been massacred, do you think I can explain? It would take a lot of explaining. The first 72 hours was real anxiety. I tell you now, after the event, that we intermediary... to have a bit of kerfulfle. And we were in minds as to whether to conscribe the intermediary and stop the message or not. If we conscribed it, it might have precipitated it. So we just watched closely. That anxiety is

over. There will be no race riots in Singapore. Never! I played golf yesterday, Malay children, Malay women ... I am not trying a sympathy gag but this is the truth... One Malay woman took her child's hand and waved it at us, and I waved back. They know that what we say we mean: that this is an equal society; and our obligations to raise the economic and educational standards of the Malays will continue. There will be no longer a senator who says, "Release the detainees." a very helpful statement, I thought, because in that way, he proved to lots of sane, rational people in Singapore what should not be done. Once we have consolidated internally, no trouble -- and now there will be no trouble, it is completely calm as you yourself know.

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The next phase was Afro-Asia. It took me two weeks, Asia took me a week, partly communications-- you know, nearer.

I would like to say that I was grateful to Prince Norodom Sihanouk, no matter what the worst things the press says about him. What UPI says about him, that he sent us such a warm message. He is going to set up an Embassy here. We will set up an Embassy at Phnom Penh (interruption). Yes, a

consulate; it will be raised to Embassy now. But we have to look for a French-speaking counsellor to interpret for our ambassadorial calibre that speaks French in Singapore.

These are problems. Africa was more difficult because the communications all had to go via London and via Paris and in code and then in translation. But, as you yourself know, there is now no doubt in their minds that we are own masters and intend to be so. And our survival demands that no bigger, more powerful neighbour can just harass or worse, invade and conquer and destroy us. And if anybody can find an alternative to the British bases to guarantee Singapore's physical survival and economical survival, then I say I will listen.

Question : Nevertheless, in Article 13 of the Act that was passed in

Parliament on Monday night, the British can do what they

like with regard to defence, Commonwealth security,

Southeast Asian security. Do you intend to re-negotiate those terms and....

Prime Minister: You have read what Mr. Rajaratnam has said on these matters? These bases, I am sure, will not be used for acts of aggression against any neighbours in Southeast Asia.

Whatever the legal constitutional position will be or is my Government -- my colleagues and I -- know the people of Singapore. We also know the Army Civil Service Union, the Naval Base Workers' Union, the SU, NAAFI workers, all of them: they are all our friends. As I said about the nexus between constitutional objectives and reality; and the reality is that the people of Singapore are a highly politically educated group, particularly the workers as lackeys of the imperialists, imperialist stooges, and so on. But I have not the slightest doubts that Mr. Wilson or Mr. Dennis Healey whom I also happen to know for some time, will engage in no aggressive war. Nor can the Australians and New Zealanders afford to engage in aggressive war. I do not know what the Australian Government thinks, but I think I know what the Australian people think: that they would like to be friends with Asia. I had that very clear impression in Australia and you do not make friends by committing acts of aggression. And I think that is the way it stays.

Question : You said that Singapore.. (inaudible)... allow the mission to come and go, or will you allow them to set up...

Prime Minister : No, I do not mind. They can set up a small rubber buying mission which is what the Minister for Trade.... I have forgotten his name, I have got it in a file somewhere, we were in correspondence in 1962 after my trip to Moscow But there is no trouble. You know a Russian stands out in any crowd in Singapore, and I think he will find it very difficult to learn Malay and even more difficult to learn Mandarin or Hokkien.

Question : Would it be exclusively a trade centre, or will there be diplomatic relations?

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Prime Minister : These are matters which require more careful consideration. As I have said in my opening when I was asked by Jackie Sam of the Straits Times, sometimes silence is golden. My colleagues and I are by nature, by training, calculators, not "feelers". We like to make sure: pawn from here to k5; then

what happens seven steps afterwards. It takes some time to work it out. I have had about two weeks and I think I need more than two weeks to work out all the implications of these things. There are times when to talk too freely -- off the cuff -- is not particularly wise. And I do not intend to embarrass either my colleagues... each one whom is an equal with me. As you know, my last Minister did not sign till very late on the 8th of August. Some Ministers signed on the 7th of August, but some Ministers signed after great anguish, late on the 8th of August.... We are equals: each one of them with their little slide rule, and each one of them an intellect in his own right. All I am primus inter pares: the first amongst equals, probably because I was born and bred in Singapore. Half of them are Malayans, so they say, well, Singapore may feel a bit hurt if a Malayan, a chap from Penang or Seremban or Kuala Lumpur, took over the prime ministership.

(In Mandarin).....

Prime Minister : Let me translate. He asked me whether Singapore had the right to determine its future, international relations and so on.

I said that independence -- in accordance with international laws and custom and practice -- sovereignty is absolute. But that is in law. In severe limitations is the fact that nearly half of Singapore have friends; have relatives, brothers, mothers, fathers in other states of Malaysia. I have told in the Malay Peninsula.... Sorry, perhaps, that word I think the Malaysia Solidarity Convention may not like: in West Malaysia. You cannot expect them, and I will not myself, do anything to injure the long-term interests, the survival, of people so close to us -- not just Chinese and Chinese, but Malays, Indians, Eurasians. Mr. Stanley Stewart, my permanent secretary: his family is in Penang. You want a trade war? You want to destroy? You want really to hurt them even though we are prepared to hurt ourselves in the process? I do not think he can do it, however loyal he is to the Singapore Government. You reach a point where your emotional loyalties reach breaking-point. And these are realities. We will not injure the interests of those whom we consider are really one people and are very close to us even now.

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Question : Sir, you said that Singapore will trade with the whole world to survive. Will recognition by Indonesia pave the way for resumption of trade?

Prime Minister : That is one of the questions on which I think silence is golden. They have said something. Mr.Seda has said something about rubber and so on. But it was not President Sukarno or the first Deputy Prime Minister: the position is open. We will wait and see. We have got to calculate all the consequences. It is not just trade with Indonesia and Singapore's little advantage if in fact that may in the end mean our destruction, if not via Singapore destruction, our destruction, if not Malaysia's destruction. As I have told you, the nexus.... you know, we are like Siamese twins.

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Constitutionally, we are served. Economically, emotionally, we are really one.

Question : Do you consider Singapore re-establishing its barter trade with Indonesia....

Prime Minister : No. I have already answered you by answering that question.

There are certain things where no matter how hard you press me -- you know us -- if we cannot answer, we will not answer. The position is open for close and careful consideration. And only after this utmost scrutiny of every possible military, political and other implications, will we move a piece on the political chessboard. Some people play draughts -- you eat one piece at a time. The affairs of men and nations are not that simple. This is a complicated business of chess. I have studied with great interest what has been said, for instance, by Indonesia, by the Chinese Foreign Minister, Marshal Chen Yi, and they are calculating. We are calculating too; and my colleagues and I are calculating not just for two million people in Singapore. I have to calculate

for millions, others who are really one with us in Malaysia.

Mr. Rajaratnam is a very brave man, and he had to go down to Seremban to face his school friends, his own family, his own brother to tell them why now they are foreigners to each other. He signed partly because of logic, reason; partly loyalty. Loyalty to each other because we have been in battle for so long, so close together that we would not let each other

down. I would not dream of taking any steps that would injure, that could in any way jeopardise, relatives, fellow-countrymen, in the rest of Malaysia.

(Cont'd. in Chinese)

Well, thank you, gentlemen.

26th August, 1965.

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