TEXT OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S ADDRESS TO FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS AT THE ADELPHI ON 25.10.63

COMING OF AGE IN MALAYSIA

Countries like individuals have to grow up and face the facts of life. They have to learn how to live with their neighbours and fend for themselves in a harsh and predatory world.

For over three hundred years, European colonial domination reduced to near-perpetual tutelage large portions of Asia. And so it is, that we in Malaysia until recently did not have to take upon ourselves the harsh burden of finding our place in a turbulent part of the world in which we are not far from being the richest, whilst we are very far from being the strongest.

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End of an era

But the end of an era has come. Sheltered from the perils of revolutions, civil wars, chaos and anarchy, Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah have been protected from the unpleasant realities of South-East Asia. What made the change all the greater emotionally and psychologically, were the six placid and prosperous years Malaya enjoyed since independence in 1957. Good rubber and tin prices, a sound administration brought progress and prosperity with independence.

Then in a matter of months or almost weeks in 1963, with a slight turn of the kaleidoscope, the rosy hues of independence, pomp and glory turned into the sombre shades of grey and black, of power conflicts and the fight for dominance. It will never be the same again. For like everybody else, there comes a time when on assuming the privileges of being masters we have to pay our way in this world and keep our place in the face of fierce challenge from others in this region.

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False euphoria meant bigger let down

What was deplorable about this inevitable process of growing up was the false euphoria of well-being and security which was generated in the last few months before confrontation with brutal facts. The sensational headlines to catch the eye, to make news bigger news, create this constant habit of reducing complex truth to simple lies. At the end of May this year when Tunku met Sukarno all problems seemed to have been resolved by personal charm and camaraderie. The long and arduous process of diplomacy, big power diplomacy, behind the scenes in Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur and even Manila was hardly mentioned in the local press. One can read of it only in English and American newspapers. The West, having a vested interest in keeping out the influence of the Eastern bloc in South East Asia, went to great lengths to bring about this superficial rapprochement by persuasion, and sometimes more than persuasion. They had to more than persuade the leaders in this region that South-East Asia's interests were best served by being friends with one another and shutting off big powers from the Eastern bloc from becoming active protagonists and sponsors of the competing parties in South-East Asia. The Americans are anxious to be friends with Indonesia and also to be friends with Malaysia, and to reconcile all this with close support of the Philippines in spite of Filipino claims on North Borneo. But all this was naively presented by a correspondent of one local

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English newspaper in Malaysia, as a simple triumph for personal diplomacy. Smiles and handshakes from the two leaders, the Tunku and President Sukarno exuding warmth and goodwill was made by some of the local press to appear to have solved everything.

This picture of bonhomie makes the subsequent recriminations after Malaysia all the more acid and bitter. Three months ago on 5th August at the Manila summit, three leaders met and bestowed upon each other's friendship, goodwill and praise. "Sukarno is a great leader", said the Tunku. "The Tunku is a statesman," said Sukarno. And both were agreed that President Macapagal was an equally great leader and a statesman. Very few newspapers presented the news in depth. Spreading superficial euphoria, again to add to the deep and biting bitterness when the froth evaporated after 16th September. Reading newspaper cuttings of the last few months of relations with our neighbours, Indonesia and the Philippines, one cannot but be cynical over the ways by which nations conducted their relations with each other.

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All happened so quickly

This coming of age has all happened so quickly for all of us in Afro-Asia. And we have had to learn quickly. In 1945 we cheered for the Indonesians when they proclaimed their independence before the Dutch returned. We cheered even harder for them when they fought the Dutch army to assert their right to freedom. And through all the vicissitudes of battle to the final evacuation of the Dutch forces, our sympathies were with the Indonesians. By 1949 when Indonesia became de jure a sovereign nation, she was already a legend in the minds of the people in South-East Asia – and their leaders became symbols of a people determined to be free, to be masters of their own destiny.

So in Malaya, Singapore, and even the Borneo territories, in many Malay homes will be found pictures of the Bung, President of the Republic, fighter for freedom – a legendary figure symbolising the greatness of the peoples in South-East Asia and what they can do, given the will and the leadership. It was not till six years later in 1955 that a comparable Malayan leadership emerged in the Tunku to lead Malaya's fight for freedom – a completely different leadership, but eminently suited to fill the role of gradual change and social revolution in Malaya.

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In the same year a few months after becoming Chief Minister the Tunku paid a State visit to Indonesia and was received personally by President Sukarno. A treaty of friendship was subsequently to be signed. In 1959, the First Minister of Indonesia, Dr. Djuanda, returned the visit. In January 1960 about 4 years ago I myself paid a visit to Indonesia and was received with warmth and courtesy.

How is it that in a space of some four to five years we find ourselves on non-speaking terms, and with radio stations based in Jakarta and in Malaysia, hurling abuse at each other, as if we had always been sworn enemies, when in fact only the day before yesterday we were still good neighbours and good friends, courteous, polite and friendly, contemplating economic and cultural co-operation in a loose Confederation to be called Maphilindo?

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The Disenchantment

The disenchantment was in fact a slow and gradual process. Indonesia had always been regarded as the elder in this region and their independence was a symbol of anti-colonialism for the whole of the Archipelago that constitute the islands of South East Asia. UMNO's flag like Singapore's flag is the flag of Hang Tuah, red and white, and for UMNO a yellow circle and

a kris in the centre. But the prestige of Indonesia's revolution slowly tarnished as news percolated of their economic difficulties.

In the minds of the people of Asia and indeed of Africa, it used to be believed that independence was an automatic solution to all men's ills and that with independence would come prosperity and glory. The need for a sound administration and an economy that ticks were never thought of by anyone other than the few who had to govern.

The mass of the people did not understand that Dutch colonial policy and the depredations of the Japanese had wrought such damage on the economy of this once wealthy archipelago, and brought it to near bankruptcy and what was worse leaving it with no Indonesian administrators once the Dutch left. Without a sound administration, the economy could not easily be restarted. Without an economy restarted and a sound administration, they could not find the huge capital investment required to improve rapidly the lot of the people.

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Lack of appreciation in depth

So it was that without the mass of the people in South East Asia knowing exactly the reason why, the artistic and talented Indonesian people

found themselves in a morass of economic problems. And the Malayans far less advanced politically, because of 10 years of British post-war rehabilitation and the training of an administrative cadre of local officers supported by expatriates in key positions to carry out faithfully the orders of locally elected Ministers, found themselves the beneficiaries of a sound and prosperous economy.

This disparity between the results of independence for Indonesia and for Malaya was to lead to false assumptions and misunderstanding because the basic causes were not appreciated even by some in high authority in these newly independent nations. Tunku's practical and even courageous decision to leave key expatriate officers in the administration until fully qualified local men were trained to take over had been sneered at as neo-colonialism. British investment capital which re-built Malaya's economy is even now being pointed out as evidence of neo-colonialism. Nothing could be further than the truth. No one other than the British understand how much the continuance of their investment here depends upon the good faith and the good judgment of the independent government in authority, that with one proclamation, if the government were misguided enough so to do, all their assets could be requisitioned and compensation given on derisory terms. But on the Malaysia side, there is misapprehension of equally huge proportions. Indonesia was in the economic doldrums, the people going through great hardships, not because they

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lacked leaders with talent or skill or the desire to build the country up into a prosperous and happy one, but because of the legacy of the Dutch and the Japanese imperialism, a legacy of loot and plunder not accompanied by restoration and rehabilitation after the war. They are a talented people, the Indonesians and the Javanese in particular, great painters, artists, with a level of civilization which even today reflects the ancient Hindu empires of Sri Vijaya and Majapahit that extended across this region. These empires passed Malaya by and went on to the richer islands further south. The Malay language and culture finds its main springs in the territories now comprised in the Republic of Indonesia but instead of affection and regard, now have come dis-enchantment and disillusionment. And the pictures of the Bung as the liberator are quietly coming down and in its place, is sorrow and bitterness. People feel let down.

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Geography and History

Geography and history are the two factors that we have to delve into if we are to work out rationally our long term relations with our neighbours. The first and important factor is geography. Malaysia is unique in that its all pervasive neighbour is Indonesia. Malaysia's only other immediate neighbour with whom it shares a short common frontier is Thailand. But the Thai border presents no problems in spite of the difficulties of terrain and communication which have helped the remnants of the Communist guerrilla forces for so long. To the west and to the South are Sumatra and the Rhio islands. Over 700 miles of sea to the East lie Sabah, Sarawak with a long land frontier of a few hundred miles with Indonesia. Only Pakistan presents a comparable territorial pattern.

Hundreds of years ago in the Sri Vijaya Empire from 7th – 13th century and the Majapahit Empire from 13th to 16th century, the suzerainty of the Hindu conquerors extended vaguely over this whole region. Even at the time Stamford Raffles first came and bought Singapore over 140 years ago from the Temenggong, South Johore and Singapore with the Rhio Islands constituted one little empire.

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In a temporary decline of Dutch power, Stamford Raffles acquired authority over large part of the Dutch East Indies. But when the final settlement was reached the demarcation lines were crisp and clear. Malaya including Penang, Singapore, Labuan and later North Borneo, Brunei and Sarawak were British. The rest was Netherlands East Indies except for East New Guinea and Portuguese Timor. Whatever disregard for geography or history, the colonialists showed in demarcating the boundary lines of their spheres of power, we are now the beneficiaries of something not easily alterable. We have to make sense of it, as best as we can. And there is no reason why we cannot.

Ingredients for difficulties – present and dormant

The ingredients of the present impasse and conflict between Malaysia and Indonesia were present right from the beginning. Indonesia is a big power and not unnaturally expected to be respected and treated as such. It had not ungenerously extended patronage and courtesies to the Tunku and even to Mr. David Marshall when they emerged as leaders after the elections in 1955. But as I have earlier explained because of a lack of appreciation of the grave difficulties that the Indonesians faced, having been at the receiving end of a rapacious policy of the Dutch and later the Japanese, and with no help in rehabilitation after the war, Indonesia appeared to founder in poverty whilst the

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countries in Malaysia flourished and prospered. Sound administration, the good fortune of the Korean War that sent rubber prices rocketing, rehabilitation and massive reinvestment to get the economy going, all these were intended for colonial profits. But it also rehabilitated an economy ruined by war.

When the leaders of Indonesia thought they did not receive from the leaders of Malaya the respect that they expected, problems began to loom. So long as West Irian preoccupied the effort and energies of Indonesian leaders, the Army and its people, they had no time for anything else. But once it was agreed that West Irian be returned to the Indonesian Republic in 1962 from May 1963 their leaders no longer brooked anything which could be considered as a slight on themselves from anyone else, let alone a smallish neighbour. And so the differences in personality and outlook between the leaders of Indonesia and Malaya came sharply into focus.

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Circumstance and time of conflict accidental

But whilst the ingredients for the present impasse were there, the actual circumstance and timing in which the conflict occurred was in large measure accidental. Shortly after 27th May 1961 and before West Irian was resolved the Tunku first announced his plans for Malaysia. Dr. Subandrio in response to questions by foreign correspondents wished the territories in Malaysia well. Meanwhile Communist opposition in the Malaysian territories vociferous and militant, mounted vicious campaigns in Singapore and Sarawak with a chorus echoing in Malaya and Brunei. This opposition by an organised minority came from the Barisan Sosialis in Singapore, the S.U.P.P. in Sarawak linking up with Party Rakyat in Brunei, all under the aegis of the Socialist Front in the Federation. Their vociferous and strident opposition contributed to a false impression abroad of the real desires of the people in the Malaysian territories misleading some people into believing that Malaysia could be prevented by local opposition.

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In December 1961, the P.K.I. came out, and for the first time Malaysia was denounced as a piece of neo-colonialism. Thereafter the cry was picked up by the Barisan Sosialis, the S.U.P.P., the Party Rakyat of Brunei and the Socialist Front of Malaya. Meetings, conferences, protests, rallies and

demonstrations and even an appearance before the United Nations by the Barisan Sosialis. But still the Indonesian leaders were quiet. It was only the Communist leaders in Indonesia who plugged the line that Malaysia was neo-colonialist. Then suddenly in September 1962 came the Referendum in Singapore which settled the question as far as Singapore was concerned, and the big expectation of the Indonesian Communists to block Malaysia through opposition in Singapore collapsed.

Filipino claim and Azahari revolt

More drastic measures were planned. By a strange coincidence, the Filipinos had also made a claim for North Borneo and by now it would appear that the Communist line of attacking Malaysia as neo-colonialism had found its impact on non-Communist circles in Indonesia. Suddenly in December 1962 a revolt broke out in Brunei and Azahari fled to Manila. Apparently the Indonesians had nothing to do with the revolt although security and intelligence reports showed that the training of these rebels had taken place in Indonesian Kalimantan – on the Indonesian side of Borneo. But unfortunately for them the revolt failed. Swift military action snuffed out the revolt that found no response from either Sabah or Sarawak. Azahari finally left Manila for Jakarta at the end of January 1963 and for the first time Indonesia by implication was openly in a

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position of opposition and hostility to Malaysia. But even as late as February 1963 when Dr. Subandrio passed through Singapore he explained to me that it was not Malaysia as such that Indonesia was opposed to but certain circumstances and attitudes in Malaysia. He felt they would pose Indonesia with a difficult problem since they would share a common land frontier in Borneo.

Tokyo and Manila

Then came weeks of feverish diplomatic activity leading to Tokyo where a great deal of euphoria was generated. Mad though it may seem one English language newspaper believed it was really the efforts of an amiable woman politician in Singapore which brought about this apparent rapprochement. But in June, there were still hopes abroad that Malaysia would founder for great acrimony had arisen over our financial arrangements with Kuala Lumpur. We never had any doubts in our minds that these disagreements could be resolved in a fair and just manner and when they were resolved on 8th July and Brunei opted out of Malaysia, the stage was set for a change of tactics and a change of line.

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Then at Manila, at the beginning of August, the Tunku placed his signature on a document which was to postpone Malaysia and make its formation subject to a favourable assessment by the United Nations team.

The rest is recent history. Partly because of Communist propaganda, our neighbours were led to believe that perhaps the assessment in Sarawak might be unfavourable to Malaysia. So many demonstrations were mounted in Kuching, Sibu, Miri that, despite the initial difficulties, both Indonesian and Filipino observers finally appeared and took part in observing the assessment.

16th September, 1963

Meanwhile, on the 28th August, Malaya's leaders strongly persuaded by Sabah and Sarawak, announced 16th September as the new date of Malaysia. There was no strong reaction at that time. Subsequently this point was made an issue of by the Indonesians and Filipinos who considered it a breach of the spirit of the Manila accord, that one party should name another date for Malaysia before the U.N. assessment had been made.

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There are two schools of thought on this. One is that the Tunku, having gone to such great lengths to win the goodwill and friendship of both the Indonesians and the Filipinos, should not have fixed a date before the U.N. assessment was made known. The other school, to which I subscribe, is that it

was vital that men's minds in Malaysia should not be left to drift. For the position in Sabah and Sarawak was such that with constant harassment along the border regions, men's minds could so easily have been unscrambled. And Malaysia would have faltered because her people were beguiled, bewildered and befuddled by the tactics of its neighbours.

No clear objectives and policy in Maphilindo

Even now in retrospect one wonders whether there was a clear definition of objectives and policy of the three partners of the short-lived Maphilindo. There was a time when Malaya sincerely believed that Maphilindo was an answer to peace and stability in South East Asia and was prepared to go to great lengths to meet her neighbours.

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To win the Tunku over to this position the Indonesians and the Filipinos undertook to welcome Malaysia if the U.N. assessment was in favour. Events following the report of the U.N. Assessment team published on 14th September happened so rapidly one upon the other that the parties found themselves in communicado even before they knew what they had done.

The report made on the 14th September by the U.N. team was favourable and Malaysia was proclaimed on 16th September. On 17th September, the Malayan Ambassadors in Jakarta and Manila were informed that they had no status. Meanwhile, the Ambassadors from Indonesia and the Philippines were withdrawn from K.L. In response, the Malaysian Government announced on the evening of 17th September that it had severed all diplomatic relations with Indonesia and the Philippines and asked the remaining Embassy staff to leave. Indonesia retaliated with economic confrontation and open activities along the Sarawak border.

One of the several factors which had contributed to this misappraisal by our neighbours of the resolve of Malaysian leaders was the gentle character of the Malayan Ambassador in Djakarta. He was always polite and accommodating. He was not present at Manila, but attended rallies in Djakarta where Malaysia was abused as TV cameras zoomed on him. He faithfully reported the Indonesian situation to K.L., but he did not successfully get across to Djakarta the resolution of the Tunku and his immediate colleagues, Tun Razak and Dato Ismail.

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Both sides have internal problems

Now both sides are to a varying extent, captives of their own internal situations. The people in Malaya, particularly the Malays, feel that they have been let down and very badly. One may question the wisdom of the tactics of replying in kind, pulling down the Indonesian coat of arms and stamping on it, and the burning of effigies of the leaders of Indonesia – President Sukarno, General Nasution and Mr. Aidit. But there is no denying the spontaneous response of an angered people whose patience has been sorely tested and who felt that there must be a limit to the slights and insults on Malaysia. Also, the Tunku and his colleagues see in this a natural rallying point for the loyalties of all Malaysians, including the Malays, in particular that section of the Malays in Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan who have still family and other sentimental ties with Indonesia, mainly Sumatra, the Rhio Islands, and Celebes. Here was an issue on which loyalties can be undividedly Malaysia's. History has presented Malaysia with a catalyst to forge national unity to rally everyone's undivided loyalty to Malaysia, and to cut anyone's sentimental, cultural, or other ties with those parts of Indonesia from whence their ancestors and their culture may have sprung.

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It is true that as a result of these activities, Singapore, and to a lesser extent Penang, have to pay a price. Some cynics think that the demonstrations of solidarity in Malaya are being kept up for the purpose of inflicting financial loss

on the P.A.P. in Singapore and the Socialist Front in Penang. But I believe the Tunku's main objective, that is to rally loyalty and undivided support for Malaysia from all Malaysians, including those of Indonesian descent. And it is in all our interests, whatever our short-term difficulties, to help him achieve this. No doubt the sooner this phase is over the better, although political observers see no end to this campaign until the general elections.

The mass reaction in Singapore is completely different. Not having been party to the Manila accord, people in Singapore do not feel that they have been let down. The mass of the people are sophisticated urban dwellers of Chinese and Indian origin and have never had any sentimental ties with Indonesia. However, among the Malays who have always looked upon Indonesia as a friendly elder brother, there is a sense of having been let down.

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The fact that we have not burned effigies in Singapore does not mean that Singapore is less loyal to Malaysia or that the Malay population, particularly those whose ancestors came from Rhio, feel less strongly patriotic than people in Malaya.

In Singapore some 2,000 people are unemployed or under-employed, and if it goes on indefinitely, we shall make adjustments and provide alternative employment for some 10,000 to 15,000 engaged in the entrepot trade with Indonesia. We have arrangements to ensure that all workers laid off as a result of confrontation will receive, for at least six months, two-thirds of their normal pay. This will cushion off the worse effects of confrontation. Plans are being made to re-deploy the unemployed to new jobs and it is within our capacity to ride economic confrontation indefinitely if necessary. But whatever our differences and approach to this problem, our long term objectives are the same to build a cohesive, strong and united nation with undivided loyalties to Malaysia, and all loyalties to neighbouring countries severed. Our paramount duty is to preserve the integrity of Malaysia. On this there can be no division of objectives.

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Things having gone this far, it is imperative that any solution should be just and permanent. A temporary patch-up, leading to more false euphoria and subsequent disappointment, would do more harm in the long run. We desire a permanent settlement in our relations with our neighbours. Trade, however valuable, requires political stability first and foremost.

After the next general elections, once the Indonesians are convinced that the Tunku and his colleagues do represent Malaysia, then a solution can be found. By then men's minds would have settled and their loyalties fixed. The rapidity with which events precipitated leading to confrontation indicates that an unravelling can take place with equal swiftness, provided the conditions are right. We have to respect Indonesian susceptibilities. Exhortation of the people of Indonesia to spurn their leaders is the surest way to ensure that they rally around them. No people like to be told by their neighbours, particularly a smaller one, what they should do about their leaders.

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The Indonesian leaders also have their own internal problems. Once the P.K.I. have taken a strong nationalist line and worked up Malaysia as an anti-colonial issue and spread these sentiments among the masses, the Army cannot lag behind. So it is that Indonesian generals who are known to be anti-Communist and who make no secret of their dislike for Communism have also

taken up the Malaysia issue. The leaders of Indonesia have their own internal problems to take into account and they must be allowed to resolve them in their own way.

Settlement or Balkanisation of S.E. Asia

But in the end a lasting solution must be found, for the alternative is the Balkanisation of South East Asia. Like the Balkans before the Second World War or the Middle East of today, the alternative to peaceful co-existence is for a very small power in South-East Asia to have the backing of a big power. South-East Asia then becomes the cockpit for vicious big-power conflicts. It would mean that willy-nilly whatever our wishes we in Malaysia must enter into military alliances either openly or secretly with those who are prepared to help us, because our size makes the fight unequal. In other words, the cold war in a very acute form will come right into the heart of South-East Asia.

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After firmness, show friendliness and fairness

A nation of 10-million people cannot encircle a nation of 90- million people. But a nation of 90-million people can easily encircle a nation of 10-million people. Once the heat and dust on both sides have settled in the coming year, our positions can be re-considered. We have shown by proceeding with Malaysia and standing firm together with the Central Government that whatever our differences of approach and differences of methods, we are all firm on our right to be allowed to live in peace, unmolested by others. Once feelings have settled and solidarity rallies ended, we can afford to show more friendliness and fairness to our neighbours. In this way, we can open the door to a resumption of relations, diplomatic or otherwise. But at least we must talk civilly to each other. For the terrible alternative is the Balkanisation of South-East Asia and our commitment in military alliances to ensure our survival.

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Whatever the price, Malaysia cannot buckle under, to be corroded at the edges before finally succumbing in the centre. Once our neighbours are convinced of this, then the door should be opened for friendly ties on a fair basis. The alternative is not that Malaysia will disappear, but that big powers will be invited to maintain military bases indefinitely in this region. And military alliances are never as satisfactory nor as advantageous as the general economic

prosperity of this region which friendship and co-operation among non-Communist countries can bring to us all.

10th October, 1963.

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