

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH AT THE
POLITICAL STUDY CENTRE ON 16TH AUGUST, 1964, IN CONNECTION WITH
THE SEMINAR ON "THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY" ORGANISED BY THE
JOINT COMMITTEE FOR RADIO COURSES.

The subject I would like to spend discussing with you this afternoon is the problem of multi-racial societies emerging from colonialism into independence.

One of the phenomena which we have noticed since the end of the Second World War is that colonial societies or societies under colonial domination which have brought together people of different races, culture, languages, civilisations, and were held together and made to live in peace with each other through over-riding force tended to splinter up sometimes, sometimes with, sometimes shortly after, independence.

First and perhaps the most spectacular illustration of that was India and Pakistan. The British did not bring any extraneous racial or linguistic groups into India and Pakistan, but they did reduce to one homogenous whole, a whole diverse series of different linguistic and religious and sometime racial communities into one homogeneous whole. There were riots -- if you read, as I have had to in the course of looking up law cases -- there were riots even before the Indian mutiny, but they were always contained.

Then when independence came, millions got disrupted in their lives, millions lost their lives. People shifted nobody knows how many millions were killed. Vaguely, they say perhaps 2 to 3-million; vaguely they say perhaps 30 to 40-million shifted from Pakistan to India to Pakistan; and even now today, in India, there are pockets of Muslim communities which every now and again break into serious rioting.

The inter-communal riots both in India and in Pakistan -- and one sparks off the other -- died off about 1950 and broke up again in 1962; and for the time being,

there is any uneasy balance between what is happening in Pakistan and what is happening in India.

Then in Burma, which got independence, a minority group of Indians, about 1½ million, who went there with the British administration, when in the early days Burma was administrated as a part of British India: with independence, slowly the Indians who were the money-lending class, the chettians and the shop-keepers, were squeezed out and pushed out -- about 1½ million, in a Burmese indigenous population of about 24 to 26 million.

So also in Ceylon, where peace of some sort which continued in decades of British rule, became tension between Sinhalese and Jaffna Tamils, leading once again to linguistic riots at the time of the former Prime Minister, Mr. Bandaranaike, when he made Sinhalese as the official amounting to about 1½ million in a population of 10 million resisted. And even now, there is a great deal of unhappiness, and one of the reasons for the run-down of the economy is this conflict within the communities.

And so British Guiana: Negroes, Indians brought together under British colonial rule, now even before the British have left, each begins to put up its sake for supremacy. And here, they have an advantage over places like another example. Cyprus, where the cleavage in cultures is not all that acute, because the Indian community and the Negro community have both become West-Indianised. When you get a Cyprus situation, then I say it is insoluble. Then you get Turkey backing it, Greek Cypriots getting Greek backing: Greek Government withdraws, Russians come in at the invitation of President Makarios. United Nations, the British, everybody.

The question we ask ourselves therefore is: what are our chances in Malaysia? What magic is there in us? Or what greatness or what virtue is there in us that we can avoid this same fate that has happened all the time? You unwrap the cellophane of colonialism, and the fungus starts. And it usually takes some time -- unless in the case of India, Pakistan -- it takes some time before the

basic problem emerges after independence. And this is really the most disturbing feature about Malaysia: that for 7 years, Malaya, Singapore -- Malaya has been independent now for 7 years -- both had representative governments for about 9 years, and only now it is emerging. Why is it? Why didn't it emerge immediately? and I say because at the very beginning, particularly in the British-type colonial societies, power, in the first instance, is handed over to western-educated leaders, as in the nature of things, you know. British throw open elections; the people who are in positions of leadership in the society are usually western-educated types who understand the mechanics of the movement. You know, how you run a party, the division of responsibilities between the executives, the judiciary, the legislature, the neutrality of the civil service, and so on; people imbued with western ideas and political concepts; and they play a leadership role.

Then, over a period of time, they've got the hit the grass roots too pull up support; and as you go down to the grass roots, you go back to primaeval feelings. Not the question of, you know, whether policy should be free enterprises or socialistic and so on, because these are sophisticated ideas which your basic grass roots did not understand; but they do understand things like Sinhalese as the national language, Buddhism as the official religion, all leading to riots and trouble: assassination of the Prime Minister in Ceylon, real trouble in Burma. Then after that when you have exhausted that as they exhausted it in Indonesia, they go to economic exploitation of a minority group over them and say look, first of all, the Dutch: squeeze the Dutch out, then squeeze the Western imperialist-capitalists: the Americans and British; and they were squeezed out. Then they say: squeeze the Chinese Shopkeepers, the middle-men, the retailers.

These are easy emotive appeals which the political leaders find. You want support? What are the things that arouse you population? What are things which stir them? So you see, it is not mere coincidence that it took 7 years after independence; and just as the issues are emerging, national language in three years' time, 1967 for Malaya, as you have to make the appeal to your grass-roots this time.

The people who made these appeals are to your western-educated leaders, because they can't really rouse the mob in the way a man who was Arab-educated, versed in the Koran and the Koranic verses, can do. It is no use arguing on rights and duties and responsibilities. When you are looking for support, the easiest way is to arouse them, and say, "Grievance, oppression: Your country, you are dispossessed"; and it wells up to the surface. And what is astonishing is that this thing was completely synthetic. It took a campaign of three months in the newspaper, and one organised group sparked it off on the 21st of July and it happened. How do we prevent ourselves going down the drain, becoming another Ceylon, Cyprus or Burma? Is it possible?

I say -- yes, it is possible -- in this situation and in fact, ours is a unique situation. That I believe there is a built-in incentive, so long as the democratic system works, operates, a built-in incentive for non-communal policies. You see, in all those other places, the spread in the population was such that one community was dominant, and therefore in numbers overwhelm the others. So, with that in mind, Jinnah deliberately decided to break up India and Pakistan, and he had to have race riots, you know, in order that there can be this shift in this population. And I say, he knew and must have known that the policies he was preaching must lead to race riots, but race riots having taken place, it must lead to the creation of a separate state, where the Hindus were pushed out from the Muslim areas and the Muslim in Hindu areas would go over into Pakistan. Similarly, the Jews in Israel: over 1½ million Arabs were there at the time when the British were in control; and they deliberately spread terror in order that there can be a mass exodus of these poor Arabs who are now still in refugee camps on the border of Jordan with Israel; and the Arabs refuse to allow the Jews to pay compensation to resettle them in order that there should always be political pressure to get these Arabs back to their homes from which they have driven. You see, in all these, there was over-riding force.

In Malaysia, it is not possible. Forty per cent Malays, forty per cent Chinese -- I am rounding off the Figures - twenty per cent Indians, Pakistanis, Eurasians, Ceylonese and others. So, over the years, perhaps in another 10 years, when the

older generation has died and the new generation emerges, and everybody has the vote, in the end it must mean the whoever plays the communal line, if the Chinese play a communal line, they will swing the 20% over the Malays. If the Malays play the communal line, they will swing the 20% to the Chinese. It is bound to happen: and in fact it is because I said this in Seremban that I enraged so many people who are engineering this campaign. They can do it now with impunity; they might get away in the next election, but I don't think they will get away in the election after that. Five years from now, it maybe that many of the younger generation who still haven't got the vote -- and the voting is still not in accordance with the population, racial break-down -- but 10 years from now, I think, it is going to approximate the population break-down.

Is it possible then, before that point is reached, for a group of adventure to say, "let us alter the constitution, so that position is never reached; so that Malay hegemony will always be supreme?" Well, I don't know whether people will want to embark on such hazardous course. But if they do, then I'll say you have started the unscrambling of Malaysia, because once you dismantle representative government, then you must fall back on authoritarian government; and to have an authoritarian government in a situation such as this must mean a pretty extensive application of force in order that your will shall prevail.

I do not believe that in the situation as Malaysia is in, it is feasible or possible for those in authority to contemplate such a course of action, because the three governments openly committed such a course of action, because the three governments openly committed and pledged to defend it against Indonesia are based on popular representative will: Britain, Australia, New Zealand; and in the background as a back stop, America, although still uncommitted. The British Government, the Australian Government, and the New Zealand Government have not the same freedom of action, as say, a Russian or A Chinese Government: they can go to the aid of anybody they like. A British Government that goes into a Central African Federation although right-wing, although in sympathy with the white settlers, found itself unable to use force, to enforce the will of the white settlers, and slowly withdrew. Similarly, whilst the British electorate would perhaps happily endorse, at

the least acquiesce in their own troops and their own exchequer financing the defence of Malaysia in a democratic situation, running a representative government, I think it would not be so if, infant, the British public understood, as it will inevitably understand, that they are being made to pay to prop up a feudalistic, authoritarian, reactionary regime denying fundamental human rights. So, there are limitations in any given situation; and I say the juxtaposition the checks and balances is such that I can envisage only one situation in which such a calamity can befall Malaysia, And that is: if the leadership in Malaysia is prepared to dissolve it, and go into Indonesia.

I will put in another way. This is really the crux of the problem that we face. If the Malay leadership, for adverse reasons, feels that carrying on Malaysia means carrying on the Malaysia as conceived and promulgated on the 16th of September last year, that is a society based on equal rights for all, with special reservations for Malays, but basically, fundamentally Malaysia was conceived of as a Malaysian nation, not as a Malay nation -- if they find that so repellent and obnoxious and are prepared to say, well in that a case, break it up, they can break it put only in one condition: by allowing Indonesia to come to their assistance, and then to absorb them. There is no other way.

Why do I say that the chances of that happening is small -- at the moment? What it will be in the next few years we do not know -- it depends upon what the Malay leadership does, what the other spectrum of the Malaysian leadership does -- their action brings about reaction and inter-action.

National Archives of Singapore

You've got three major communities in Malaysia, each one of them having the main spring of its culture and civilisation outside the country. Forty per cent Malays: -- immigrants who have come over, you know, people who came from Rhio, Sumatra, Java, Celebes, settled in various parts of Malaya and Singapore. And Blakang Mati, the other day, when I visited it, I discovered 3/4 of them were people who have come from Rhio and Java; 1/4 had come from Johore. Forty percent Chinese have got China as the main spring of their culture and civilisation. So with the Indians, the Ceylonese and the Pakistanis. Each one has an outside source: higher civilisation, higher culture. What keeps it together here? A higher standard

of living. Never mind 4,000 years of Chinese culture or civilisation. Never mind all the great relics of India, and Borobudur in Java. In none of these three places do the people enjoy a standard of life that they enjoy in Malaysia,. That is why people want to come in. That is why we have got to keep them out in order to ensure that higher standard of living. How long will this last? This is cupboard love. That is what it is. I mean, let us be quite frank about this. Why were we able to hold the loyalties of first-generation immigrant Chinese in Singapore, and make them vote for merger and Malaysia, albeit, you know, sometimes reluctantly, but they were finally persuaded. Because they knew that their relatives were having a tough time in China, were Hungry, and they were sending food parcels there.

There will come a time maybe 10, maybe 20 years when one after the other, all three will catch up and maybe pass over our material standards. That has to be faced. IN a matter of years, the Chinese are going to explode the first nuclear bomb. The Indians ar already manufacturing motor-cars, will manufacture jet aeroplanes. One day, coherent government will emerge in Indonesia. The chances are it will be Communist. After the army is gone -- if it goes -- then the Communist take over; and if they make it tick with the enormously greater resources they have, they must catch us up.

Therefore, in the 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 years -- I am no prophet of their rate of progress, so many factors come in here -- but in the time at our disposal, we have got to inculcate a separate identity of being a Malaysian, of thinking and feeling and reacting as a Malaysian, or all the component parts will break up, must break up. If India offers the Indians a better standard of living, higher civilisation, so will China, so will Indonesia: What is the raison d'etre for Malaysia? What is the reason for its continued survival? It then becomes a pawn in the power game. You see, Turkey and Greece over Cyprus. Here you'll have India, China, Indonesia over Malaysia, with the United States interested and many other powers interested.

How do we create this? Well, that is a subject on which can spend a great deal of time more than we have got in this afternoon.

But the tragedy is I have a feeling that some people do not. and some people with great influence, do not want this process to begin. That is the tragedy of it. They want to block it, in compartments. They want Malays to remain Malays. Chinese and Indians can become Malaysians. But Malays will become Malays.

Now, so you come back to this moot question: Can Malaysia succeed in this situation? "I say yes, if the Malay leadership... and this requires the consent, the judgment of the Malay leadership. Leadership on the part of the other communities alone is not good enough. Of course, mind you, if the other communities, if the Chinese leadership, for instance, refuses to make it work, then it must break also. I mean, if, for instance, the Communist leadership were dominant in the Chinese and they played up Chinese culture, Chinese civilization, Chinese Communism in other words, and Chinese dominance: then it means the integration into one nation can never begin.

But for the Malays, they have got to make up their minds. First, whether they want to go with Indonesia or they want to be separate. That is the basic question they have to ask themselves. If they want to go with Indonesia, then I say that is the end for them, for us. It will not just be tomorrow they take a vote and they say they go to Indonesia; then that's over. No! It's nothing of that sort. It will go... first, in vague forms like Maphilindo, and so on... vague forms, in which outside strength will be lent to give strength to the Malay component in the country to keep down the others, because there is not enough strength, Malay strength alone to keep it down, and I have explained why, in my view, British, Australian and New Zealand strength cannot be used to keep down the other communities. So, you must get conflict, the end result of which, whoever wins, Malaysia is finished. And it must mean the victory of Indonesia, because they are there prevailing, pervasive, and will finally absorb this region.

If they do not want to go with Indonesia, as I believe the election results showed ... because in many of these areas like Batu Pahat, 50 if not more than 50 per cent were a direct Indonesian descendants. They voted whole-heartedly for the

Alliance knowing that the Alliance was going to face continued confrontation, when the Indonesian were asking them to vote for party Rakyat and PMIP.

What made them vote that way? A better life. Something better in Malaysia. I'll tell you why on the non-Malay side, if you want to keep this thing going, you must never strive to assert or displace the Malay from his equal position in our society. If co-operation in a multi-racial society leads to their relegation as a depressed class, as a depressed community, then the prospect of redeeming themselves via absorption with Indonesia to put the others down becomes a tantalising one. Therefore, we owe it to ourselves to keep them up at the same levels of life more or less as the other communities. This is a delicate balance. Whilst we are shifting little communal checks and balances, and playing with material incentives, we should begin the process which has lead, in the United States to one of the greatest nations in the world, forged out of polyglot lot communities. Of course, they started differently. They first started off as a nation English-speaking. Then they got Germans, Italians, poles, Spaniards, and everybody went through the American sausage machine and came out regular hamburgers. They came out regular size: American hamburgers, speaking the same language thinking the same, having the same attitudes: basic values.

So, you see, the people who started this -- wanting to keep the Malay base intact -- are really trying to stop the one process that can keep Malaysia alive. But they are not interested in keeping Malaysia alive. They are interested in keeping their dominance alive. But the way in which they are keeping their dominance alive must mean the disintegration of Malaysia, because if Malaysia is a Malay Nation and not a Malaysian nation, then I say it belongs to the Bung, because he is the biggest Malay Chief in this region.

Let me explain this to you. Apart from military pressure, economic pressure, if you keep Malaysia as a Malaya nation and you keep this 40 per cent of your population ideologically as Malays, distinct from the Chinese and the Indians, and the others, thinking as Malays, reacting, referring to themselves as bangsa, bangsa Melayu, then this group must be susceptible to all the blandishments and

propaganda coming from Jakarta. It must, because you are keeping them that way. The one way you can overcome Indonesian blandishments to make them think as a Malaysian, that they have more common interests with the Indian, the Chinese, the Ceylonese, the Eurasians in Malaysia than he has with his fourth or fifth cousin in Menang-kabau or in the Island of Boyan or Sumatra. There must be an identity of interest that whatever your racial kinship, your interest and my interest coincide in the survival of a separate identity in Malaysia.

To bring that about, you require imaginative leadership in the Centre. Whether it will them embark on imaginative policies, I don't know. But I think our immediate problem now is to stop the rot and give them time to think, to work out the awful consequences of their policies. You see, I'm quite sure the people who started these riots, I mean who set off the chain of events which led off to these riots, and which have led off to this mutation in the complexion of our society, have not calculated to the degree of their actions. My first equation is, as I have said, whoever plays the communal game may consolidate his 40 percent, but will lose the 20 per cent. I say, if you watch Singapore and you watch Malaya, that has already started to happen. Inevitable. It has already started to happen. This is the first shift.

Second if you play only one segment of the community as Malays, then you are keeping this vulnerable for the Bung to absorb any time.

And third even if the Bung does not absorb it, there comes a time when the Chinese and the Indian components will give you enormous trouble, because as you keep your Malay sector Malays, so the Chinese will remain Chinese and the Indians will remain Indians; and therefore vulnerable to all the pulls from the North, from the West, and from the South by the Indonesians. Therefore, it must collapse.

What is our job in a democratic society? I say, first, mobilise opinion. Why do I speak so freely? Because I say we have got to get everybody to prepare his mind to bear on these things, or as many people as possible, to argue and work out where we are going; where certain policies will lead us; so that I hope the next time, next open move made for Round No.2 in this game to consolidate the 40 per cent at

the price of the Singapore Malays and the Singapore situation, public opinion will be sufficiently aroused throughout Malaysia to make it unprofitable for those who embark on it.

If I may end up, we have all got a vested interest in Malaysia. I have no doubts in my minds it was the right decision and the only way out. The other way was quite a gruesome prospect in which we would have come into conflict much sooner. That was independent Singapore. It wouldn't have come about; would have led to real conflict; would have led to a British-Guinean situation, you see. The British cannot allow Singapore to be independent by itself. It is not viable. It has got no water; it has got no market. You've got no economic expansion. Your communist problems will become worse as your unemployment problems mount. There is no political stability in that kind of a situation. ... leading into no economic investments; leading into a chain reaction escalating your problems. Finally, as you pressure here, it becomes a Chinese effort which will bring about a reaction in the whole of Malaya, which will bring retaliatory moves as Chinese chauvinist demonstrations here find its ripples and repercussions throughout Malaya. The Malayan Government would have taken counter measures and reprisals against Singapore. Finally, ending up real riots as water gets closed off; Cause away gets blocked, and so on. We could have played it that way... indefinitely. Demand independence. Riots break out. British refuse, anti-colonialism, suspended, re-elections emerge again like Japan, you see. Second time, third time; finally, ruins; or finally dictate on the basis of asking for independence, knowing that you cannot be independent, you then dictate the terms of merger. You follow? Knowing that you cannot be independent, you ask for it. Then KL is brought to the table, and say, "These are my terms". But thereafter, you would have split the two communities asunder.

So, you see, Malaysia provides us with a fascinating example of the play and inter-play of communalism and race, language, religion, in politics; but there is one big difference now between Post-Malaysia and Pre-Malaysia. This time we are playing for keeps. There is no backstop. Before, there was the wicket-keeper. The Constitution can be suspended; troops can be called in; restart. Malaya is in a fairly

contained position; Singapore, small island; Sabah and Sarawak, dormant. Now, this whole thing has spread wide open.

One of the problems ... one of the worrying points about this last riot was that all the troops, British troops, cannot be used. Anyway, there were not many British troops on the island. Malayan troops were in Borneo. So were the British troops. And we brought down troops from Malaya and left Malaya thin. And if that conflict had spread throughout Malaya, the bottom would have been blocked out. Really, hell would have been let loose; because this is a community, as I've said, where the striking power is equal.

So, finally I end my discussions leaving you with this thought: that a nation gets what it deserves; and if there are not enough men in Malaysia who are prepared to stand up and take an interest in these things, then it will drift, must drift, as the English-educated leaders get pushed by forces more closely connected to primaeval urges on the ground.

You see, the way to run Malaysia and win, to my mind, is quite simple, provided we trust each other and each other's good judgment. And I say that Borneo border and all the surrounding waters can be held. The 60 per cent will provide a hard-core that will never melt against the Indonesia. The same 60 per cent will form a hard-core in case anybody wants to march down from the North. You see, you can just play 40:40:20. So, anyone time you've got 60, safe, you see. You have got it? And this is true, you know. I'll tell you quite frankly that we spend lot of our time working out this arithmetic before Malaysia to see whether it has a chance of survival; and the chance is there.

The question is: Do we seize it? Are there enough men in Malaysia who see the dangers and say, "Look, stop this; and this is the way out". If there are, we survive; if there are not, then I say God help the whole lot of us.

16th August, 1964.