SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

MC. AU. 43/63 (PM)

TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT A MASS RALLY ON THE PADANG ON SUNDAY, AUGUST 25, 1963.

Only once before in Singapore has there been a crowd such as this on the Padang. The last time it was a festive occasion on the 3rd of June, 1959, when we took a decisive step forward towards freedom. Tonight is a different occasion. It is a solemn occasion. It was only after careful deliberation that the Government decided last week to sponsor tonight's rally. It is a decision which could not be taken lightly. For after tonight, once the resolutions have been passed and adopted, the Government's attitude to the Japanese Government must alter. A stand once taken cannot be abandoned until a satisfactory settlement has been reached. Once these resolutions calling for non-cooperation have been passed, at all levels, amongst the people and in the Government, there must be non-cooperation, until a fair and just solution is found.

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You all know that my colleagues and I have placed great emphasis on the rapid industrialisation of Singapore. It is our policy to invite the technical and industrial skills from the rest of the world to come to Singapore to heighten the tempo of industrialisation. The cheapest of technical and managerial skills that can come to South-East Asia is from Japan. But after tonight's meeting and the adoption of the resolutions of non-cooperation, no more visas will be issued for more Japanese on new industrial or commercial projects in Singapore. And, indeed, with the solidarity now shown by the Chamber of Commerce in Kuala Lumpur and the response from the people in North Borneo and Sarawak, it means that non-cooperation towards with Japan will be extended throughout Malaysia.

Having said that I want to make my Governemnt's stand clear on another matter. We have given an undertaking to protect the lives and safeguard the property of all Japanese nationals now in Singapore. I intend to see that that is so. These are men who have come here because we have invited Japanese industrialists to help us with our industrialisation. If our word is always to be believed, then we must honour our undertaking. This undertaking covers all present projects. There are some countries in the world which make solemn

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undertakings and immediately and frivolously disavow them. In the end nobody believes them. Their promises become worthless.

It is important, no matter how much the anger, however strong the feelings, that we must conduct ourselves as a civilised society. A promise given must be honoured; or confidence is gone forever. I would like to make it plain that all present Japanese projects can continue to do business here and that their personnel can come and go freely to and from Japan. But there can be no increase in the visas to be issued.

All of you must understand the need for restraint and discipline in our public conduct. After careful deliberation we have called this meeting. We must conduct it with order and propriety. I know that in the middle of last week Communist front organisers decided to exploit the situation for their anti-national and anti-Malaysia activities. For that reason, I make no secret of the fact that we have taken all precautions necessary to ensure that if they do anything stupid tonight they will live to regret it.

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You all remember what happened when Mr. Marshall as Chief Minister called a mass rally at the old Kallang Airport in March 1956. There was no deliberation let alone any preparation. As the result the stage symbolically and ominously collapsed underneath Mr. Marshall's feet. The Communists exploited the feelings of the people and the result was riots broke out and many people were injured and great harm was done to Singapore. I cannot allow the Communists to exploit this situation, exploit the people's feelings on Japanese atrocities which are deeper and more intense than their feelings for Merdeka then in 1956. This issue must be pursued with calm deliberation. We must not allow hysteria to overwhelm our better judgment. Communist exploitation for this issue will be weeded out. Otherwise we will perish.

I had hoped to tell you tonight of the specific proposals the Japanese Government intends to make to the four educational institutions – the universities of Singapore and Nanyang, the Polytechnic and the Ngee Ann College. You will have read my letter to the Japanese Consul-General in Singapore and his reply. It is a pity that the present Japanese Consul-General is insensitive and so prosaic in his approach to this issue. I do not know why the former Consul-General of Japan was recalled. He knew more about this matter, particularly the feelings of the people on this issue and the perils it holds for Japan. I hope his recall was

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purely coincidental and not a deliberate change of policy. For if the Japanese Government were to be insensitive and unimaginative in their approach, then they stand to lose a great deal in this part of the world. We realise that the rate of our industrial progress may also be affected. But that cannot be helped. I hear that the Japanese Government fears repercussions in the rest of South-East Asia, especially in Malaysia, North Borneo, Sarawak and Hong Kong. In the rest of South-East Asia, with the exception of these territories, they have settled with independent national governments. But for these territories, they settled with the British Government. Not unnaturally, the British can never have the same intense feelings about what happened to the civilian population in 1942 as we have.

I am not unhopeful that being a practical people the Japanese will come to realise the wisdom of coming to terms with the national representatives of the people of Singapore, Malaya, North Borneo and Sarawak, and even Hong Kong. It is now up to them whether they wish to participate in the lucrative commerce and industry of Malaysia. I say Malaysia because as you can see from the development of events over the last few weeks, even though the Central Government will be in charge of foreign affairs and immigration it will make no difference at all. For on this issue there is Pan-Malaysian solidarity.

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The Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Kuala Lumpur held a meeting on the 23rd August, the day before yesterday, in which they expressed their full support for Singapore's stand. I am quite sure there will be coordination between the workers and the leaders in the various territories of Malaysia. In other words, Japan must come to terms with us in Malaysia, or else lose the Malaysian market – at present and in the future potentially one of the wealthiest markets in this part of the world.

Let me add that calm deliberation and cold calculation does not mean that my colleagues and I have no feelings on this issue. Indeed, it is a highly charged issue for many of us. My colleagues, Dr. Goh Keng Swee, was a member of the Singapore Volunteer Corps, together with my wife's brother. My brother-in-law was shot and killed, but by an inexplicable chance of fate, Dr. Goh escaped this this unhappy and to play his part in the history of Malaysia. The Japanese Consul-General and his predecessor who discussed these matters with me, or indeed the Japanese Prime Minister and his Foreign Minister with whom I had brief discussions in Tokyo did not know how I, but for a chance of fate, would have been one among those massacred in February 1942.

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As I was queuing up at Weld Road - Jalan Besar Concentration Centre in February 1942, the scrutineers at the gate looked at my physical size

and asked me to join some people on a lorry, presumably to do some work for the Japanese. Somehow I felt that lorry was not going to carry people to work. I asked them to let me go back to get my belongings which I said were left behind with my gardener whose kongsi was in Upper Weld Road and with whom I had put up for several days when we were kept in that Concentration Centre. I never returned to the exit point until they changed sentries and scrutineers. When they did, I walked out and they allowed me to go home.

Those who were sent into the lorry never came back. Such was the blindness of their brutality. They would never know what they did to a whole generation like me.

But they made me and a whole generation like me determined to fight for freedom – freedom from servitude and foreign domination. I did not enter politics. They brought politics upon me. From that time onwards, I decided that our lives should be ours to decide. That we should not be pawns and playthings of foreign powers.

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Now in a matter of days, we shall be a free people. We are not going to change masters from time to time. We have had enough of all that. We shall be our own masters in our own country. If anybody tries to dominate us, we are not without friends. And rather than have a new master, death would be

preferable. But I believe that the solidarity of the people of Malaysia, the desire to unite and live in peace and tolerance with each other, the desire to prosper in freedom, to be friends with our neighbours, friendly, fair and firm will ensure our survival and prevent the repetition of the horrors of enemy occupation and re-occupation. Humiliation and degradation by foreign European powers is bad enough. It was worse at the hands of a conquering Asian nation like Japan – and it will be even worse if it should be by a neighbouring power in South-East Asia.

I speak for one and all of you that we have had enough of being pawns and playthings of foreign powers. We have a will of our own, and a right to live in peace on our own. So let us unite in Malaysia and prevent it ever from happening again. And let us settle these legacies of World War II peacefully if we may, but otherwise if we must.

25th August, 1963. (Time issued : 1900 hours)

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