

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT**MC. AP. 63/63 (PM)****ENGLISH VERSION OF A TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE PRIME
MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT A MEETING OF THE
MEMORIAL FUND COMMITTEE AT THE VICTORIA THEATRE ON
SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 1963, AT 10 A.M.**

We meet today to make arrangements to build a memorial of an unhappy incident in which many tens of thousands of people of all races died at the hands of a brutal invading army. This incident left a scar which after more than two decades is still sensitive.

Many of us here today have friends or relatives who simply disappeared soon after the fall of Singapore in 1942, and have never been heard of since. Today we stand in silence to pay respect to those who died for no crime whatsoever except the misfortune of being in Singapore at that time.

There is one reason why, although 20 years have passed, this matter has never been resolved in our hearts, whatever the legal situation may be. Legally, it may be argued that the Treaty of San Francisco has settled everything and that all things should be past and forgotten. But this was settled by a colonial government that did not represent us, and never understood the depth of our feeling at the atrocities and humiliation an occupying invader inflicted on us then a subject people – the tributes in cash and kind exacted, the senseless brutality and the futile humiliation. It is this feeling that we as a government representative of the people now seek to resolve peacefully and quietly.

It was my duty to make known the depth of the feelings of the people to the Japanese Government. This I have done. They have assured me that they are genuinely sorry for what happened, and that they are prepared to make a gesture of atonement. They have made a certain proposal. The Singapore Government in turn has put forward another proposal.

The Japanese Consul-General has recently told me that he is going back to Tokyo at the end of this month before being sent to another appointment abroad. He will personally make a detailed report of this matter to his Government and will help find a suitable gesture of atonement. I am sure he will convey to his Government our views that we are not seeking charity or cash. We

in Singapore have survived and prospered for over a hundred years on the basis of our own hard work, the thrift, the skill and the effort of our people, not on gifts from donor countries or reparations from former enemies. But feeling is so strong on this subject that we think a suitable gesture of genuine regret should be forthcoming.

Meanwhile, we must be patient, and above all, we must be realistic. You know that in our industrialisation programme the participation of Japanese industries in the development of our Jurong industrial complex would help. They have sent several missions to Singapore to survey the prospects. Already, several enterprises, including an oil refinery, have been set up. The amount of trade, technical co-operation and industrial development that they could take part in Singapore and the rest of Malaysia would be out of all proportion to any gesture of atonement they can make. For that reason I understand the views of the representatives who have organised this meeting that a parsimonious gesture would be worse than nothing. The Japanese are hard-headed businessmen. And because they are hard-headed businessmen, I think they understand that in the long run it is worth their while to make a magnanimous gesture of contrition.

Finally, may I, to start the fund rolling for this memorial which we will build on the vacant land between the sea and Raffles Institution, make a

small token donation. Mr. Chairman, as you know, the resources of the Singapore Government are reasonably sound. We could have built this memorial without public contributions. But I agree with your committee that the memorial will have more meaning and give more satisfaction to the thousands of people who have been so deeply hurt during the Japanese occupation if the people themselves contribute towards the memorial.

I wish your committee's work success. I hope you will exercise patience and restraint in your deliberations on these matters, and I hope also that before this memorial is completed we shall have satisfactorily settled with the Japanese Government a suitable gesture of atonement.

National Archives of Singapore

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