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NEW YEAR MESSAGE

from

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1963 will probably go down in history as the most eventful year in our lives. Had Malaysia been formed in 1957 at the time when the Federation was proclaimed independent, our emergence as a nation would have been welcomed by the whole world, including our immediate neighbours. But seven years later, the mood had changed, and Malaysia's neighbours grudged her the territorial integration and economic success they desired for themselves.

So from a "confrontation" of propaganda and villification commenced at the beginning of the old year, they ended up with an economic boycott and military pressure by the beginning of the new year.

1963 saw the two world powers reconciled to living with each other's strength, witnessing the first real thaw of the cold with the test ban treaty. Mr. Khrushchev was sincerely sad at President Kennedy's assassination. But

paradoxically 1963 saw us in Malaysia having our first experience of prolonged tension and conflict with our neighbours.

It is difficult to believe that only three years ago all appeared to be well with Malaya and the other territories now in Malaysia. Then the Tunku was offering his services to Indonesia to settle the question of West Irian. Today the Thais and Japanese are offering their services to sort out our difficulties with Indonesia and Philippines. So many events have been telescoped into these three years. Many cannot get over the fact that all seemed no so nice and cosy only so short a while ago.

But however tantalising the prospect of moving the hands of the clock back, it can never be the same again. Whatever the immediate causes of conflict, and however the blame is to be apportioned as to who precipitated it so quickly and acutely, the fact remains that we have now got to get used to living with a big and difficult neighbour.

The basic ingredients of the present conflicts had always been present. Our neighbour had been big and difficult for quite some years. But so long as West Irian consumed all Indonesia's energies and resources, they had little time for us. By 1963 she knew that West Irian had been resolved, with little effort in actual

war. But she now had a standing army of 400,000 men and large quantities of Russian and American arms. The role of a big power in South Asia became too attractive to resist.

Life for all of us would have been so much more pleasant if we could have Malaysia and also Indonesia's trade, with generally amicable relations. But this was not on the cards. Perhaps we can take philosophic comfort at having avoided an even more unpleasant alternative to "confrontation". For the alternative was never status quo, the old easy relationship of trade and cultural exchanges. Had the Indonesians not persisted in "confrontation", we would be now engaged in the more trying process of erosion and absorption through Maphilindo. For Maphilindo cleverly developed and skillfully operated would have gradually dissolved our distinctive identity in Malaysia.

It would have been so much more difficult to counter; no visible enemy, no hostility, all cultural exchanges and co-operation in which eventually the smaller nation would have been absorbed.

Imagine the proportions these embryonic organisations for cultural and ideological penetration would have grown into in five years time with the stimulus of Maphilindo! Instead they prematurely had to exploit these embryonic

organisations at fifth column activity and sabotage which have led to their exposure and isolation. None of us enjoy being targets for destruction and sabotage. But the price they have paid in confronting us with unpleasant reality is in arousing us to an awareness of our own vulnerability. They will never again find us such a soft target for easy penetration.

Historians will wonder why after the Manila accord Indonesia swung back from Maphilindo to "confrontation", from the line of penetration and absorption to open hostility and conflict. Having settled for Maphilindo at Manila in July, it appeared inexplicable that they should go back on it, reject the United Nations Secretary-General's assessment and pursue a hard line which was not likely to produce comparable dividends.

But that assumes that there were no internal conflicts within Indonesia. Dr. Subandrio was Maphilindo's foremost etagonist. The P.K.I. (Party Kommunis Indonesia) was its fiercest enemy. Maphilindo meant among other things a preoccupation with Indonesia's internal economic and political problems. This together with the Indonesia's Army's civic action programme may well have led to a major setback for the P.K.I.

From all accounts, the severity of Kuala Lumpur's reaction on the 17th September in recalling her Ambassadors from Jakarta and Manila and breaking off diplomatic relations, took everyone, including Dr. Subandrio, by surprise. He went to New York to lobby Afro-Asians in the United Nations. The P.K.I. leaders were in Jakarta with President Sukarno. Within hours President Sukarno's hard line was laid. Confrontation became not only a propaganda exercise, but an economic and military technique of pressure. On several occasions, Dr. Subandrio tried to go back to Maphilindo, but by now Kuala Lumpur was conscious of its public reaction and of the approaching general elections. Moreover there was little enthusiasm to go back to the more subtle and dangerous game of absorption in Maphilindo.

What of 1964 and future? First, we must stand up to the sharp and acute test to national unity and security. If we do not, if we allow to wishful thinking to undermine our resolved and unprincipled opposition to divide the nation, then that is the beginning of the end.

On the other hand, if we assert our will to be a nation and establish our capacity to progress and prosper in spite of everything, then our relationship with our neighbours will settle down at a new equilibrium.

We are not the only nation in Asia with strong and ambitious neighbours. India and Pakistan over Kashmir, India and China over the barren Himalayas, Cambodia and Thailand over the ruins of a temple, Cambodia and South Vietnam over a few islands -- yet they are all learning to live with each other.

Of course, the ideal would have been Malaysia not accompanied either by "confrontation" or Maphilindo. This might have been contrived if we were skillful, experienced and cynical enough at this diplomatic game. Take the British. Their Embassy in Jakarta was sacked. Some of their enterprises were seized. But they still do business. Their Ambassador is still there waiting to move back to a new Embassy to be rebuilt at Indonesian expense. But while it is business as usual in Indonesia, British troops are being shot at and are shooting back on the borders of Sabah and Sarawak.

But how many nations are as phlegmatic, as subtle, or as persistent in trade as the British? They are a member of NATO and SEATO. Yet they have a legation in Peking and a Consulate in Hanoi. And they are still able to maintain a special relationship with America. And what Singapore loses in economic confrontation, Hong Kong hopes to gain!

Perhaps it is not too late for us to learn the divious ways of men and nations. But first we must ensure our right to live in peace in South-East Asia.

We must be firm on this. But at the same time, we can afford to be friendly and fair. We must never by word or deed allow ourselves to be presented by the propaganda of our neighbours as an obstinate and obdurate people. It may pay us with Afro-Asia not to return in kind the compliments over Radio Kalimantan Utara.

Finally, let us resolve to make 1964 a year of consolidation. If we are realistic and practical, we can hold our ground internationally and thoroughly expose the hollowness of the neo-colonialist line. If we the States within Malaysia are united and prepared to help each other, we adjust our economy and make good any losses.

If at the end of 1964 we are stronger internationally and internally than at the beginning, the prospects for a permanent settlement will be bright.

National Archives of Singapore

But in any event no one can prevent us from making good on our own. We have the capacity and the wherewithal to succeed. Given the effort we will.

1st January, 1964.