

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT BYC/INFS.DE.13/59

TEXT OF A SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR.

LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE CITY HALL ON DEC.3, '59.

(PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

Friends and Fellow-Citizens:

Exactly six months ago on June 3rd, with the promulgation of the new Constitution of the State of Singapore, the British Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Colony of Singapore was abolished. Gone were the cock-hat with the white plumes, the symbol, for over 100 years, of our British overlord. On that memorable evening six months ago, we the people of Singapore gathered here to rejoice in the step we were taking, away from the colonial past, towards an independent future and our tryst with destiny.

But the man who used to wear the cock-hat with the plumes on top did not disappear. Quietly and unobtrusively he put away the symbols of his once great office. As laid down by the Constitution, he became the constitutional Head of State, to help transfer smoothly the reins of power to a Government elected by

the people. Yesterday he departed, and with his departure goes the last of the powerful British Governors who once held sway over our lives.

This morning, a few minutes ago, our own Yang di-Pertuan Negara was sworn and installed in office. It is a milestone in our brief history. He is not a powerful man with power of life and death over us. His role is that of constitutional Head of the State of Singapore. He is the personification of the State of which you and I are members. Abstract concepts like "the State" do not easily arouse mass enthusiasm and loyalties. From tribal chiefs to Kings and Emperors through the ages down to present day dictators and presidents it was the individual leader that personified the State.

But our Yang di-Pertuan Negara is no such potentate. As human civilisation advances, forms of government also change. No individual is perfect.

So the search for more perfect forms of government has moved from the rule of the autocrat to that of the collective leadership elected by the people. We, your elected Government, constitute that collective leadership. But again collective leadership is an abstract concept, and cannot easily invoke mass enthusiasm and loyalties. So over and above this collective leadership of the elected Government, is the titular Head of the State. He symbolises all of us. To him devotion and loyalty are due.

It is my privilege to introduce to you our Yang di-Pertuan Negara, Inche Yusof bin Ishak. It is not his high birth which has commended him for this high office, for he is a commoner. It is only that he is one amongst us whose deep understanding of the hopes and fears of our people, and whose natural dignity, ensure that the duties of his high office will be discharged honourably and well.

With his installation as our first Malayan Yang di-Pertuan Negara, we have also adopted new symbols. The flag, the coat of arms and the anthem, they serve a powerful emotive function. Men have died for the honour and glory of their flag. Men have rallied and united in instinctive response to their anthems. Small country though we may be, it is nevertheless necessary that we develop these instinctive emotive responses so vital to the survival of a people.

Singapore is unique in many ways. An island City State of 1 1/2 million people with a Constitution of semi-independence, we must be unique in this world in having as our adult citizens less people who are born and bred here, than those born and bred elsewhere. Of our nine Ministers, only two were born and bred in Singapore. And so it is with the bulk of our adult citizens. In the last elections, of about 600,000 voters, only about 270,000 less than half were people born and bred in Singapore.

I have mentioned these facts to emphasise the urgent need for inculcating common values, common loyalties, common responses amongst our people. The sense of belonging together belonging to one entity, one unity, is a must in our task of nation building. An old nation with an ancient past has long historic experiences to bind its people together. Indeed it is their long history that permitted the evolution of a common language and a common cultural heritage. We may not be able to afford such a long time to evolve a common heritage for our people. There are forces let loose in Asia, and in the whole world, which make it dangerous and foolish for us to count on several decades in which to accomplish our task of building one nation and one people. We must go about our tasks with urgency. The racial and cultural conflicts engendered by differing economic status between the indigenous peoples and the Chinese settlers in neighbouring countries are grim reminders to us to accomplish our task of integrating our peoples now and quickly. We cannot afford the tragedies that have taken place amongst some of our neighbours.

Hence we have chosen this auspicious occasion, the installation of our own Yang di-Pertuan Negara, to launch Loyalty Week, a week in which to remind ourselves that if we are to prosper and flourish, we must be loyal to the State that sustains us, and to the symbols that should always remind us of our obligations and inspire us to unity of action and purpose.

To make my point just now, I recounted how of the nine Ministers in the Government only two were born and bred in Singapore. But in truth our task is not so formidable. Of the nine, eight were born and bred in Singapore or the Federation of Malaya. One was born in Ceylon, but had from infancy been bred in Malaya.

In a world where all the city states have disappeared, in a century where only the big and the powerful nations count, there may be a touch of pathos in our attempts to inculcate local loyalties in 1.5 million people. It is always useful to keep our sense of proportion. Whilst we are searching for that vital sense of oneness in a common destiny, let us not forget that what we have always inculcated is a sense of belonging to Singapore as part of a larger Malayan whole.

National Archives of Singapore

Today, here on this Padang, and also in the thousands of homes listening with us here, let us renew our faith in ourselves and our future; let us resolve to be loyal to the interests of our people; let us pledge ourselves afresh to make this island a happy and peaceful place of plenty for all those who have been born and bred here, together with all those who have sworn to be one with us. May our new symbols endure and evoke in our hearts those sublime feelings of dedication

and sacrifice to a cause bigger than our individual selves. Finally, let us give to our Yang di-Pertuan Negara the loyalty and affection due to him as the symbol of the unity of the people who constitute the State of Singapore.

DECEMBER, 3, 1959.

(Time issued - 0900 hours)

National Archives of Singapore