

TRANSCRIPT OF 'THE FUTURE OF MALAYSIA', A SPEECH GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF SINGAPORE, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT ASSEMBLY HALL, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA, ON 24TH MARCH 1965, TO THE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS.

Chairman:

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me this evening on behalf of the Institute for International Affairs to introduce to you the Prime Minister of Singapore, the Honourable Mr. Lee Kuan Yew.

Mr. Lee is visiting Australia as a spokesman of Malaysia. But he is, of course, a great deal more than that. In the first place, he is one of the architects of Malaysia. In fact, I think it could be said that he is the architect of Malaysia, the man who was responsible for Malaysia from the drawing-board upwards, as it were.

Secondly, in Singapore, and how in the wider area of the Federation, he continues to be one of the most active political leaders of the country, and tonight therefore, we are privileged not merely to hear an address about Malaysia, but to hear an active participant in Malaysia's political processes.

It is not necessary for me, I think, to go into very great detail about Mr. Lee's accomplishments. He is Cambridge graduate, as is Mrs. Lee whom we have very great pleasure in welcoming here this evening. Mr. Lee himself earned the rare distinction of a Double First in Law, and was called to the Bar in London in 1950. He was the founder of his party, the PEOPLE'S ACTION PARTY in Singapore in 1954, and in 1955 he was elected to the Singapore Legislative Assembly. In 1959, he became Prime Minister of Singapore. And at the last elections in Singapore in 1963, he again led his party a sweeping victory. It may not be inappropriate to mention that among his other accomplishments. Mr. Lee is a golfer, and golf is perhaps of not inconsiderable diplomatic importance in the country from which he comes.

Mr. Lee has been in Australia, I think, long enough to assess the very considerable interest that exists here today in Malaysia and in the problems that confront her. He's also perhaps been here long enough to assess the fact that Australian interest in this region is mixed with a good deal of ignorance. As a nation, we are still taking the measure of our responsibilities in this region as a whole. we are therefore very grateful

indeed to him that he has found it possible to spare this evening to speak to us about Malaysia's present condition and her future prospects.

Perhaps as a golfer as well as the political leader, he may be disposed to give us a hint of his handicap in both spheres. I have very great pleasure in asking Mr. Lee to address you.

Mr. Lee Kuan Yew:

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,

I had hoped this evening to spend the greater part of my talk discussing more of the problems of international affairs, such as they are in Southeast Asia and in the Australasian region, and only in passing deal with the complexities of the Malaysian situation, I will however be prepared for those who are interested in the ramifications and the difference in the factors within the Malaysia situation, to answer questions afterwards.

First, I think the subject "International Affairs" is as old as the subject of man. I mean, from the first tribes to the modern nations, man may have learned how to use wood and stone and metal and gun powder, and now nuclear power. But the essential quality of man has never altered. You can read the Peloponnesian wars, you can read the Three Kingdoms of the Chinese classics, and there's nothing new which a human situation can devise. The motivations for human behaviour have always been there. The manifestations of the motivations whether they are greed, envy, ambition, greatness, generosity, charity, inevitably ends in a conflict of power positions. And how that conflict is resolved depends upon the accident of the individuals in charge of a particular tribe or nation at a given time.

But what has changed is the facility with which men can now communicate and transport not only ideas but also man himself and his weapons. Therefore, into a very old situation has been introduced a very alarming possibility which puts the whole problem of international relations now in a very different perspective.

Let me explain briefly what I mean.

I was reading the opening to the debate on foreign affairs by your Minister for External Affairs. And it struck me that the one thing which preoccupied him after his one year in office was this problem of power and the conflict of power in a world in

which power can be absolute. And a conflict of two absolute powers means the destruction of all.

How does this affect us in the Pacific region? Is it true, like a film version of the last days of humanity ultimately on the beach somewhere in Bondi is the last man to be found on earth? Well, I do not know, and if it came to that, I would not be interested in any event. But I do know that it is not impossible that the same human ingenuity that discovered these modern means of communication of ideas which can make it possible for us to communicate with each other so rapidly, to transport human beings from one place to another rapidly, and to deliver weapons of destruction instantaneously; that same ingenuity should enable us to find some way, if not for a final solution, at least to stave off the inevitability of complete destruction if we pursue power and play with the mechanics of power in the way nations of Europe and of Asia have been accustomed to do for so many thousands of years.

More immediately of concern to us is the question of whether the ideological conflict between East and West, between Communism and anti-Communism with a large mass of Afro-Asia still non-Communist in the sense that they do not want Communism but are not convinced that the answer to Communism is anti-Communism and Western capitalism, and in this situation, how are we to find some accommodation to prevent calamity? If not to find a solution, at least to be able to get some time in which accommodation is possible while some final solution is being worked out.

Every day, you read the newspapers, and so do I. And the first page that I turn to is South Vietnam, foreign news, South Vietnam. What's new in this very old, intractable problem? One thing I found engaging about New Zealand was that they always turned to the sheep-and-mutton page, which for me is quite a revelation. I think that Australia, being somewhat nearer, finds herself more preoccupied with some of the problems of the region, particularly since in any event you've got some engineers in South Vietnam, although not on combat duty, and the American problem in South Vietnam is not unrelated with American interests ultimately in the whole of the region, which will determine whether America will find it worthwhile to continue maintaining a presence in Asia. Or, if not in Asia, in the South Pacific, which in turn means whether the Australians can in a world of big power conflicts find some shelter behind some big power which will afford them the comfort of superior force.

What does this conflict signify? Ten years ago, I think, in 1955, or better still in 1954, when signed the Geneva Agreement, I would have doubted then whether the position could have been held for 11 years, as it vary nearly now is 11 years since May

1954. I remember the date very well because I happened to be on board a ship travelling not far away off Saigon at that time, when they were all foregathering at Geneva. And then, the world was quite simple. It was the underprivileged against the Western privileged nations. The underprivileged included all the non-European countries, or the non-European populations dependent on Russian military force to break down the hegemony of America and Europe over the rest of the world.

The position appeared so very simple and clear cut at that time. The West, determined to hang on to what it's got; the East, Russian, East European, Chinese, determined to smash every modicum of strength left in the West, and to liberate the world. And the few people who had then been already liberated, like the Indians, the Pakistanis, the Burmese, the Ceylonese, not then the Africans nor Malaysians, were undecided as to where their interests lay.

1955, I think, was the high-water mark of that age. Ten years, the first decade after the second World War. Bandung, anti-colonialism, the solidarity of Afro-Asia against the hegemony of European people. Those who were for freedom, for equality, for liberty, for human happiness; and those who wanted to assert European ascendancy, for human happiness; and those who wanted to assert European ascendancy, exploit the subject peoples of Asia and Africa. That was too simple.

Ten years then, 1965, there's a very different picture. It is not European versus the rest -- the rest being led by the communists and the Europeans representing anti-communists, anti-change -- it is the communists versus other communists. Russians, who are now called Revisionists, versus Chinese, who proclaim that they are the true disciples of Marx and Lenin. The West itself is divided, however identical the interests of European countries may be.

President De Gaulle is not convinced that in that last moment when a decision has to be made, whether France has to be saved, even if it means an American sacrifice, President De Gaulle is not convinced that the Americans would act as Europeans, that they may act as Americans, and therefore he must have his own way, he must have his own deterrent. And the Afro-Asians, that solidarity which manifested itself in 1955, the great brotherhood of man, it is now clear it is a solidarity against European domination.

Mind you, in 1955 when they foregathered in abundance, they proclaimed their solidarity for a peaceful endeavour, mutual respect and self-esteem, non-interference with each other regardless of size, settlement of disputes by the five cardinal principles

Pantjasila, Afro-Asian's code of moral ethics of how to resolve the problems between tribes and ethios.

Asians have fought Asians over the Himalayas, Africans have fought Africans, over former French possessions lying between Morocco and Algeria, or between Somalia and Kenya and Somalia and Ethiopia. So that first flush, that romantic decade of brotherhood, of all non-white peoples against white peoples, has gone through a subtle change.

We now know that whether you are European, Asians, African, man is a human being, collectively as a group constituted in nations they react in certain predictable manners, ways.

Inevitably, they react in their own defensive interests, and all principles go by the board. Except insofar as the principles happen to the exigencies of their immediate interests. Now this is the problem we are faced with in Southeast Asia, in that if two decades have passed since 1945, many nations have emerged, some old some new, some never existed before in history, like Malaysia. Or, for that matter, Indonesia. And they have had as yet no time to be able of ascertain what is in their collective interests, first as individual nations, and second, what is in their collective interests next as groups of nations in the region, able to act in consort with each other, if not for their collective interests, at least against a common threat.

And the most spectacular thing about 1945 to 1965 in Southeast Asia, the Age of Nehru I would call it because he set the pace, the idealism, the belief in great principles, was the absence of cynicism to a point where vast numbers of otherwise cynical people were led to believe that because Asians have gone through a common tribulation and common humiliation at the hands of the European powers, therefore thereafter they would always be brothers in a common struggle. Which wasn't true, unfortunately. The Cambodians know it's not true. They are fearful of the South Vietnamese as well as of the North Vietnamese. They are equally fearful of the Thais, for that last bit of history before the French took them over was one in which in any case they were likely to have been pincerred between these two forces, both bigger than them.

But none of these powers were able to exercise an influence outside their own region in aid of their own interests. And I think this is the most spectacular single fact of Asia in the two decades after the Second World War.

If one looks back now, one were to look back from 1945 and turn over the pages of history and wonder how it was that highly intelligent and highly experienced

revolutionary figures in India, not just individuals but groups of men, were able to work themselves into a position where India is now divided between Pakistan and India. And, anti-communist Pakistan - Muslim and anti-Communist -- now is acting in consort with China because it has dispute with India over Kashmir. It is very hard to believe that this need had happened. Or that now the Indonesians would be actively soliciting the aid of China economically to carry out a policy of confrontation, which to me cannot mean the identical interest; whatever the end result of confrontation may be there is no coincidence of interest between the present Indonesian regime and the Chinese Government. And they are able to find common accommodation, albeit temporary. It is fantastic.

And, to make confusion worse confounded, the Philippines are America's proteges in Asia, American manifestation of culture in the Pacific, dependent on American aid for its cultural pattern of life. Now, against its own will, committed internationally on the side of the Indonesians against Malaysia. All for some fabulous claim over Sabah which is based upon the interpretation of some old document which the Sultan of Sulu and the Sultan of Brunei were supposed to have signed some time in the last century.

How did this come about? Is it possible that sane, rational, intelligent men could have worked themselves into these awkward positions?

I think the first admission we have to make is that not only is it possible, but it was inevitable that the idealism which generated so much hope of a brave, new Afro-Asian world had to go through this phase of disillusion before man discovered that Afro-Asians were men. Human beings, just like the others, as much prisoners of their past as apostles of their future.

It is in this context that I would like to present to you the problem of Malaysia.

I have said that there is nothing new in human relationships, in human situations, in the permutations and combinations of any given situation between two groups of men either as tribes or as nation states, but that the big difference is the capacity for quick transportation of ideas, men and weapons have created a new problem.

And Malaysia is, in a way, a very special manifestation of this problem. Here, as a result of a hundred-odd years of British rule, vast numbers of men who were not there have moved in from China, from India and from Indonesia. On Singapore island we have two fishing-villages with more than 500 people; when Stamford Raffles first landed on Singapore island they probably had about two fishing villages, probably not

more than 500 people, when Stamford Raffles first established a colony early in the 19th century. Just as, perhaps, there was nobody in Melbourne 200 years ago, except for a few people with boomerangs and wooden spears.

But, unlike Melbourne or Sydney or Wellington, here you had a situation where migration had taken place, and large numbers bringing into one million peoples of different cultures -- Chinese, Indians, Malays and Indonesians, products of different civilizations. And because their past histories were different, their present habit-patterns are also very different.

The Malays and the Indonesians under the beneficence of tropical sunshine and tropical rainfall are by and large a leisurely people, not intense, no tendency to gastric ulcers, no desire to accumulate fortunes, leading lives as satisfying as any other human beings anywhere in the world. And they would be quite happy but for the impact of Western civilization which brought in Chinese and Indians into this one milieu. The Chinese, products of floods, pestilence, famine, an intense people, not better or worse, but different because of that experience -- a different climate, a different situation produced a different type of culture. And the people who went South went there to make fortunes. That's why they left their homes. And I discovered they also went to South Island, New Zealand, to look for gold when there was a gold rush there, after they had missed the gold rush in California. And, having this gold, they really go and coin it. Rubber, tin, commerce, trade, industry, manufacturing, prepared to have a try at anything. Similarly, to a lesser extent, the Indians. They were also migrants seeking a better life, many with the intention at the time they left their country to return, to make good and receive the accolade from their own village elders when they returned and had made good. But for various reasons, they lived on in the leisurely climate of Malaysia because life was too good.

What is it that keeps Malaysia together? For over a hundred-odd years, that same British Raj governed the whole of these territories. They divided it into little protectorates and had little potentates that they installed and regularly removed whenever it was inconvenient and they installed another cousin or uncle, or aunt twice-removed. And the business of extracting wealth from these regions continued with unremitting efficiency until the Japanese came in 1942 and the whole system collapsed.

And when they returned in 1945, I think it rebounds to the credit of the British that they were able to see that this was the end of Empire. And they, reading the archives now, seeing some of the service grams that went backwards and forwards

between their leaders in London and Ministers and under-secretaries giving instructions to the Governors; I have to admit that in fact there was a conscious effort to try and go along with history. They knew that to re-establish the old dominance was no longer possible.

They tried in many diverse ways to keep a foothold in the region, and one of the biggest mistakes they did -- not with malice -- was to have divided Singapore from Malaya and allow the development to go on in the two territories one more or less Malays, in which Malays were predominant, and the other with Chinese predominance. For 18 years it went on: 1945 to 1963; until the two territories were brought together again. And the problems we are facing today are problems which need never have arisen if that artificial political division had never taken place.

If Britain, or whoever then was Colonial Secretary, Mr. Arthur Creech Jones, was not persuaded that it was possible to hold this island base, perhaps for three, four or more decades, then Malaya would have had to learn to live with Singapore much earlier, and all our problems, which are problems of adjustment today, would have had to be faced in 1945, 1946, 1947, 1948.

And much greater stability would have resulted. But that was not to be. It took 18 years, or nearly 16 years till 1961, before we convinced the British Government that a separate Singapore meant in the end greatly resented problems; that a Singapore which was going to be crippled economically by a hinterland in the hands of hostile Government, a regime which did not share its forward-looking revolutionary attitude, was bound to lead to conflict which must end in the complete destruction of British bases. And it is in the light of this that you've got to face up to the problems which Australia, together with New Zealand have to under-write with the British.

And the British, being more far-sighted, and seeing that it was not possible to hold Singapore separately from Malaya -- many of these problems need not have arisen. But they have. And because for 18 years Malaya was so accustomed to a Malay predominance that when the awful moment of truth came that it could not go along to the utter disregard of what was happening in Singapore, they found Singapore so unpalatable and indigestible a unit that they insisted that Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei should go along with it.

In any case, Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei would have gone along with it. We were part of one empire. Telecommunications networks, the trade lines, the administrative system, the civil services, was by and large one. The British kept up the fiction of



different political divisions. But this accident of taking in Borneo States together with Singapore triggered off confrontation because it coincided, 1963 the formation of Malaysia, coincided with the year the Indonesians got back West Irian, on May the 1st, and thereby lost the one reason why they were doing what they were. And either they had to do something different and turn inwards and begin to build Indonesia now that they were through with anti-colonialism, or they had to go on with another adventure.

Had we formed Malaysia in 1962 or 1961, perhaps we could have avoided this evil. But by a freak of history we formed it in the very year the Indonesians resolved this problem and found themselves with nothing to do. An army of 400,000 were suddenly unemployed. Which meant, retrenchment for officers and soldiers. Which meant unpleasantness.

And that is the beginning of our problem, and of yours. Because, for the first time, both for Malaysia and Australia and New Zealand, we have to face up to the realities of living with an uncomfortable, unhappy neighbour. We regret the fact that he is uncomfortable. We would like to help him to be comfortable. But he is in no mood to be rational and to be constructive. He is not interested in increasing his standard of living or in increasing the industrial output of the Gross National Product of Indonesia. The President is also in the last phase of his life and determined that whatever else history may say of him it shall at least accord him an place as one of the great revolutionaries that the Afro-Asian world produced, and he will have a niche in the Afro-Asian pantheon of the gods. He has indeed compared himself to Jesus Christ, Mohammed, Soekarno. He has, indeed. And I would say the way he did the comparison was not without great vividness. They all talk in great terms. They all think vivid, imaginative pictures for their people.

I do not know what history will ultimately say about the President, but I do know that he is determined that history shall say that here was a great man. And in view of this, to start turning now at this phase of his life to internal construction when the whole of his life has not been construction, it is hardly likely that he will have an honoured place amongst the leaders of men. So therefore, we have to resign ourselves to this revolutionary posture being maintained, if for no other reason than that is the way in which he intends to go down, the great visionary.

But our problems will persist long after the President of Indonesia has left the scene. And I would like to believe that after he is gone perhaps our problems will become more manageable. But I am not greatly encouraged in this belief because of the skill, the patience, and the perseverance with which the Indonesian Communists seek a

broad national front in Indonesia. And if they can succeed in carrying on this great anti-colonial, anti neo-colonial surge, common enemies, all Indonesians unite, and all patriotic forces uniting, whether they are in the Army, they are in the Communist Party, whether they are in Islamic groups or otherwise, and buy themselves more time in which to consolidate their position not only in the outer regions but also in the Army itself then they are in not only for more years of strife but strife, the end result of which can only mean greater peril.

But then, you see, so many things in history are not predictable. Nobody would have imagined that in spite of all the great accord which existed between India and China in the early 50's that Mr. Nehru would live to see his policies of peaceful co-existence destroyed. So half our battle is that not knowing what the ultimate result is going to be although fearing that the result may be adverse, it nevertheless behoves us that we should hang on and press forward on every possible front in order that if the situation offers itself, we shall be there, ready to consolidate our position. And your position, and mine, in this respect are identical.

All we want to do is to be left alone to get on with our business of living, to build up our own country, create our own prosperity, trade and be friendly with our neighbours. Our problem is our neighbours are bigger, have very little inducement to leave us alone because we are the wealthier, and see no reason why they should not exercise a greater influence over our lives than they are doing.

So we go back to the first history of man. No tribe in proximity with another tribe is happy until a state of dominance of one over the other is established. Or until it has tried to establish that dominance, and failed, and it is quite satisfied that it is not possible, whereupon it lives in fear that the other tribe will try and assert dominance over it. And the cavalcade of man will go on. And if it goes on then I say we have reason to rejoice, for then we shall reach for the moon and the stars and the universe.

The danger is that with the modern advances in scientific techniques that I earlier referred to, it may well be that the last mistake may be the end of all this history, strife between conflicting groups. But those are the imponderables, the infinite. What are finite and definable are our immediate problems: those who want to create instability in the area are on one side, and those who want to seek accommodation and stability and progress, leading naturally to a much more viable situation for all the present existing regimes in the area. So you get that big division cuts across now ideology. It cuts across race.

1955, Australia and New Zealand, British, French, Dutch, Americans, colonialists on one side, Malaysians together with Chinese, Indians, everybody else, Africans, on the other side. 1965, a very different picture.

You want to be left alone in peace, unmolested. I want to be left alone in peace, unmolested. Therefore we are together. If I am left in peace, unmolested, in spite of the pressures from a bigger neighbour in the end the pressures turn out to be unsuccessful, your chance of being left in peace is that much greater. The wider divisions between those who want to create general instability, not just big and small nations, people who have a stake in instability. Communist regimes can only emerge if there is chaos, confusion, disintegration.

Therefore, the Communists have a stake in economic chaos. They are on one side. We are on the other. But you know, I doubt whether the Russians are all that happy about North Vietnam and South Vietnam, because they have another split which cuts across that desire to upset established order, if by upsetting the established order they upset their position in that established order. For, the Russians have established a very comfortable position in the order of things.

So we can go on ad infinitum. And our hope is that by holding on and establishing peace and stability, other powers will also begin to develop an interest to establish an interest in their position in the world, whereupon we may well emerge into a much more peaceful, a much more tranquil, a much more secure world. That may or may not be so in the end. But it is on that basis that we must endeavour to hold the present position.

Thank you.

National Archives of Singapore