

TRANSCRIPT OF A SPEECH MADE BY THE PRIME MINISTER
MR. LEE KUAN YEW AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE
UNDERGROUND CAR PARK AND PUBLIC GARDEN AT RAFFLES
PLACE AT 11.00A.M. ON NOVEMBER 27TH, 1965.

Friends,

It is of particular interest to me this morning to see what the place looks like after completion. I had, on several occasions, passed by and seen it all boarded up. And I had heard from time to time that there was, at one end of Raffles Square, a monstrous and imposing structure that looked more like Lenin's tomb than a flower garden! And it had even been suggested that we might perhaps repose some of the precious remains of some of our more distinguished citizens in one end of this square!

It was therefore a meaningful breakfast for me this morning as I flicked through the newspapers to find out how skilfully public relations officers have been, and how ingenious the PWD and the National Development officers had been in explaining this whole project away.

You see, between the conception and the final fruition, there was a lapse of about two years. We announced this in November, 1963 when the Yang di-Pertuan Negara addressed the first Assembly in Malaysia -- the first and the last Assembly in Malaysia. And two years from thence, this is what we have got.

When we approved the plans ... I was shown some beautiful plans in the Cabinet Office saying what a stupendous structure this would be. And I had

visions ... I have forgotten what those plans actually conveyed, but I had visions of a beautiful garden, everybody passing by admiring the flowers and the trees and so on. And at the same time, the garden would be bearing gold coins or silver coins underneath -- invisible to all sight -- as cars went whizzing by.

But the final realization, of course, is somewhat different, you have seen the explanation. It is three feet above the ground in order to allow ventilation and natural light. I think it is the most plausible explanation, but if we had really good engineers who had built car parks underground before with a garden on top, we would have discovered a way whereby both ventilation and lighting will reach the garage below whilst at the same time putting this garden underground for all to view as they pass by. But that is not to be.

And, this is one of the things that worries me. You can buy curtain, carpets, furniture and, if it is a folly, that is that. You scrub it out in four to five years. But if you put up a public building or a garden such as this, then it bears testimony either to your audacity or to your folly for many, many decades to come.

I am hoping that before long, we will give our engineers another opportunity to show how much they have developed in skill and professional competence. I quite believe that this has got to be high because otherwise there is a sudden drop from the road outside, and the cars can't get inside. And I am told that there is not enough of a swing around between the road there and the garage floor. Well, so be it.

But I suggest we get hold of some budding Singaporean sculptor to do some frescoes or bas reliefs along the side so that when you come out from the arcade,

you see visions, in grim concrete, of healthy men and women striving hard, endeavouring to achieve the brilliant future. If we can't do that, then I say, let it out to any number of watch and radio makers who want to catch your eye as you pass -- so that more gold coins can roll in!

Whatever it is, I think in a small way this expresses the ethos of our people.

There are two ways in which independent governments try to express their personality. One is by big monuments and literally, monuments, you know -- just something to be admired, something imposing to overawe you. You can't sleep in it; you can't drink in it; you can't drink in it; you can't take shelter in it. You just go and watch it, be overawed and so away! Quite a number of governments do that.

But there is another way in which pride of achievement, pride of growing and improving standards find a response finally in higher civic consciousness.

I cannot tell you how sad I was when the crowd moved in. It was not because they moved in -- this showed at least they were quite interested to know what was going on... It was because they trampled on the green lawn, and I said to myself; "That is another four hundred dollars gone, to re-lay green lawns!"

Well, the day we get our people to understand that this is theirs -- the flowers, the trees, the shade and that when you step on that green lawn and you ruin it, it is your money that goes to pay overtime to somebody to put the turf back -- that day, you would have succeeded in giving the place real pride. Perhaps this will be in a few more years.

But slowly over the years, you will notice a growing realisation that this is what two million people in one little island in Southeast Asia can achieve -- given skill, drive and a framework of honest and effective government within which they can strive to perform their best. And, over the years, be it Raffles Place Gardens, underground car park or public fountains opposite the National Theatre or the National Stadium which we will put up at Kallang Park and which will be up to Olympic standards -- whatever it is, they will all reflect a growing awareness of our high standards which is, in turn, dependent upon high performance. And when you have established that nexus between high standards and high performance in the mind of the average worker, that day you have a secured society. The day the average worker realise that running around breaking bottles, breaking heads, windscreens -- just being destructive -- does not help, that will be the day your security positions is more than three-quarters resolved; and, what is more, you get an enlightened and mobilised population making high endeavour part of its habit.

I would like to believe that somebody -- in the years to come -- will look at all this and say, "Well, it was not as skilfully finished as it could have been; but there was government, there was a people that inherited whatever there was out of a 140 years of British colonial rule and built upon it; that did not go backwards but went forward and never looked backwards!" And I say that alone would be consolation to me for whatever the engineering and the reinforced concrete defects of this particular structure. What matters is the thought behind it and the capacity to push it. Between the conceptions as an idea, the calling of plans, the approval of those plans and the final execution, there was constant drive.

You know, many people say nice things and then forget it. It is because they haven't got the stamina, the perseverance.

This garden was mooted in the old days by the old city council. But nobody could get a move on. Nothing was done and it got built on more tarmac year by year, and got uglier and uglier! You require a certain amount of drive to break you away from that inertia, and to say, "It will be done -- and now!"

And similarly, with Crawford; similarly, with Outram Road. It is true we suffered a malaise in 1964 when people refused to move from Crawford because they were egged on to stay and they were made to believe that they were being persecuted and so on. But we were patient, and we never gave up; we were never stymied!

They played a communal line. We countered the communalism until finally, we eroded away without force -- which is most important -- we eroded away psychologically, all the stupidities and the obscurantism which were designed to impede and to block us.

You know, there were two ways of reacting to the situation one way to say, "Well, in that case, since you don't want it, curse be on you; we will leave it alone"... That would have meant defeat and that would have meant we would have stayed in Malaysia to be bludgeoned, bullied, cowed. Never for us! However ruthless the force, the threat of the application of force, we meet it -- not blindly and foolishly but dexterously and determinedly -- until finally, they decided that force could not work and they booted us out.

And even after we were on our own -- with the police and the army ours -- no force was used in Crawford. The argument went on, until finally they have become convinced that this is a Government on the level with them; prepared to give them help where they required help... But what is right will stay right and nobody will bludgeon and coerce this government into doing what is wrong.

And so you see, in that way I hope 50 years from now, it may yet be said that what this little island represents was what made for an oasis of stability and sanity in a very turbulent and disturbed region.

Finally, may I urge all of you who trade and live in this area to move into the spirit of it. By all means, do your business day and night. This is what the place has got: vitality, drive, stamina. Make of it what you will. We are with you. We want you to have more business. We want this to be the shop-window in South Asia. One day, there will be people coming from Jakarta, from Kuala Lumpur. They will come and they will shop here. You know, they will always come and shop here. Why not? We will always be polite. And on that basis, we will always prosper.

And with those words, I wish you many years of more prosperous business in Raffles Place.

Thank You.

27th November, 1965