SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT MC. JL.56/61

TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE OPENING OF THE
COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION
REGIONAL CONFERENCE AT THE VICTORIA
MEMORIAL HALL ON FRIDAY, JULY 21, 1961,
AT 2.15 P.M.

This Commonwealth Parliamentary Association regional conference of the Federation, Singapore, Sarawak, Brunei and North Borneo group could not have been more timely. For over a month now the subject of closer economic and political co-operation between these five territories has been very much in the forefront of all the newspaper. Men's minds are pondering over this concept of Greater Malaysia and inquiring about this road towards a more stable and prosperous future for all our peoples. The difficulty, it would appear, is that in each one of our territories there are reservations and fears as to what would happen to certain important local interests if we were all to merge into one political unit before all partners are equally strong and mature so as not to be overborne by their more sophisticated and advanced partners.

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The events of the last few weeks since the Prime Minister of the Federation went to Brunei and made his speech offering Brunei, North Borneo and Sarawak merger as a state in the Federation of Malaya are all fresh in our minds. Partly because political thinking has not been prepared for so advanced a proposal, there has been a reaction towards a more conservative approach. We know that our friends in Borneo and Sarawak welcome political association in principle with Singapore and the Federation. The only question is when and how?

We understand the fears of the Borneo territories of being swamped by large numbers of immigrants moving across from the more developed territories of the Federation and Singapore to fill the vast places in Borneo. We also understand the apprehension that the greater number of educated and trained officers in the Federation and Singapore may thwart local aspirations to assume their own responsibilities and administer their own territories. These are not insuperable problems. There can be state safeguards on immigration, Borneoisation and so on. I would like to suggest that at the conference you speak your minds frankly. Let us know what are the things that you feel have to be safeguarded. Let us know how they can be done and when.

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But one thing we all understand is that the logic of political events in Asia, and indeed in the rest of the world makes the setting up of small and splintered independent territories an extremely risky long-term proposition. Today we share on currency, one telecommunication network and one defence arrangements under the British Raj. We share a common past and are inheriting a common administrative system. It is desirable that the five territories should hold together. The only question is how and when.

How and when is a matter which has to be decided by us the people of these territories and not by the British. They can make the way easier or they can be obstructive. Be that as it may, we the people of these territories, must set the pace for ourselves -- do our own thinking, come to our own conclusions as to what will be to the mutual interests of us all. Let no plan for Greater Malaysia be sired by the colonial ruler. They have already done immense damage in the past by unnecessarily splitting and splintering up their colonial territories and its peoples.

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I invite you in the course of this conference to speak your minds for sometimes thinking aloud amongst friends does a great deal to clear the air and make everybody know where everybody else stands. Whatever the conclusions

of your deliberations, they will not bind our respective assemblies, so we can do only good by exchanging our different views.

In the course of the next few days, you will be discussing also the strength and weaknesses of the one-man one-vote parliamentary democracy system as applied in former colonial territories in South East Asia. The results have sometimes been erratic. It is our duty to try to make the system work, to give it effective leadership and hope that the system will take roots and that the people will eventually attach their loyalties not so much to persons and personalities but to the institutions and offices of the State that endure. It is a long and difficult process. In your deliberations and in discussing any constitutional arrangements on how closer association can be brought about between our territories, we should all bear in mind that constitutional theory is one thing, constitutional practice in a given situation is quite another. What is important is whether the constitutional arrangements will work, not whether it conforms with the theories of parliamentary democracy.

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Finally, let me welcome you to Singapore, wish you a good conference and a pleasant stay.

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