TRANSCRIPT OF SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
OF SINGAPORE, MR, LEE KUAN YEW, TO STUDENTS
OF CANTERBURY UNIVERSITY CHRISTCHURCH,
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Vice-Chancellor Ladies and Gentlemen,

I can only hope that I possess some of the attributes that you have so generously
described me to have, and I hope that in the course of my talk this morning I
could give you some impression of what are the likely developments in
SOUTHEAST ASIA in general, Malaysia in particular, and its consequences for
those who live in the Pacific region and for the world contest between the East
and the West as a whole.

If I could start off first with what is Malaysia; a conglomeration of one peninsula,
with an island at its tip and about a third of the Western segment of the island of
Borneo, separated from Malaya by about 500 to 800 miles of the South China
Sea, depending upon whether you are in Sabah or Sarawak.

What brought them together into one political unit? It's really an accident of
history, of the activities of Dutch, Portuguese and British navigators in the 17th
and 18th centuries, and the merchants who followed them and the subsequent colonial administrators who followed in the wake of the merchants to establish the political structure under which the exploitation of the natural resources which the metropolitan powers lacked could be carried out with the least interference possible from the local inhabitants.

In this process a considerable distortion of what would otherwise have happened was inevitable. Unlike the Dutch in what was then known as the Netherlands East Indies, the British found it necessary in order to exploit the mineral, agricultural resources of tin and rubber to bring in considerable quantities of disciplined and cheap labour, principally from South China and South India.

The indigenous people who were there, principally Malays and the few of the orginal tribes in Malaya, the Semang and Sakais, Negritos and others, they never took to regimentation of plantations and of the repetitious jobs, found no attraction for them. Fishing, farming was their way of life, and therefore considerable number of Chinese and Indians came in, first as workers and plantation tappers, later to become the shopkeepers, the bankers, the entrepreneurs, the technicians, and the professional men, and now also the politicians in the area,
So you have in Malaysia a curious imbalance in economic and social development between the original communities and the people of immigrant stock. It is what perhaps would have happened in New Zealand if there were, say an equal number of Maoris and Europeans, with a little bit of the Indians and the Fijians thrown in to makeup a nice little polyglot community. With this significant difference; that power was never in the hands of the immigrant community, and when it was handed over the colonial Raj, it was handed back, by and large to the people of indigenous stock.

This presents Malaysia with a fascinating problem of how it is to adjust itself and to seek accommodation and balance between the indigenous and the immigrant; indigenous being left in control of the apparatus of the state, the police, the army, the administration, the mechanics of a civilised community, the sewers, the water mains, the electricity, and all the other mundane things in life which is very important if we are continued to enjoy one of the highest standards of living in South Asia.

Malaysia is many things to many people. To the British they'd like to present what they have done in the region as a pattern of orderly de-colonisation, of how power was handed back to once-subject peoples. To the Indonesians it is a neo-colonialist plot designed to threaten the progressive forces which Indonesia
represents, the new emerging forces which will spread and conquer the world. To Malaysians I would like to believe without exception this represents the only coherent, rational way in which we could preserve the majority of the benefits we got out of being one unit under the British colonial administration, and the avoidance of the grievous perish which surrounds us.

There were, theoretically, several other solutions to our problems of independence and self-government and self-determination. But we did not opt for those other alternatives because none of them offered the same possibilities of an enduring future as Malaysia does. Now in Singapore for instance, it could have sought its own independence and tried to find some form of viability first as a trading outpost like Hong Kong, next playing a role like Cuba in the island-hopping operations of the world revolutionary forces; and had we considered that the advantages of such an adventure would have been more than what Malaysia could have offered us, then undoubtedly we would have chosen to have done so.

We did not because it was not difficult to see why it was that perhaps in the long run, whatever the immediate difficulties of adjustments between the Malaysian territories themselves the different forms and styles and tempers of the political leadership and the social system -- the combination of these four territories,
with Brunei for the time being opting out was likely to offer all of us more stability, more security, and a greater chance of survival as a separate and distinct entity in Southeast Asia.

I would hate to believe that we cannot achieve what we have set out to do. We have gone through one-and-a-half years of Malaysia and gone through considerable stress and strain in this process, particularly as the Indonesians decided at the very outset to bring forth into immediate conflict all the latent divisions of interest between the indigenous and immigrant peoples.

But be that as it may, our survival now depends upon our capacity to identify more of our common interests with Malaysia, and our capacity to act in unison in defence of our collective interests than our natural tendency to find friction in competing for either political or economic advantage.

New Zealand and Australia, will more and more, have to take more active and positive interest in this region. I do not think it is possible to have Malaysia stand on her own feet and withstand a big and aggressive neighbour without some Commonwealth assistance. But the problem which New Zealanders and Australians face is one of really making sure that they have not jeopardised their own interest in choosing to assist Malaysia as against Indonesia. You know the
Indonesian attitude is this, the world is now divided into the young emerging forces and old dying forces. And young and old in this classification of Indonesian leaders does not depend upon young or old in age or in establishment of a society, but whether it is like the Indonesian president who is young and vigorous, virile and forward-looking, wishing to liberate the world, or whether we are old and products of a dying society like myself because we are tools and agents for dying imperialist forces.

Now, if New Zealand and Australia.....I mean the Australians are still equivocal yet about whether the young Australians and New Zealanders fall within the classification of old and dying or young and emerging. And the last bomb explosion in Singapore showed that if the Australians went on taking a greater interest in Malaysia's survival, then undoubtedly the young and bustling Australians would be classified under old and dying forces.

But this is an option which you have to exercise. I hope you will exercise it judiciously and to our mutual advantage. If you stand and do nothing and leave it all to the British to carry this load then there is a real risk that the Indonesians can succeed in convincing the Asian world that in fact this is a neo-colonialist plot and this is a cover for the continuance of British imperialist interests, both economic and military in the region. Now, the association and identification of the younger Commonwealth countries, although European but nevertheless
Australians in geographic and other interests, does give a broader front of solidarity of interest between Malaysia and the Commonwealth. Not just between Malaysian and British colonialists.

But of course, as you become more and more identified with the defence of Malaysia as Indonesian infiltrators get rounded up by New Zealand troops and Indonesians become less and less tolerant of New Zealand's participation in the region, so you will have to decide whether this is an enterprise which is in fact in your long term interests. And we all act in defence of our national interests. And I'd like to suggest that whatever the ephemeral advantages of neutralism or opting out may be to New Zealanders, if you are to preserve, or attempt to preserve, a semblance or at least a chance of stability in Southeast Asia, then a stand must be taken now if for no other reason than that if you allow Indonesia to go on altering national boundaries by this technique of a combination of diplomatic and military pressure which she successfully exploited against the Dutch over West Irian, then all boundaries in the neighbourhood would be so adjustable, to the disadvantage of all those live in neighbourhood.

I would like now to suggest why I believe that if we are sufficiently circumspect about what we are doing, not just Australians and New Zealanders and Britishers
but also Malaysians, then this co-operation in defence of our mutual self-interest can also be an advance for peace and stability in the region generally.

You are acutely conscious of what is happening in South Vietnam, and this is all part of one region. If what has happened in South Vietnam can be repeated in the same way one by one in all the neighbouring territories, then in a matter of a decade or even less if some of the intervening states between Malaysia and South Vietnam decide to anticipate history and be sure what they are on the side they appears like winning, then the whole region will be unscrambled and it would be long before the Australians find themselves in difficulties.

But of course, you can take the attitude that until Sydney has been occupied you're reasonably safe because you've got the Tasman Sea between you and them. But I do not suggest for one moment that is either the outlook that I had gathered in my stay in New Zealand, or that it is in anyway likely.

I am assuming for the purpose of this discussion that the region is not allowed to be corroded at its edges too quickly, that sufficient time will be given for consolidation and stabilisation to take within Malaysia. The external help which we can receive from either New Zealanders or the British, can only buy us time. It cannot ensure us or will guarantee us survival. But it does give us time. And
this time I hope, will be bought at a minimum expense, and used to maximum advantage.

What is minimum expense? In my view, it is likely to be at its minimum if we meet Indonesian pressures as they come with a purely defensive purpose.

The great disadvantage which Malaysia faces in meeting Indonesian aggression which is really what confrontation is a euphemism for, is that she hasn't got the military capacity to match the Indonesians soldier-for-soldier, gun-for-gun, battleship for battleship, or battle cruiser for battle cruiser. Indonesia has 400,000 men under some form of military discipline or another. Malaysia has about 10,000. Indonesia faces tremendous internal problems unless this external diversion can be kept up. And that is one of the first facts of life we have to learn to live with.

Here is an army built, equipped by the Russians, intended for mischief, primarily against the Dutch now found not required for that purpose and therefore unemployed unless turned to other equally aggressive pursuits. Now, if gun for gun means one Indonesian gun versus one British gun, then you begin to lose the propaganda war. You will become identified as an imperialist power trying to prop up a puppet regime really as a cover for British military and economic interests, and we would become identified as the puppet. Hence, it is important
that - it is abundantly clear to all, to even the most misconceived and misguided of commentators, that -- here is a pure defensive operation.

Until such time as Malaysia can build up her own units for such activities behind Indonesian national boundaries as are necessary from time to time for our own defence. This is the first factor which must be recognised, that if you have New Zealand troops found on Indonesian soil then it is extremely difficult - however morally well-founded you may be - to explain to the world that you are not there as imperialists. Hence this rather passive role of waiting for the enemy to come and get you. But I suggest that this is really an intelligent way in meeting this problem.

Next, it is really a test of will -- their will versus ours. And I would like to believe, and I think there are grounds to believe, that we've got more iron in our souls than they have in theirs. If you study the history of Indonesian military and diplomatic activities over the last ten years before they got West Irian, you will find that it's really a battles of nerves.

They really never came to grips with another military power, with organised will. And I think that behind all this smokescreen of bravado there's really a sobering appraisal of the capacity of the other side to suitably deal with
any invasion forces that may some in. And that is our surest guarantee of paying
the minimum price.

If however they should find themselves in a moment of desperation to go
and embark on something on a bigger scale than what has so far been attempted
then, well, they would have perhaps shortened the time in which the test of wills
takes place because I’m quite confident that they haven’t got the capacity to
sustain anything like a major war for any length of time whatsoever.

That being so, and the Indonesians not being unintelligent, we have to
prepare ourselves for a very long and tiresome process of patience and a contest
of wills, really. They will go on doing this because it is necessary to keep the
disparate forces in Indonesia together. This is a convenient hook on which to
hang up all their internal differences. The president needs it, the
Communist party of Indonesia needs it, the army of Indonesia needs
it, and all the other political leaders around the President. So it is
unlikely, when all the different forces require it, that they will desist.
Assuming that the president lives for another ten years. I think we must be
prepared to face this for another ten years.
But, assuming that he doesn`t, what then? Well, it depends upon what follows. As I have said, the Army needs it for the time being, the Communists need it for the time being, and the other political leaders around the President also need it. But supposing the President is no longer there. Will the army need it? Not if they are to resolve their problems in Indonesia, and one of the problems is who succeeds the President. Because that makes a great difference to the political future of the Indonesian Generals and colonels and so on.

Do the Communists need this? I say, yes, because so long as they can get the Indonesian army pre-occupied with a completely irrelevant issue, so far as the Indonesian Communist party is concerned, then it must be to the advantage of the Indonesian Communist party.

Do the political leaders around the president need this? I think they do. Because without this they`ve got to make a choice between the army and the communists. And for political leaders with no great political strength on the ground, it is always unpleasant making a final choice of this nature with disastrous consequences if the choice turns out to be wrong. Hence, the desire to postpone any final decision would be very great indeed. And so, if between the political leadership, the political leaders and the army, there can be some accommodation which the communists would be anxious to get, we may well get
a continuance of some balancing of forces which will use confrontation as the
hook upon which to hang up their internal differences. If this happens, then I fear
that over the years the Indonesian Communist Party must gain strength and must
ultimately emerge triumphant.

If it doesn`t, if in fact the army -- the only other effective counter-
organisation to the communists -- decides that the moment has come in which to
make a decision for their own survival as a non-Communist or an anti-
Communist State, then I think we will get some respite from these pressures. But
in the long run, whatever the temporary respite may be, we`ll have to accept the
fact that all political groups in Indonesia, whether they believe in Soekarnoism
or they are members of the Indonesian Communist Party or followers of the
Murba, or the P.N.I. or the P.S.I., they believe in Greater Indonesia, or Indonesia
Raya. And if you go back and read the deliberations of the Committee, minutes
and records which were kept just before they proclaimed their independence on
the 17th of August, 1945 when the Japanese were still in occupation of
Indonesia, you will see that they seriously contemplated proclaiming
independence over the whole of the archipelago.

In the words of the President, if I may paraphrase him: God had ordained this
group of islands stretching between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, straddling
the Northern and the Southern hemispheres, should be one nation. And Malaya as it then was should be part of this nation. For then, whoever controls Malaya and Sumatra would control the Straits of Malacca, the Sunda Straits, and would be at the cross-roads of the world.

Well, this is the kind of geo-politics which we must expect from the Indonesians until such time as they understand that their smaller neighbours are not necessarily weaker neighbours.

I am sufficiently sanguine about the future because if you look at the history of the region you will find that these were not cultures which created societies capable of intense discipline, concentrated effort, over sustained periods. Climate, the effects of relatively abundant society and the tropical conditions produced a people largely extrovert, easy going and leisurely. They've got their wars, they have their periods of greatness when the Hindus came in the 7th and again in the 12th centuries, in the Majapahit and the Srivijaya empires. But in between the ruins of Borobudur and what you have of Indonesia today, you see a people primarily self-indulgent. And I think that is a source of considerable comfort to us because we are much smaller than they are.
You have different peoples in other climates in other countries. Now, you have the Germans, for example, a different breed of men with a different cultural milieu, and they for some reason or the other always believed in destiny, that somehow God had chosen them to produce a better type of race in order to lift up standards in the world, and that they have the answer. And there are capable of extreme effort over very sustained periods, and with very high standards of individual performance. Now this being so, I suggest that the future is not necessarily bleak provided we can keep external powers from getting into Southeast Asia.

If Southeast Asia becomes like the Balkans before the First World War, and every conflict of every little state, every friction between every state in Southeast Asia becomes in fact a ploy for big power interests to advance their long term aims, then the position will become extremely intractable.

And this is the big danger that Southeast Asia faces. In fact, the whole of South Asia is going through this period of malaise where people who have got identity of interest are quarrelling amongst themselves. I mean the first bloom of Afro-Asian solidarity against Western domination in the period between `45 and `55, the high-water mark of which was the Bandung Conference when Pantjasila and solidarity of all former subject peoples in themselves believe in a
new code of Afro-Asian ethics in peace, non-interference, non-aggression, mutual respect regardless of size and power, mutual help. Well, that phase has gone.

Now you have the Pakistanis, basically Islamic, anti-Communist in close co-ordination with the Chinese because they have got interests over Kashmir which conflict with India; you’ve got the Cambodians more frightened of the South Vietnamese and the Thais than they are of any other power, and resentful of American aid to South Vietnam and Thailand which they think is ruinous for their own national integrity; you’ve got the Philippines, dependent really upon American thinking and aid and policies and really ideologically wedded to Americans philosophies for many generations to come, helping the Indonesians and in turn helping to unscramble the anti-Communist front which the Americans are trying to establish in Southeast Asia, by making a claim for Sabah based on some documents which the Sultan was alleged to have signed many many years ago; and most curious of all, the Indonesians with non-Communist and anti-Communist leaders in the Government actively pursuing a policy which must help to undermine stability in southeast Asia, and that in turn leaving the options open to the Communist as to what they are to do in this region.
They could have, to sustain themselves, assuming that they were more long-term in their thinking, they could have embarked upon other adventures to have sustained the momentum which the liberation of West Irian lost them by embarking on the liberation of Portuguese Timor, or Australian New Guinea. But for some reason or the other it happened that they chose Malaysia.

Now this is really a curious situation. I know for certain that quite a number of the Indonesian leaders whom I have personally met are fearful of the Communists, and in particular of Chinese Communism. And yet today they are invoking Chinese Communist help in order to sustain themselves in their anti-Malaysia activities. And China's aid has been extended only because they are pursuing this policy. So one side must be wrong. I mean, either the Chinese are wrong in helping the Indonesians confront Malaysia, or the Indonesians are wrong in getting Chinese help in confronting Malaysia. Because I do not see the present leadership in Indonesia having an identity of interest with the Chinese leaders.

I can see an identity of interest between Indonesian Communist leaders and Chinese Communist leaders in having world Communist spread throughout the region. But I do not see an identity of interest between the non-Communist and the anti-Communist groups.
Now, what does this mean? I suggest this because really the nations in Southeast Asia have not been able to discern, to define and to collate their collective interests. This is the problem. If they are able to see that in the long term, if we want it to survive as ourselves and not as vassals or satellites of other powers, then it behoves us to act collectively in defence of our larger interests in the region in keeping outside powers from meddling with us and our affairs than in allowing our immediate frictions to be exploited by outside powers.

But that is not to be. The Indonesians are so firmly committed to this policy that nothing can dissuade them than the sheer process of attrition that they cannot get away with it. And if they do then we shall all perish. Not because the Indonesians will triumph, but because others working behind what the Indonesians will leave in their trail, must eventually be able to triumph in Southeast Asia. The Communists believe that in a state of confusion -- you know, one of the Communist dogmas of a successful revolution is there must be a state of confusion where the people have faith in their Government in resolving its problems and the Government in authority has lost faith in itself in being able to produce the solution, and that's the situation a well-organised communist movement can emerge triumphant in.
So you see they have a vested interest in instability. For instability generating economic and social discontent, in turn undermining confidence in the ability of the regime to produce solutions and in the confidence of the regime in itself, is the very situation which they must create in order to succeed.

So putting it in its broadest terms, you and I share one common interest in that I do not want to be a vassal of some other big power, you do not like to see this region emasculated by big powers with consequential dangers to yourself, and we both, in order to defend our joint interest have vested interest in stability, economic and social progress.

It is against that background that we should view Indonesian confrontations. Commonwealth aid, whether it is military or economic is only meaningful if in the time that it gives us, in the time they are paying for it, it is exploited to the full to consolidate Malaysia internally in order that it can endure on its own. A Malaysia perpetually dependent on Western succour and sustenance is not one that enthralls the soul and certainly will not inspire my people, and certainly is not one which your leaders can sell you at election time.

So on that note, I hope, having discerned what are the long term objectives of those who want to destroy this stability in Southeast Asia are, we
should seek to find the solutions which will tend to bring stability and progress.
And if we succeed in that contest, then we would have bought not only time, but
strength in which perpetually to resist subversion, penetration and destruction
from outside ideologies, be it from the Russians, be it from the Chinese, be it
from our own indigenous communist groups.

And on that basis we survive as a separate, happy, prosperous people; you
have as your neighbours reasonably contented, reasonably constructive,
reasonably amiable and hospitable neighbours to deal with.

Thank you.