SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE MALAYSIAN SOLIDARITY CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE, FEBRUARY, 1962

A NATION IN THE MAKING

It is seldom that a people are given the right completely to shape their future. Often events dictate the shape of things to come. And so it is with the destiny of some 10-million people occupying the five territories that once comprised the British Empire in this corner of Asia. Of the five the most populous and the wealthiest, the Federation of Malaya has, become independent first. This was by design. The British thought in 1956, when the first negotiations in London took place between the Tunku and Lennox-Boyd, then Secretary of State for the Colonies, that if they cut their losses by giving independence to the Federation of Malaya first, they could prolong their hold on the vital naval, military and air base in Singapore and so protect their interests in South-East Asia, including the three valuable, territories of Sarawak, Brunei, and North Borneo.

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But that was the thinking six years ago. And six years is a very long time in this epoch of colonial revolutions. Some thirty new nations or about half the 1956 strength of the United Nations, have been added as members. All were former Afro-Asian colonial possessions of the British or the French or the Belgians. And more are on the way to becoming nations. Colonialism is on its way out. The plan of 1956 becomes antiquated by 1962.

In 1962 we are talking and planning the shape of Malaysia, a new Federation to link up our five territories. Six years ago the British Colonial Office would have laughed out such an idea, for there was every expectation then that they could hold on to their bases in Singapore and to the oil kingdom of Brunei, and the wide open spaces of Sarawak and North Borneo for 20 or 30 years. But events around us and the spectacle of unpleasant nationalist wars supported by the Russians and the Communist bloc in the name of "anti-colonialism" have made rethinking necessary.

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1962 will be long remembered for West Irian and also for Malaysia. It is a toss-up which is "liberated" first. But the stupidity and intransigence of the Dutch makes shooting and the spilling of blood and hate a probable accompaniment of the West Irian episode. The British are more far-sighted in their own self-interest. It is better in their own long-term economic, military and

political interests to withdraw gracefully from a still tenable position of authority, than be pitchforked out ungraciously from an already untenable position as the Dutch find themselves in West Irian today.

It is our lot to have a colonial master who is more pragmatic about his self-interest in trade, investment, and bases. So we have the opportunity of peacefully discussing and planning the shape of our future in Malaysia. The British have to agree because they have no choice. For the alternative is to get themselves in a position analogous to West Irian. Singapore was part of Penang and Malacca in the Old Straits Settlements. Labuan, now in North Borneo, was part of Singapore. And so the argument could go on until military bases and economic rights have gone, and friendly ties are replaced by implacable hate as in the case of the Indonesians and the Dutch.

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Having understood the reasons which lead the British colonial power into a reasonable frame of mind, our task is to plan the steps towards independence for the new Federation with the least dislocation to our administrations and our economy. True many Asia and African nations have often sacrificed both administrative and economic organisation as the price of independence. But independence is so much more substantial and enjoyable if the price paid is not higher than is absolutely necessary.

That is part of the task the Malaysia Solidarity Consultative Committee had set out to do and our work has not been in vain.

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