

PRIME MINISTER OF SINGAPORE, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA IN PERTH, ON 1ST APRIL, 1965.

CHAIRMAN:

It is with great pride and privilege that we acknowledge today the visit of the Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, and Mrs. Lee Kuan Yew.

In the history of the world, very few have been given the role of safeguarding freedom in the hour of national danger. And as we recall the sorrow and turmoil at home, we look upon Mr. Lee Kuan Yew as one of the few men who has been given this role.

I would also like to introduce you all to some of the people who have come with him. In front, on my extreme right, is Mr. Ghazali bin Ismail, who is the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Culture.

It now gives me great pleasure in calling upon the president of the M.S.A., Mr. Simon Goh, to give his welcoming address.

Thank you.

PRESIDENT OF MALAYSIAN STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION:

I think one person that we have forgotten, and that is Mrs. Lee, sitting right in front of you.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Lee, Mrs. Lee, and the official party, our friends and fellow Malaysians.

On behalf of M.S.A., I would like to say to you Sir "Welcome to Perth", and Mrs. Lee, and we hope that you have had a very enjoyable and fruitful trip of Australia and New Zealand.

We want to tell you how honoured we are that you have given us this opportunity to meet you and Mrs. Lee on this foreign soil.

As Malaysians, naturally we are very concerned of what has happened and all the incidents big and small, not serious and the serious ones, that has happened in our country after the formation of Malaysia. We here are also very concerned about the future of Malaysia. Therefore, Sir, I'll be very pleased, and all the members of M.S.A. will be very pleased, if you could tonight give us your views of the future of Malaysia

Many people, including students, often proclaim that we students are the future leaders of our country. Sir, I know that you have traversed New Zealand and the Eastern States of Australia, and you have met many, many of our fellow Malaysians in the two countries. We would also be very pleased Sir if you could give us your impression of the so-called future leaders of our country.

In conclusion, may I assure you, Sir, of our every loyal and staunch support in your leadership in striving for a strong and united Malaysia, a Malaysia that is based on equality, harmony, and goodwill of its people.

Finally, on behalf of the students today, I would like to wish you, Sir, and Mrs. Lee and all the members of your official party, a very pleasant trip home. I don't know what is waiting for you at home. But we hope that it will be a very nice and happy one.

Before I sit down and shut up and let all of you hear Mr. Lee, I'd just like to say something; and that is that I have just been informed by the Guild Executive Officer that the Vice-Chancellor of the University of the W.A. has made it a special thing tonight for all of us - and that is, he has instructed that the Guild Executive Officer to have all the windows and doors opened so that we can achieve a maximum comfort for our Prime Minister, Mr. Lee and Mrs. Lee. He also assures me that we shall install all the fans that is available at the University, and here we are.

So, Sir, I'm sure you won't have any more appeals to leave us early tonight. I hope that you stay here with us as long as possible. Thank you.

Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew:

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,

I am greatly honoured by the presence of so many Malaysian students in Perth and by the warm and enthusiastic response to the words of welcome that the President extended to me and my party.

I was asked to give my views on the quality of the prospective leaders of Malaysia that I've come across in the Eastern States and in New Zealand. I have also been asked to give my opinions as to what the future of Malaysia would be.

Well, I think common courtesy and civility demands that I should not be too blunt in giving my views on the first; and the exigencies of our political situation demands that however grave the situation, I must always present an optimistic future for all those who have put their money on Malaysia, which includes you and me.

I think the two issues are inter-related. Are there enough Malaysians to make Malaysia succeed? If there are, then the future is for you. If there are not, well, we have to start the count-down all over again on some other occasion.

What has happened in the last few years is that we have brought about, by a great deal of political pressure, a re-unification of Singapore with the States of Malaya. They were, and have always been, one political milieu. For a diversity of reasons, when the British returned in 1945, they cut Singapore adrift politically from Penang and Malacca, joined Penang and Malacca together with the Federated Malay States and the non-Federated Malay States. What has happened in the years 1961, 1962, 1963 is now history. The logic of economics, geography and politics made it impossible for Singapore to be kept separate, without disastrous consequences befalling both Malaya and Singapore.

What was not anticipated was that the Borneo territories, now known as Sabah and Sarawak, then known as North Borneo, would also join in this new Federation called Malaysia. What Brunei is to do in subsequent years, I do not know. But I should imagine that she will hang on to her oil resources for as long as she can to the exclusive use of 80,000 citizens of Brunei.

But having created Malaysia, we have now the problem of creating Malaysians. You see, this is the one nation in the world where you've got a country first before you've created the proto-type. And in the old days we could wax eloquent on the wickedness of the British colonialists who arranged that this should be so. Divide and rule. Bring the Chinese in - cheap labour. Bring the Indians in. Don't educate them. Nett result -they educated themselves. And in the end what we have got is four different linguistic groups in Malaysia sharing some common values, but not all together in one common mould.

The problem that arises now is: first, can we get everybody into one common mould by consent; second, if not by consent, can it be done by force. And if it neither can be done by consent or by force, what happens to Malaysia, because you've got a nation before you've got the people.

I would like to believe that there are enough people in important positions in Malaysia, people who can influence opinion not just political leaders, men whose standing in their community whether they are merchants, teachers, doctors, lawyers, dentists, men who are regarded with some esteem, formulators of opinion, that there are enough of them who believe that this is not only worthwhile doing, but it's the only conceivable way in which you can rationalise what is a very curious situation.

In many of the colonial territories in the world, the moment you remove the over-riding power which was in the hands of the colonialists, conflicts arise - conflicts resulting from peoples of different races and cultures having been brought together and forcibly made to live peacefully together. When you remove this external authority, you've got to supplant it with something else.

When the Japanese came, one external authority was substituted for by another. And there were no race riots. There were in the interregnum, the few moments when the British withdraw before the Japanese established their new order. And, again, those moments when the Japanese withdrew before the British re-established their order. But peace was forcibly implemented. If anybody did not live in peace, then he was suitably dealt with. So they had to live in peace.

The problem that now arises is quite simple. We are substituting for British authority our own. And we have got to devise a formula to ensure that the authority that ultimately emerges in Malaysia is one that will command the loyalty, the support of the majority of all the various racial, linguistic groups in the country.

You see, there is no other way, because no one single linguistic or racial group is in a position to enforce its will on the others. I would like to believe also that this cold fact is one which will gradually percolate into even the most frenzied of communal and chauvinistic minds. The price that any communalist must pay if he wants to assert the supremacy of any linguistic or racial group is conflict that must lead to disintegration. What happens after disintegration is a matter that I have no interest to discuss with you this evening.

I think we should confine our interest to those issues which will ensure that Malaysia never disintegrates. How are we to ensure? I would answer simply, "Are there enough Malaysians to save Malaysia?". Are there enough people who believe that this multi-racial society, with all its racial, linguistic, religious and cultural problems is still viable, is worth holding together?

You must first believe that before you start doing. If you don't believe it's worth doing, then you can never bring yourself really to try. Malaysia is a confluence of three of Asia's biggest cultural groups. Three ancient civilizations find their confluence in Malaysia. The Indonesia, the Indian, and the Chinese. Each one of these countries surrounding Malaysia is of a higher civilization going through a renaissance, making an inevitable appeal to all those - you see, at this particular juncture, when a great revolution is taking place in China, similar revolution in India, and a revolution of some sort in Indonesia, you are asking Chinese, Indians, and Malays of Indonesian extraction of whom there are about one quarter of the Malay population of Malaysia to forget their cultural origins and throw themselves into a common milieu. It is not easy. There is no chance, you know it and I know it, that in the next 100 years we in Malaysia can produce a civilization, a culture comparable either to China, or with India, or even with Indonesia we are not sure what is to happen. And at this juncture, you're telling them, "Let's start" when they are seeing the Chinese explode the hydrogen bomb, the Indians can explode one in a couple of years or more if they set out to do so, and I am told of course by the newspapers that the Indonesians hope to do one in 1965. Nobody really believes that we Indonesians hope to do one in 1965. Nobody really believes that we, a polyglot community, can give that same inspiration, same tug at the heart-strings of people that takes them on to grandeur and greatness. That is not possible. But let us never forget why is it that more people want to come into Malaysia than to go out to these places of great civilization.

Nobody wants to go back to China or India or Indonesia. You know that. I know that. They all want to come in. Because, in none of these three countries do the people enjoy a standard of life which we offer them. You live in Malaysia better than you can live in China, India or Indonesia. You may have 103 million people, but you eat corn and rats and lizards. And you may have the longest bridge in the world over the Yangtse, but you know that it's a tough life. Those who have gone back have wrote some very plaintive letters about the price people pay for the longest bridge in the world and the nuclear bomb.

Now, this gives us an advantage. It is cupboard love. Let's be quite frank about it. We hold the loyalties of all the communities because Malaysia gives them a better life than they can get outside. And our problem is how to weld this before the day arrives when one of the three major sources of our culture and our linguistic roots overtakes us in material terms - as they must eventually, because they've got greater resources, and their speed of economic growth must one day catch up with us and perhaps leave us behind. If that day arrives before we have welded the different communities into one nation, integrated, feeling and thinking as one people, then I say there is no reason why they should be there. If the Indians can go back to India and get a better life, he would not be in Malaysia. Similarly, the Chinese. Today, the first generation immigrant who came out from China to seek a fortune; perhaps you who were born there in Malaysia cannot go back without considerable discomfort, but the first generation immigrant who was born and bred there and came out to the South Sea seeking a fortune, they can go back with no discomfort whatsoever.

So, you see, time is not on our side. And hence, if people say that we are brash young men in a hurry as sometimes they do say they forget that there is a time limit which has been set. If within that time, before any one of these three major powers overtakes us in the material things in life, we have not integrated our society, then it is very unlikely that we ever will. And Malaysia will be a cockpit for all kinds of irredentist movements and a very serious problem to the world at large. And this is what it is all about. This is why the British are anxious that it should succeed.

They've got their stakes; they've got economic investments. They've got a desire to try and assert a kind of influence for peace against all those who might otherwise become more warlike in their activities in Southeast Asia. But, behind it all, is the very grave danger Malaysia has for Asia and the world if a peaceful accommodation is not found amongst the people who are now living in Malaysia.

I would not like to involve you in the current argument which is going on between those who believe in a multi-racial society and those who believe in a communally segregated society. There are two different points of view. I mean, you have heard them both, and you know. And theoretically perhaps - I would like to present this without any bias in so far as I can and leave you to judge for yourself whether you think one or the other is more likely to bring peace and harmony into Malaysia. One theory propounded by the Alliance is that we are all -the different communities - different and distinct, and that if we try to mix everybody up it will lead

to a lot of confusion and unhappiness. Therefore, you never say "Malaysians unite". You say "Malays unite", then "Chinese unite", then "Indians unite". And of course if you are a Ceylonese or a Eurasian, then it's too bad; you've got nobody, you are too few in numbers to unite anyway. Then the three groups having united, the chiefs of each group, they come together and unite. Therefore you've got a united nation.

That is the theory. I mean, it is seriously being implemented. Therefore you have a Malay communally-segregated party and no non-Malays can join it. And the Chinese, they have party, you know. They arranged for a Chinese party to be created. And that Chinese party cannot recruit non-Chinese. And so the Indians.

We believe that a Malaysian is one regardless of race or religion. We believe that the issues that divide the people are inequalities of wealth and opportunity, not the colour of their skin or the texture of their hair. We do not believe as a communally-segregated political set-up believes that the Malay bus-conductor should join the party of the Malay company director and not join the party of the Chinese bus driver, which is what they are suggesting. And they seriously propound this: that you, the Chinese bus driver, you join the Chinese party; and you good Malays, all must unite and unite under your Malay company director. I do not - if I believed that this would help the transition to something more permanent and more stable, I might well be prepared to go along with this as a transition. But I believe every day that you're preaching that, you are risking a great fission being set off.

People came down to Singapore and started shouting "Malays unite! Chinese are oppressing you, chasing you out from the city", and so on. And you know what happened. It is highly fissionable material, all this. Because, all you need is a few people to light a spark in a situation where you have generated pressure, and the end result you can predict safely and accurately, just as you can predict that if you do this, you mix this acid with that acid, you must get a resulting explosion.

You ask me now, what can we do about it. And I say, are there enough Malaysians who are prepared to fight and die for Malaysia. It's as simple as that. You can have all the high thoughts you like all the ideals. But if you're not prepared to stand up and fight for them, we just go by the board. And I'll tell you who are the people who are prepared to fight and die for their kind of country. First, the Communists. Never doubt that they are prepared to fight and die for a multi-racial Malaya and a Communist Malaya. Not a Malaysia. Right up till today the Sarawak Communist Party is still the Sarawak Communist Party, with nothing to do with the Malayan Communist Party. The

Malayan Communist Party embraces Malaya and Singapore. It does not include Sabah and Sarawak. And all the united Communist front line, any Socialist Front, Barisan Sosialis, "Malaya good; Malaysia neo-colonialism. Self determination to Sabah and Sarawak". They mean what they say, and they are prepared to fight and die for it.

The second group consists of people who are quite fanatical, who believe that Malaya and these countries belong to a people of a particular race, a particular community, and that all the others are there on sufferance. Some of them are prepared to die for this. I mean, let us not make any mistake in believing that they are just cranks. You know, when Dr. Burhanuddin was arrested recently together with Aziz Ishak and Ishak of the Socialist Front, both Ishak and Aziz Ishak confessed that they were in collaboration with the Indonesians, they had received money, they had planned to set up a government in exile. But Burhanuddin never broke down; refused to admit a single allegation against him. He believed this, he's going to fight for this. He believes Islam will rally the Malays, and they will establish an empire. He may be wrong, as I'm quite sure you must believe and I must believe he's wrong. Because if he succeeds, we are dead. But let us concede that he is prepared to die for this belief.

And therefore, if you want a Malaysian Malaysia, a Malaysian nation to emerge, then you must be prepared to stand up, speak out, and be prepared to die for it. If we are all thinking that this is the right thing, but all fearful that if we say the right things we may be punished, we may be injured, we may be incarcerated, then I say we are out.

You see, what I said not so long ago in Malaysia when they were making things very difficult, literally shaking the mail first at us, they've got the army, they've got the Police, they've got the guns - I had to remind them of one thing: that we know that we cannot afford to be intimidated. We are prepared to die for what we believe to be right - a Malaysian nation. When they know that, then you reach a point when accommodation becomes possible.

You see, if the other man believes that he runs amok, you get frightened, the position is safe, he then runs amok. But if he knows that he runs amok and you are prepared to dig your toes in and slug it out even if you die, he'll think over it again before he run amok.

Before I conclude, let me make clear what we want in a Malaysian nation.

I was asked in Adelaide by some Malaysian students; Malay rights, they are wrong, they are iniquitous, are they not? I said, "That is not the issue". Another man

stood up and said "Malay language - what will happen to all of us?" I say that is not the issue. The real issue is whether we are going to have a multi-racial Malaysian nation or you're going to have a nation in which one group dominates the others. And we are quite prepared in our multi-racial nation to ensure that the imbalance in economic and social development, particularly in education opportunities, training in skills, that we should give our Malay fellow citizens every opportunity in order that they can rise in one, maybe two generations to the same level that the immigrant people have achieved in Malaysia. That is the first requisite.

I don't believe that giving a man a special licence to run a bus company will solve the poverty of the Malay farmer. And it is the poverty of the farmers, not the wealth of a few Malay bus operators, that is causing these acute conflicts. We also in a Malaysian nation accept Malay as the national language. A people must have one language to bind them together, and we accept Malay. But it cannot be done, you know, in 1967. All of a sudden we stop and say "Right, we'll think in Malay and we'll speak in Malay". It's not so easy, it's got to be done gradually. It's got to be implemented. You know as well as I do that quite a number of the Ministers in the Federal Government, if we started implementing Malay in 1967 and you say, "Right, you write your minutes in Malay, stand up in Parliament and make a speech in Malay", they'll be deaf and dumb.

These are all slogans, meant to befuddle the grass roots, the masses, to gather their support. They don't really mean it. They can't implement it, and they know it. But we can implement it if we try over the next five to ten years. And we should.

I do not wish to elaborate in detail what kind of Malaysia we ought to create. But I'd like to put it in its broadest terms; that the first issue to be settled now in Malaysia is, is it to be a Malaysian nation? Or, is it to be, like some people like Dr. Burhanuddin and there are others like Dr. Burhanuddin who are also in other political parties who believe that it should be a Malay nation? I say that is not possible.

I cannot agree to that. I can be a Malaysian. I cannot be a Malay. But I am prepared, as a Malaysian I am prepared to do my duty like every other Malaysian including every Malay who is loyal to Malaysia and is also a Malaysian. And that duty includes the responsibility not just once or twice but a sustained effort over one or two generations, to bring up their educational standards to those of the other communities.

It's a very grave problem. It's not something which can be dissolved or we can wish away overnight. I was in New Zealand recently, and I met the former New

Zealand High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur, Mr. Bennett, and he told me -I mean, I don't want to say this because I don't want any misunderstanding - he told me that the Maoris, and he's now looking after them and is Assistant Secretary in the Ministry for Maori Affairs, that in some respects, the Maoris are like the Malays. They are intelligent, physically vigorous people. But, a different culture. Not competitive. They don't believe in slogging out many years in the University to become doctors, lawyers and so on. And this is a problem which must be resolved.

You see, if the European New Zealanders never went to New Zealand, then the problem would never have arisen for the Maoris. They could have gone on living a happy, leisurely existence. But the New Zealander is there, and the problem that arises for them is an acute one of having to adjust your way of life to meet a competitive people in your same society. This is the problem we face. And in order that he shall not be overwhelmed, it is our business to give him succour and sustenance to raise up levels. And, you know, the wickedness of all this is that quite a number of these communal-type leaders, these "ultras" as I call them, they hate us not because we are anti-Malay - I mean if we were anti-Malay and they hated us for it I say that's fair - but because we are pro-Malay and prepared to do more than they are and more effectively to raise Malay standards, so they hate us. Yes, they do. So much so that when they found they had their three Malay seats in Singapore in September 1963, they went all out to ensure that that process is reversed in Singapore and is never allowed to start in Malaya. That is the problem we face.

They don't want a multi-racial society because they then have to compete on performance. If they are worried for the Malays and not for themselves and their power position, then I say let us compete. Let us see whose programme, whose policy can bring better life, better advance to the Malays. Let us compete.

We say to them publicly "How does you and I here talking in Malay, or we in Parliament talking in Malay instead of in English, raise the standard of living of the Malay padi planter?". So that is the problem. You ask them to show the nexus. There is no nexus. He is befuddling the Malay padi planters, "Oh, if we all spoke in Malay, then you'd get a job. The other chap would be out of a job". Is it really that simple? All right. Then sack all your stenographers. Sack all your registry clerks. Put in these chaps. And your administration will come to a grinding halt. Sack all your technicians in your power stations. Put in chaps and change all the signs. From "DANGER" you put

"MERBAHAYA". All right. Fair enough. But if he doesn't know which switch to throw at what time, then you've had it.

We say these problems can only be resolved if you educate, and educate and grow a new generation of men trained in technological skills, thinking like you, like everybody else anywhere in any civilised society, rationally, calculating, prepared to make the effort on his own behalf. Then we begin to resolve our problems.

And we are beginning to do these things. A slow process, maybe in one, two, three generations. But there is no other way. You see, the other ways are so gruesome that it is not true. What other way is there? Get slow boats and pack all the Chinese and the Indians back to China and India? You want to do it like Alley Oop on the Time-Machine, switch the machine and back to 1800 before Stamford Raffles? Even then there were Chinese and Indians too. Do you want to murder them and massacre them? I don't think it's such a simple proposition is it? Even Hitler could not do what he wanted to do.

Well, what do you want to do? Assert dominance - continual war and strife, disaster. Constant politicking leading to more widespread riots - it will lead to segregation and ultimate partition.

I'll give you an example of what is happening now in Singapore. Fear in all the Malay areas in Singapore. In Geylang Serai people are so frightened that men can overnight become mad and attack their neighbours and friends for no rhyme or reason. And they are moving out, fearful that on another moonlight night they will again go mad. And they move out. And in some of the Chinese areas where Malay minorities resided, I saw a block of huts being burnt recently at Chinese New Year. When it was rebuilt, the one Malay who was staying there decided not to go back. He went to live with his friends in Sembawang. You spread this Malaysia-wide and you get a drift of population congregating in the South, Singapore spilling over to Johore, perhaps in Penang spilling over into Province Wellesley. 5,7,9,11 years, and we talk partition. Do you want this to happen? Or do we want to be sane and rational and sit down and calculate and say, "Look, I can't get my way. You can't get your way. We are together for better or for worse. Let's make it for the better".

I am quite sure, if we can find in New South Wales, in Victoria and in Perth - never mind, if I can find ten men in this hall prepared to stand up on a public platform and say, "Look, this isn't what I believe in, and I am fighting for it. And if I

have to die, so be it. But do not believe that it is all so easy that we will just be sitting ducks and be slaughtered" - if we can find enough such men, enough Malaysians to save Malaysia, then I say you go back there's future for you. And those of you who are prepared to stand up on your hind legs, you may be leaders.

National Archives of Singapore