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TRANSCRIPT OF A PRESS CONFERENCE

HELD BY PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW

IN LONDON ON 21 JUNE, 1979

(As telecast / broadcast)

Prime Minister : When my visit was being arranged several weeks ago, I had on my agenda talks on our bilateral economic relations and, in particular, our trade with the European Community which, in the last few years, because of unemployment in Britain had posed problems for Singapore exports not to Britain as such but to the Community. I found a robust competitive spirit. I think we will have less sensitiveness in exporting to the Community because some industry ailing somewhere wants to be rescued. By way of illustration, we had to impose restraints on black and white television sets. We have, in fact, been moving away from black and white to colour television sets, and we are wondering whether we will be facing the same difficulties with colour television sets as

we did with black and white. And if we do, then we'll have to go on to video tape recorders. That's the philosophical problem which we face and Britain faces. And I am cheered that the British lion which has been fed - the entrepreneur - will now go out and look for his feed. Of course, it is quite difficult transition. Those of you who've read the book, "Born Free", will know how certain lion cubs which were brought up and looked after did not necessarily go back to vigorous self-supporting giants of the wild. It takes some re-learning. But there are old lions around to teach them. And we hope the experiment will succeed because it's in our interest that it does succeed.

By the time I got here, of course the agenda had shifted on to Rhodesia and refugees. I'll deal briefly with both of them then you can ask me what interests you.

We have all taken up our positions on Rhodesia long before the British elections on the third of May. Mr Andrew Young and Dr David Owen had, of course, influenced all of us in adopting certain optimistic courses of action. Some of

us had our reservations, but we stifled them. Now we are asked to review our position because over 60% of the people of Rhodesia - Blacks and Whites - have voted. It looks like a difficult subject for the next Commonwealth Conference. I don't think it's possible for us to be political acrobats. A position having been taken can only be changed if there are changed circumstances. And the changed circumstances must be beyond what had taken place in Rhodesia. It includes not only what is taking place in Britain but what is also taking place in Washington. And it is within that context that the Commonwealth Conference will have to make a tentative step forward towards what all of us must hope can be a peaceful settlement to the problem of Zimbabwe or Zimbabwe-Rhodesia.

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Refugees was not on my agenda. It has become a subject of compelling interest for Britain and, quite rightly, the press have taken an intense interest, both humanitarian and political.

It's a great game between the Soviet Union and China. Vietnam was a third player in the game. We, the countries of Southeast Asia, particularly the non-communist countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations States, form part of the stake in the big game.

As of now, the refugees are just so many chips in that game. We are not yet chips, we don't intend to be chips. We don't want even to be players in the game.

As luck would have it, the monsoon has changed and the boat people are drifting southwest to northeast, to Hongkong, which happens to be British, and the problem has involved you - which means European or Western American and British standards of human rights, humanitarian principles and a test of the universal application of the principles you have expounded so eloquently, especially the last Labour Government, on the question of human rights.

In order to minimise the number of chips crushed up in this game, we must get the world to understand what this

game is about, who are the principal players in order that the principals will stop trading human lives for political benefit.

The political benefit as of now goes mainly to the Soviet Union: may have been intended, may not have been intended. But if not intended, then certainly having come fortuitously, will be turned to double advantage.

Let me explain. In each one of these countries of ASEAN there are Chinese ethnic minorities ranging from 2% in the Philippines to 4% in Indonesia, 30-plus percent in Malaysia, 10% to 15% in Thailand and 75% in Singapore. They are hardworking, they compete for jobs, they compete for business and they are usually not unsuccessful. This makes for fine political balances within a political policy.

You will have seen from the short summary (which I have asked, for your convenience, to be stencilled) that this game goes back a long while ago.

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The more pressure on these countries, the more their balance is upset, the more anti-ethnic Chinese they become, the more anti-China they become, which means eventually the more pro-Soviet they may become. And if they decide to expel the Chinese as the Vietnamese have done, then certainly the economy must suffer and only the Soviet Union can help them out as the Soviet Union is helping Vietnam out. And in the same way as Vietnam cannot do what she is doing without Soviet backing, so if you can get - “you” meaning the governments who can be the big players in the same game, this geo-political stake - influence in Southeast Asia, so you can inhibit or hurt the Soviet Union from continuing in this game. Then the Vietnamese will relent. Otherwise, before the monsoon ends, I don't think the Governor of Hongkong was exaggerating when he said that he may have half a million refugees before the monsoon is over. That will put you in a dilemma.

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As far as we are concerned, my response is that of a Singaporean, that of a member of ASEAN. I am not responding as an ethnic Chinese. I will not join this game either as a chip, not even as a player.

Mr Prakesh Marchandani of BBC Television News : Prime Minister, day before yesterday, you told me that Britain and the West weren't doing enough for the cause of the refugees. What would you like to see them do?

Prime Minister : We don't have the whole of this morning. It will help if you ask me more pointed questions related to what I had said and to the documents which I have given to you.

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Join the game as a big player, get a conference going,

get the world to understand what this world is about. Stop it!

Mr John Dickie of Daily Mall : Prime Minister, how would you dissuade the Soviet Union from its present policy if they will not attend the conference?

Prime Minister : They don't have to. How was the West able to persuade the Soviet Union to allow Jews to emigrate? How was the West able to persuade the Soviet Union to hand over dissidents? And in any case, self-interest, once the game is exposed will mean that there is less to be gained out of carrying on with it.

Mr Collin Legum of the Observer : Prime Minister, do you, Singapore, and other Southeast Asian States see a role for yourselves in terms of the international conference?

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Prime Minister : In this?

Question : In the proposed international conference and how do you describe that role?

Prime Minister : I have already explained that this is a game for big players. It's a great game. We should be able to play a useful role in lighting up the issue to show the consequences on us of the impact of another 1, 1.2 million ethnic Chinese from South Vietnam, one to two million Cambodians or Kampucheans from Cambodia into Thailand and other parts of Southeast Asia by the time the next harvest is not garnered because sowing is not taking place with the monsoon and there will be some four to five million surviving Cambodians who will be very hungry.

Question : Does that mean that you will not attend the conference at all?

Prime Minister : Of course we will attend.

Question : You will?

Prime Minister : Yes. But this is a game for big players.

Question : Prime Minister, Jack Thompson, BBC World Service.

Is there any merit in the view that perhaps the West should renew some of its aid as it has given in the past to Vietnam in order to make that government more lenient towards its own internal population? Japan has backed off. What about that particular aspect of the problem?

Prime Minister : I despair for the BBC World Service. How much is your aid compared to Soviet aid? You ought to read the Herald Tribune this morning and see their estimates of what Soviet aid costs per day in weapons, food and civil infrastructure. It's negligible. Five ships being subsidised, some 30 Vietnamese English students. It's all very helpful. But this is a big game, and they are not interested in peanuts.

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Question : Well, I was thinking more of the United States and the Japanese - those who have economic power to help Vietnam out, and persuade her to move away from the Soviet Union.

Prime Minister : I am not a big player. But one big player told me - Mr Deng Xiaoping - in November last year that China gave Vietnam 20 billion dollars of aid over the last 30 years helping them fight against the French and then against the Americans. He said the Russians will discover, as the Chinese have, how completely devoid of any sense of obligation, let alone gratitude, and that they would deserve to suffer what the Chinese have already suffered. It may be that the Chinese experience was an exceptional and unfortunate one. It may be that there is a lesson in it for all of us. But, of course, he also added that he didn't regret a single cent of it because it helped to defeat the imperialists.

Mr Peter Prime Minister, could you tell us whether or not the

Snow of flow of refugees stops, what should be done with the
Independent refugees who do get out of Vietnam? Do you approve of

Television Malaysia's policy of deporting them?

News :

Prime Minister : The ASEAN countries have decided that unless they make a joint and collective stand, this will be left as an ASEAN problem. And unwanted Vietnamese who've not been chosen by successive host countries who come round looking for standards of health, standards of education and generously pick up the lawyers, the doctors, the dentists, the architects, the journalists, the cartoonists and leave behind the hewers of wood and drawers of water, that unless we take a joint collective stand as hard-nosed as the players on the other side of the game, we will be as one Malaysian Minister put it, "left with all the rubbish in our garden." I don't think he meant it exactly in that way, but it does express his feelings. I don't think any people deserved to be called "rubbish" or treated as "rubbish", not even by hard-headed communists.

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Question : But what do you do when they turn up on your beaches?

Prime Minister : You've read what they said they were going to do. They were either going to shoot them or shoo them.

Question : You agree with that, would you? That's what you'll do?

Prime Minister : I've said that we have decided to take a solid front.

Question : Mr Prime Minister, how many refugees have your country taken in since this problem arose?

Prime Minister : For resettlement - 300 fishermen. For transit, at this moment we have a thousand plus. Since 1975, probably about five to six thousand have come and been resettled.

Question : Mr Prime Minister, this is Barry Gordon of

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Independent Radio News. Do you see anything positive coming out of next week's ASEAN meeting, to which I understand, Foreign Ministers from Japan and Australia have been invited, about the present refugee situation?

Prime Minister : Positive in the sense that it can take this, what has so far been a regional issue, onto the world stage. It is a world issue. It's a challenge to the whole world, not just to the countries of first landing.

Question : Mr Prime Minister, I'm William Horsely of BBC Radio 4. From your notes here, the Soviet Union charges Peking with the intention of applying political ideological pressure through a fifth column on the governments of other countries. Do you think that there is any danger of the Soviet Union's ploy of creating unrest in these countries of large Chinese populations outside Vietnam might succeed?

Prime Minister : I think you haven't - you are new to the area. If you

read the note carefully, it is not the Soviet ploy to create trouble with ethnic Chinese in these countries. The Soviets are saying it's China's ploy to exploit these ethnic Chinese to create trouble in these countries and bring them under China's hegemony.

Question : But the end result will be conflict between the Chinese minorities and the other populations in the region?

Prime Minister : I think that's not an unreasonable conclusion to come to.

Question : Mr Prime Minister, if Vietnam foolishly crossed that border between Kampuchea and Thailand, what would be your reaction? What would Singapore do?

Prime Minister : Utterly irrelevant really what my reaction would be. I think that the Vietnamese would be more worried about first, what Thai reaction would be; second, what China's reaction would be.

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Question : What would ASEAN's reaction be?

Prime Minister : ASEAN has already stated that it views with considerable concern bordering on grave disquiet any likelihood of a repeat of the problems that took place on the

Vietnamese-Cambodian border, having it duplicated on the Cambodian-Thai border.

Question : Mr Prime Minister, you said earlier that Rhodesia was one of the issues discussed. What exactly is Singapore's position on the issue of recognition?

Prime Minister : We have taken a stand both in London with the other Commonwealth countries, we have also taken a stand in the United Nations with the group of non-aligned countries. We will not be able to change in the existing situation. In other words, some movement must be made to get the parties which were excluded from the internal settlement to be included in it if they so wish for a peaceful settlement. If they do not wish for a peaceful settlement, then of course a new situation arises which enables everybody to take a fresh look at the situation, including the United States Congress.

Question : You said in the past, Prime Minister, that the Conference spent a disproportionate amount of its time on Rhodesia. Don't you feel that this may happen again?

Prime Minister : I have been assured by the Secretary-General that he has only one morning slated for discussions on Rhodesia. That's on a Friday. We won't even continue the discussions on Friday afternoon, we will all adjourn after lunch. We will talk these things over. And, by the time the weekend is over, we can go on to subjects like world trade and the new international economic order.

Question : Would you like to bet on that?

Prime Minister : The Secretary-General may have noticed a note of disbelief in my reply. But he assured me that that was most likely to be so.

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Mr Patrick : Coming back to your area, Prime Minister, could you

Keatley of the : tell us what you think about the effect of the flow of

Guardian : refugees on the political stability in the area? It is a technique

...

Prime Minister : It's disastrous. The Vietnamese are past masters at the use of refugees as a political weapon. They used to drive the refugees into the towns of South Vietnam, put pressure on the infrastructure, living space, food supplies, create economic distress and amongst the refugees, there is a natural quota of the activists and the agitators and then riots and then popular insurrections and so on. They did the same thing in Cambodia, they are doing it now in Thailand and they have sent them by boat to other countries in the region. They know or they must know that this puts tremendous weight on the economies of these countries, not to mention the stresses refugees generate on the political structures of these countries. And again, whatever their intentions, one must assume that these are extremely disciplined minds who have calculated the consequences of their actions and that they had intended these results.

Question : How far, Prime Minister, do you think the refugees themselves are a party to this?

Prime Minister : Alas! Would you like to be a chip on the gaming table? If you have seen some of these boats, if you have been to any of these refugee camps you will know what a horrendous experience it is. I have to read these reports, it's part of my job. And although I have been through this hundreds of times, each time it is like putting your heart into a meat grinder. And they are not just so many ignorant, illiterate inconsequential people. Half a million have already been disposed of in this way; another million and a quarter, another one to two million from Cambodia, if not more.

 Amongst them just think - I don't like this comparison because it is not analogous. But there are pianists like Fu T'song, violinists, computer scientists, doctors, brain surgeons. These are talented people, just as when the Jews came here, those of you who have read your books as to what happened in those years will know that doctors were not allowed to practise because they didn't have British medical degrees, although they were specialists in their fields. But this is part of the price of becoming a chip. I have got 2¼ million chips. I don't intend to have them put into this kitty.

Mr Saraj : May I take you back to the trade issue? Did you talk
of Reuters : about - obviously you must have stopped by in Brussels -
Britain and did you get any assurances that Britain would
help ... ?

Prime Minister : We don't really want help. All we want is no
hindrance. We'll help ourselves. We were getting on fine
with Brussels, we were getting on fine with Bonn, we were
getting on fine with Paris, with the Benelux, even the Italians
gave us less trouble. It was that sad but I think that's behind
us , for the time being.

Thank you.

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DOCUMENT DISTRIBUTED AT THE
PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER
MR LEE KUAN YEW IN LONDON ON 21 JUN 79

People's Daily on 4 January 1978 published article by Liao Cheng-Chih on guidelines and policies on work concerning overseas Chinese affairs in which amongst others, it refers to the kinship between Chinese in China and the overseas Chinese.

2. On 23 March 1978 - Vietnam officially abolished all private enterprises, which affected mainly the Hoa people. This was announced by Radio Ho Chi Minh City. 30 April 1978 - Liao announced that 120,000 Chinese expelled from Vietnam. This was reported by Hsin-Hua on 1 May 1978.

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3. Peoples' Daily on 3 July 1978 published editorial entitled. "China's policy is open, above-board consistent - refuting Soviet slanders on China's policy towards overseas Chinese", in which Singapore citizens of Chinese descent are stated to be no longer overseas Chinese. It compared the Chinese in Southeast Asia to the Irish in New Zealand and US.

Extracts as follows:-

- (a) “We do not approve of lopsided consanguinity. There are many instance of people of the same extraction that are scattered in different countries of the world. Some of the high government officials in the United States are of political Jewish or other extraction. This is a common thing in many countries. A considerable number of people of Chinese origin who live in the Southeast Asian countries have through years of residence voluntarily acquired the nationality and citizenship of those countries. In Singapore, for instance, citizens of Chinese descent form a great proportion of the population; they speak and write in Chinese, while they also speak and write in English. They are no longer overseas Chinese but citizens of Singapore. These Singapore citizens of Chinese origin do not fall within the framework of China’s policy towards overseas Chinese, but are under the jurisdiction of Singapore.”

(b) “The Soviet propaganda machine is trying to sow discord between China and countries in Southeast Asia. But this is futile. It falls flat on its face when it says overseas Chinese or the citizens of Chinese origin in those countries have “ethnic feelings” for China. Ethnic feelings are in evidence in many countries. There are many people of Irish descent in New Zealand and the United States. Can one logically conclude that Ireland thus entertains aggressive ambitions towards New Zealand or the United States?”

4. Soviet propaganda against Chinese use of overseas Chinese began 5 years ago :-

(a) Pravda article on 1 March 74 said Peking’s policy of using overseas Chinese as ‘fifth column’ was source of conflicts among various national groups in Southeast Asian countries.

(b) Radio Peace and Progress 6 May 77 - claimed that over two-thirds of Chinese of Southeast Asia remain politically and economically linked with Peking.

(c) Radio Peace and Progress on 11 October 77 - repeated the claim that ethnic Chinese wield a disproportionate share of economic and political power in Southeast Asian countries, that Peking is attempting to penetrate into the economies and political and defence structures of these countries without risking the responsibility for the actions of overseas Chinese who are no longer its citizens. It said China's aim is to destabilise the countries in Asia with the help of overseas Chinese - the five countries in ASEAN were at the top of the list of targets of Chinese expansionism.

5. Before the Sino-Vietnam conflict, in the later half of 1978, Radio Peace and Progress stepped up its propaganda against the overseas Chinese.

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(a) On 20.9.78 it said China's aims were to achieve hegemony first in Vietnam and then the rest of Southeast Asia, and the overseas Chinese had a central role in the execution of this grand plan.

(b) On 4.12.78 RPP alleged that Peking was using its diplomatic missions abroad to recruit local Chinese to further its aim, and claimed that in fact Peking was pleased with recent developments regarding the resettlement of large numbers of Vietnamese Chinese nationals in western countries. It claimed that these people would be used by Peking for engineering new provocations in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. Peking's ultimate policy was to use this fifth column to apply political and ideological pressure on governments of other countries. "Its agents instigated the Vietnamese citizens of Chinese descent using them as a fifth column and as an instrument for putting political and economic pressure to bear on Vietnam. It seems that Peking is now working hard on overseas Chinese living in other Southeast Asian countries to weaken in them the spirit of great-power chauvinism."

6. After China-Vietnam conflict - in March 79 there were three broadcasts by Radio Peace and Progress alleging that Chinese aggression in Vietnam was a stepping stone for implementing great power hegemony in the region. One of the main things cited is Peking's use of overseas Chinese for its

interest in Southeast Asia, and that overseas Chinese were participating in China's armed aggression against Vietnam.

7. On 8.4.79 Radio Peace and Progress made only passing reference to the overseas Chinese; that with "each passing year the problem of Chinese immigrants going to Southeast Asian countries is becoming more pressing."

8. Genesis of Sino-Vietnam exchanges on overseas Chinese:

June 1977 - Chinese and Vietnamese leaders discussed in Peking the issue of Vietnamese citizenship for ethnic Chinese in Vietnam.

October 1977 - Authorities in Kwangsi Province requested Vietnamese Consulate-General in Nanning to take measures to stop forced exodus of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam.

4 Jan 78 - People's Daily published article by Liao Chen-Chih on overseas Chinese policy.

Feb-March 78 - Expulsion of Chinese in Vietnam began. Chinese authorities made further representations to Vietnamese missions in

Peking and Kunming against “large scale” expulsion of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam.

23 March 78 - Vietnam abolished all small private enterprises.

17 April 78 - Vietnam ended “illegal activities of open-air markets in Ho Chi Minh City.”

30 April 78 - China publicly expressed concern at the large number of Chinese expelled from Vietnam. People’s Daily accused Vietnam of discriminating against, ostracising and persecuting ethnic Chinese.

4 May 78 - Vietnam officially acknowledged that Chinese residents had been leaving the country and called on those remaining to stay in Vietnam. Xuan Thuy, Vietnam Communist Party Secretary, said the exodus of Hoa people was caused by rumours of an impending war between China and Vietnam.

12 May 78 - China withdrew aid and technicians from 21 projects in Vietnam.

24 May 78 - China protested against persecution and expulsion of ethnic Chinese in Vietnam.

25 May 78 - Vietnam refuted China's allegations.

26 May 78 - China decided to send ships to bring Chinese in Vietnam to China. Radio Hanoi denied that Vietnam authorities had persecuted or expelled Vietnamese of Chinese descent.

27 May 78 - Vietnam proposed talks with China, to settle differences over Vietnam's Chinese residents.

2 June 78 - China rejected Hanoi's proposal for talks.

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5 June 78 - Deng Xiao-ping confirmed that China had stopped some economic aid to Vietnam.

13 June 78 - Pravda accused China of provoking exodus of Chinese residents from Vietnam, and of being behind the Vietnam-Cambodian conflict.

29 June 78 - Vietnam became member of CMEA.

30 June 78 - Radio Hanoi said Sino-Vietnamese talks on evacuation of ethnic Chinese had broken down.

3 July 78 - China stopped all aid to Vietnam.

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