

TRANSCRIPT OF THE "MEET THE PRESS" SESSION  
AT ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA, FOR THE PRIME  
MINISTER OF SINGAPORE, MR. LEE KUAN YEW,  
FOR BROADCAST BY THE ABC FROM ADELAIDE  
ON 4TH APRIL, 1965, RECORDED ON 30TH MARCH  
1965.

ANNOUNCER: Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore, and one of the outstanding political figures in Asia, is 42. He was born and brought up in Singapore, son of well-to-do Chinese, in the days when British rule was not even questioned. At home and at school he spoke English. As a youth he went through the big siege when the British surrendered Singapore and watched the Japanese march in to end forever the legend of white superiority in Asia. It was a shattering personal experience. After the war, he went to England to complete his education, and took Double First Class Honours in Law at Cambridge, a rare distinction. Back home, he gravitated quickly to politics through the trade union movement, formed the left-wing People's Action Party, and swept into office at the head of it in 1959, and again in 1963. In the formation of

Malaysia that has brought him to Australia. Tonight, he is interviewed by North Adams and John Temple.

Question: Mr. Prime Minister, you are often spoken of as one of the co-authors of the Malaysian idea. Now, who in fact first put forward the idea of Malaysia? Was it you?

Mr. Lee: No, it's the Tunku. He is the man who in May 1961, came down to Singapore and suggested a closer association between Singapore and Malaya together with the three Borneo territories. We had always propounded the thesis that Singapore and Malaya must eventually come together. And he countered in the end this idea that not only Singapore, but also the three Borneo territories should come into Malaysia with Singapore.

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Question: He had come to it rather reluctantly, hadn't he? He had to choose between Singapore out of the Federation and running the risk of them going Communist, or taking it in and running the risk that it might dominate, the Chinese population might dominate the Malay population?

Mr. Lee: Well, yes. It's a reversal of policy for the Tunku and his colleagues because before 1961 their objective was a separate Malaya, and we were breaking up all the joint services. The University in Singapore was broken up, and it became a University for Singapore and another one was set up for Kuala Lumpur. Telecommunications was being broken up. They used to be one. For over a hundred years, the British ran it was one. And so we could have gone on. I think the currency would have been broken up into two. They were planning their own currency. And, well, it just wasn't possible.

Question: You were the most enthusiastic supporter of Malaysia because Singapore stood to gain most from it.

Mr. Lee: Well, I want to get this clear. I think we were most enthusiastic supporters of merger, Singapore going into Malaya. And the Tunku said, North Borneo, Brunei, and Sarawak also. And we said, yes, that's good for everybody. So we supported Malaysia.

Question: Would Singapore have gone Communist, do you think, if it hadn't been for the merger, in some form or another?

Mr. Lee: In the long run, if you don't have Merger and you don't have a bigger economic base, you will be unable to solve the problem of economic growth and unemployment will become greater and greater over the years until eventually you can't resolve it. And when people give up hope of resolving their problems by one-man one-vote, then they try the other systems of Government.

Question: Was Australia consulted at all about the foundation of Malaysia?

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Mr. Lee: I wouldn't know about that. I didn't consult the Australians. I consulted the Tengku. I should expect, though, that the British who were in charge of the three Borneo territories must have had consultations with the Australians because you would have been affected by these decisions.

Question: In the same way .... well not in the same way, but Sukarno too was affected by this, and he was consulted too, was he?

Mr. Lee: I don't see how he was affected by the three Borneo territories coming into Malaysia unless he wanted the Borneo territories for himself, which he says he does not want.

Questioner: Of course, they border on his . . . . Kalimantan Utara.

Mr. Lee: Well how does that affect him? I mean, they are not his. They are still bordering on him; always have and always will be, unless you take a pair of scissors and cut it off.

Questioner: Yes, but then one would have thought that it might have been wise, as a matter of courtesy perhaps, to have mentioned the matter to him if we're going to make a change in the status of territories that border on his.

Mr. Lee: Well, let's put in this way. Supposing you decided to integrate East New Guinea as one of the States of the

Commonwealth of Australia, would you consult him, do you think?

Questioner: Well, not consult, perhaps. But tell him.

Mr. Lee: Ah, yes. That's a different thing. He was told. He was told by the British. He was told by the Tengku. And I met Dr. Subandrio on several occasions and told him all about it.

Question: And their early reaction was what?

Mr. Lee: But we were not asking them for permission, you know. Never did. I don't think we have to.

Question: Mr. Prime Minister, you have said that you don't know at what stage Australia was consulted about Malaysia. Do you know what the initial Australia response was to Malaysia? My own impression was that there was no great keenness to begin with.

Mr. Lee: I can't say that I remember any specific detail of the Australian response. We were too pre-occupied with other problems then.

Questioner: Oh, I have no doubt that from the very word "Go" it was a vital Australian interest at stake. Then and now.

Question: Well, if we look at it selfishly, does Malaysia add in any way to our security? Doesn't it rather do the contrary by making us, bringing us into a shooting war with our nearest neighbour?

Mr. Lee: Well, how does not being involved help you in the long run.

Let's suppose that you decide to be friends with Indonesia

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and not annoy her at all, go along with her, and you withdraw your troops and withdrew all your aircraft; then what

happens? Then the British are isolated. Then it becomes

more easy for the Indonesians to present this as a British

imperialist conspiracy to maintain their military bases and

their economic strangle-hold on the region. Then the British

lose out and are isolated. Then the Malaysians collapse

because they can't survive by themselves without help from outside to stand up against a neighbour who's got ten times more population and forty times more troops. And how does that help Australia? Well, let's say Malaysia has collapsed as a result of Indonesian pressure. Don't you think that the Indonesians will be in a fairly exuberant state of mind? And you share a common frontier . . . . .

Questioner: I'm looking at it this way, Mr. Prime Minister. Supposing Malaysia had not been formed. Would Australia have been better or worse off than she is now?

Mr. Lee: Ah, well, That's another matter. I think that even the British are probably in somewhat unhappy moments, nostalgic of the good old days when Borneo, Brunei and Sarawak were peaceful little colonies. At least it wasn't costing them much money, and they were getting something out of it from the timber and the pepper and a bit of the rubber. And now they are spending a lot of their money. So you see, if we start harping back to before Malaysia was formed, and we all became overwhelmed with nostalgia for the good old days,

how does that help us solve our present problems? I mean, Malaysia's there, the Indonesians have decided, both the army, the Communists and the President have decided to put the squeeze on us. If he succeeds, then the squeeze will be put on others around Indonesia.

Question: Yes, but we are involved in the defence of the Federation which was originally a device for uniting Singapore and the Federation. We weren't consulted very deeply on that and about the Federation. We are involved, and we must retain our commitments. But I was wondering if we are better or worse off, though, as a result of the formation of the Federation?

Mr. Lee: Well, I don't think anybody is better off as a result of confrontation. Let's get these two things quite clear in our minds. The formation of Malaysia, and Indonesia's so-called confrontation to Malaysia were two different things. And the President of Indonesia still had the opportunity right up till the 16th of September 1963 to gracefully withdraw from what I think in the long run is an untenable position for him. He

could have said, "Well, I've agreed in Manila. The United Nations have decided that the people of Borneo were in favour of Malaysia. I accept it. I welcome Malaysia as I promised to at Manila." You see, there were two things; formation of Malaysia does not mean confrontation.

Confrontation was a conscious act by the Indonesian people following the formation of Malaysia. Malaysia didn't bring about confrontation.

Question: Was the risk of confrontation foreseen when Malaysia was formed? Was it assumed Sukarno would go along with it?

Mr. Lee: Quite frankly, the moment I read the cables that -- I think this was August 1962 -- that the BUNKER PLAN had succeeded

and that the Indonesians would get back West Irian, or West New Guinea, on the first of May 1963, I thought it was a race against time whether West Irian would be liberated first, or Malaysia would be formed first. And when West Irian was liberated first, well, it was very much a probability that the Indonesians would require some other focus for venting their

anti-colonial fervours if one were kind to them, or their spleen if one were not.

Question: Is it really anti-colonial fervour that's at the bottom of this, or anti-colonial fervour and rationalization, do you think?

Mr. Lee: West Irian, I think, was by and large anti-colonial fervour. I mean, it belonged to them. Or they thought it belonged to them. It's part of the Dutch Empire, and therefore they had a right of succession to it. I don't think they can work up the same fervour for Malaysia. It never belonged to the Dutch. We were never part of the same Empire. And they are forced from time to time to admit that they are doing all this not because they are claiming any part of Malaysia, but because they feel so moved by people in Borneo struggling for freedom that they've got to send their regular troops over to "liberate" them.

Question: Yes, well bully for them. It is unfortunate, from Malaysia's point of view I suppose that the best friends you have -- Britain -- are rather tainted with this colonialist thing, aren't

they? I mean, however enlightened they might be nowadays, it's not difficult to get an anti-colonialist thing going about Britain, is it?

Mr. Lee: No. This is one of the problems we've got to face; that whilst we may have friends and supporters and sympathisers in Asia and Africa, and I can name quite a few of the big Afro-Asian countries who sympathise with our position, and support us . . .  
...

Question: Would you like to name them?

Mr. Lee: India, in Asia for instance. The UAR in Africa.

Question: Nasser is sympathetic now?

Mr. Lee: I think so. We have been -- before the formation I had the privilege of meeting him. I think, a year, or nearly two years before the formation of Malaysia. He came out in a joint-communicue supporting the formation of Malaysia, and he's never wavered from that position.

Question: And of course you've sent, or Malaysia has sent, Tun Abdul Razak on a goodwill and explanatory mission round Afro-Asian, particularly African countries. It is a bit hard for you, isn't it to go get the Africans and other Asians actually to support you -- you know, directly and loudly?

Mr. Lee: Well, this is a problem of talking their language and using their vocabulary. The leaders in Africa and Asia, by and large, are the products of an anti-European colonial, anti-West, anti-European, anti-colonial stage. And unless you feel like them and talk like them, there isn't the same rapport. I mean, in Asia and in Africa there are a few countries which didn't have to go through the whole gamut of the anti-

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revolutionary cause from just making speeches to going to jail as a result of demonstrations, to throwing stones, to throwing

handgrenades, to open conflict, to Dien Bien Phu in 1954

which was what the French forced the Vietnamese to do.

And the countries which were fortunate in meeting

enlightened colonial rulers, or people who had learnt from

others' experiences, are to that extent at a disadvantage. I

mean, let's take the difference between, say, the Congo and Algeria. I mean, the Algerian leaders arrived there after arduous struggle. And they were there as of right. I mean, if they were not good enough, then they would have fallen on the wayside. And the Congolese leaders, the first phase, were people who arrived because the Belgians thought that they could manipulate them and carry on with them. So you produce a different group of men, who have got a different world image. And this is our problem. I mean, I've never been to jail because the British were too wise, and they didn't want to make a martyr. They knew they would lose, anyway, by putting me in jail. It wouldn't make them win. And that's the problem we face. I mean, the Tengku never went to jail too, you see, that's his problem.

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Question: So, both countries got their independence the easy way, when you reckon it up, Mr. Prime Minister?

Mr. Lee: Yes. I think that's true.

Question: I mean, Nigeria got its independence just as easily as Singapore, or the Federation did.

Mr. Lee: That is true. And therefore we face these problems. But supposing we'd all gone to jail. You know, the present Malaysian leaderships had all gone to jail, and we'd suffered and been brutalized, and if I could show a few scars where the British jailers had left their brutality and wickedness and evil on me, well, it will be that much easier to present an image which will invoke an immediate response from the rest of Afro-Asia. But this is the problem that we face. We've got to show them that although we didn't have to really sort of fight it out or slug it out before we got out independence, that just because the British could see where the end result would be if they had slugged it out with us, and decided to give it away to us as against giving it away to the Communists who were quite prepared to slug it out with the British to the end, that doesn't mean that we are not nationalists, we are not people who love our own country, who want our country to succeed, who do not want to be colonies or to be exploited and used by European peoples.

Question: Mr. Prime Ministers, isn't there one other difference? Isn't the presence of British power in Malaysia --Malaysia has brought about a very distinct change in British defence thinking now, Britain having decided first of all, I imagine, to withdraw from Southeast Asia. She's now planting herself down there as a great power once more. Doesn't this frighten off the Afro-Asian States?

Mr. Lee: I shouldn't think so. The point that I think they understood -- I had this task last year, last January, of explaining our position and of the embarrassment of having British troops and British guns and warships and aircraft to defend us -- by putting in quite simply. I said we would prefer to be defended by Asian or African troops. I mean, if India had a mutual defence treaty with us and were able to spare the requisite number of battalions to man the borders, or if the African nations had troops who were prepared to help police the borders, we would be very happy indeed to ask all the British and New Zealand and Australian troops to stay in the cantonments and not be seen outside. You know. Or, a larger number of them could even go back home. Because

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they were a very few before confrontation began. Mind you, the bases were there. The Ordinance Depots, the Stores and the moth-ball fleet. But there weren't the men, because it is expensive keeping men there. But they were there in readiness for an emergency. And Sukarno, President Sukarno and his Government, made that emergency, and brought out the men.

Question: But would you be prepared to see Britain go on using Singapore after the threat of Indonesia has diminished?

Mr. Lee: Well, let's put it in this way. I would be foolish if I believed that Malaysia could survive without a guarantee that in the event of aggression by a bigger power, we could invoke help and speedily receive help.

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Question: You were saying that you are prepared to see Britain go on to use the space more or less indefinitely against all comers, all enemies, all possible enemies. Now, would you be prepared to see Britain use Singapore as a nuclear base?

Mr. Lee: Well, that depends, doesn't it, upon the threat to Malaysia. Let me put it in a different way. I am not opposing the right of the British or any other European power to have bases in Asia. What I am asserting is the right of a small Asian nation like Malaysia having friends and allies who could come to its aid and defence in an emergency. And if it is necessary because it is being threatened by a power with nuclear capacity to have nuclear weapons, well, it's just got to be faced.

Question: Is there any possibility, Mr. Prime Minister, that you could reach some sort of compromise with Sukarno by swapping the British and Australian defending troops for others, perhaps, the Africans as you mentioned previously, or perhaps United Nations?

Mr. Lee: Well, if that were possible, then I think it would -- I don't think it would solve the question, solve confrontation, because that's not the objective of confrontation. But it will make it more difficult for the Indonesians to put over this line

that this is a battle against the neo-colonial and neo-imperialist forces.

Question: It would remove this rationalisation from under his feet?

Mr. Lee: Yes. It will strip off the masquerade.

Question: Now, the other angle, apart from confrontation, that is worrying Australians and all Malaysia's friends I have no doubt is that if Sukarno is fended off, can Malaysia survive then, or is its internal strains going to blow it apart?

Mr. Lee: I don't see how Indonesian pressure can overwhelm Malaysia. They can't do it by guns, they can't do it by economic sanctions and blockades, and all they can hope to do is to generate sufficient political heat, exploiting the differences between the Malays and the non-Malays in Malaysia to help it disintegrate. And really the problem of Malaysia is the problem of keeping 11 million people of diverse racial and cultural origins, keeping them together when overwhelming authority which used to be British is now removed. I mean, are we able as Malaysian -- which means 40 per cent Malays,

40 per cent Chinese, 20 percent Dayaks, Dusuns, Muruts, Indians, Pakistanis, Ceylonese, Eurasians and others -- are we able to constitute by ourselves some authority which will accommodate all these various groups in the country, make them feel that this is their authority, their government, worthwhile listening to, worthwhile leaving their fate in the hands of.

Question: I think one of the necessary things you would have to do before you could do this would be to broaden the base of your political parties so that they went across racial lines.

Mr. Lee: Yes. That's been my constant theme. I don't think Malaysia will survive if it were either a Malay nation or a Chinese nation, or an Indian nation. It's not possible because the composition of the country is such that it's either Malaysia or it will break.

Question: Well, with this in mind, then, this is a reason, is it, for your intervention, the PAP's intervention in the elections on the Malay Peninsula for the first time?

Mr. Lee: One of the reasons, yes. I mean, we had to come in sooner or later. And we fielded a token number of nine out of a total of 104 candidates just to sort of feel our way in.

Question: Yes, will this now prompt many of the leaders in the Malaya, in the UMNO and the other Malay big-wigs to a right old song and dance, didn't it? So do they disagree with you about the need for making parties go across racial lines, or . . .  
...

Mr. Lee: Oh, yes, yes. They disagreed with us and they still disagree with us. I mean, they believe that the way to run Malaysia is to have all Malays in one party together in communally segregated parties, and then all the Chinese in theory anyway are supposed to form another party, and all the Indians form a third party. And as for the others, the Dayaks, Dusuns, Kadazana, and Eurasians -- well, I mean, I don't know. They've got to find a place somewhere in one of these three parties . . . . .

Question: Well, what is the rationale for this. I mean, it seems plain to me that what the Malays say, what you say is what they say . . . . .

Mr. Lee: No, no, no. This is what they are saying. I'm not saying it. I think this is all madness. You know, it can't succeed.

Question: Well, it seems so plainly to be silly, one wonders why they stick to it. Why do they think it can work?

Mr. Lee: Well, it's worked in Malaya, you see, because although the Malays were only 50 per cent of the population of Malaya in the old peninsula, they were 65 per cent of the votes. And whoever got the majority of those votes automatically controlled the country. So it was in their interests to keep the Malays separate. But I don't think this will work in Malaysia. It's too big. The thing is against three dimensions, now. You know.

Question: Mr. Prime Minister, one of the difficult things in Australia to determine is the strength of Malaysian nationalism. The usual

thing is to say that confrontation is producing a national identity among the Chinese, the Malays and the Indians. But how true is this?

Mr. Lee: I think it's been exaggerated a lot. Confrontation does bring home the realisation of the dangers that surround us in Southeast Asia. But at the same time, confrontation is accentuating the conflicts internally, the conflicts between those who believe that Malaysia should be a Malay nation, and those who believe that Malaysia should be a Malaysian nation. You see, there's a group that believes that the way to beat confrontation is to have a Malay nation created which can appeal to the Malays more than Indonesia can appeal to the Malays more than Indonesia can appeal to the Malays. Well, if they carry the day and they really carry on this policy, then I think Malaysia will fail. Because you can't beat Sukarno on the basis of who is the bigger Malay leader, or who can build the bigger Malay society. Because he's got 95 out of 103 million who are Malays and Malaysia's got only 4 1/2 out of 11 million who are Malays.

Question: You must know, Mr. Prime Minister, that there's been a lot of sniping at you while you've been away in Australia in Malaya newspaper editorials and David Marshall, for instance has been having shots, the basis of this being that you're running around here doing a bit of personal image-building and generally pushing Singapore's and your own barrow rather than Malaysia's. What do you say to this?

Mr. Lee: Well, I would be dishonest if I didn't admit that I came to Australia because I wanted to know about Australia and educate myself in the process, get the Australians to see Malaysia and the problems of Malaysia. And what I think Australians should see if they are not going to make the mistake of the Americans in South Vietnam. I mean, if Australians as a people understand the dangers of just blindly backing a particular regime as the Americans were made to appear in South Vietnam, just backing Ngo Dinh Diem and after 8, 9 years they've had to have him destroyed, and then they were left with nothing. I mean, Australians need never be put into that position. What I say you should back is Malaysia; the right of self-determination of 11 million

Malaysians. Not any particular Government, not any particular leader. I'm not asking Australians to back me, my party, my colleagues, or the Federal Government. I'm saying, back the elected Government of the country. And that's a pretty sound basis on which to assist Malaysia.

Questioner: Thank you very much indeed, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore.

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