

**TRANSCRIPT OF TELEVISION AND RADIO PRESS  
CONFERENCE OF THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW,  
WITH NEVILLE PETERSEN OF THE ABC AND GARRY BARKER OF  
THE 'MELBOURNE HERALD' RECORDED ON 9TH APRIL, 1965.**

*Petersen:* Good evening. My name is Neville Petersen from the Australian Broadcasting Commission. In the studio this evening is the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew and I'm going to ask him some questions about his recent visit to Australia and so is Garry Barker from the *Melbourne Herald*. Mr. Lee, one leading Australian weekly after your visit said that you'd made the deepest impression any Asian visitor had ever made to Australia. How do you account for this?

*Mr. Lee:* I don't know. I don't know whether I've made a deep impression. It's very kind of the magazine to say so but my visit was fairly brief. I mean, about two-and-a-half weeks, about 20 days for a pretty big continent. I would say that partly, the interest was aroused because of the time of the visit, coinciding with Australian troops in Borneo and one Australian being killed and an awareness that this involvement may well be a long-term one.

*Petersen:* I think you said that Australian troops might be in Malaysia for 20 years.

*Mr. Lee:* No. I was reported to have said that. The question arose in this way. Someone asked me at a meeting in Canberra how long Australian troops would be required in Malaysia and I said, well, it's very difficult to look into the future but I can't imagine that we would be able to have European troops permanently stationed on Asian territory forever and ever. I mean, it's very difficult to explain it internationally for me, an Asian, to have a big burly Australian

holding the gun, looking over my shoulder, protecting me. I should imagine that we should not be able to develop a capacity to defend ourselves on our own for a long while yet; it might go on for five, ten, fifteen, twenty years. That was my answer and of course they dropped the five and took twenty.

**Barker:** You said in Australia, in Melbourne I think it was, that you would prefer to have Afro-Asian troops guarding the Malaysian borders. What, basically, do you think is the difference between having Australian defenders, an Australian battalion which is in a geographic sense men from this area, and having, say, somebody from Nairobi or the Kenya Rifles. Where is the difference?

**Mr. Lee:** Well, surely the differences lie in men's attitudes and men outside the European bloc. You know, Australians are geographically in the Pacific, in this area but they are also known to be Europeans, or people of European stock. Not unnaturally in the non-European world, this is just one group, I mean, the European races. The race with all the modern weapons of war, the race that's been squatting over the rest of Asia and Africa for the last two, three hundred years. And if we want to counter Indonesian allegations that we are in fact a puppet regime created for the purposes of Britain's, America's, Australia's, New Zealand's military and economic interests, then we should try and broaden the association. Not just with Europeans supporting us, but with non-Europeans also, preferably Afro-Asians. If we could get some Afro-Asians to come and, say, man our boundaries to see that we don't attack Indonesia and also that Indonesia doesn't attack us, I think it will be all to the good. Then, all the Australia soldiers can withdraw to their camps at Terendak in Malacca and not be shot at and killed and the world will be that much happier.

**Petersen:** Well, this being so, what then would you say was the future of these displaced European personnel which is roughly what we are? We belong in the

North Atlantic, probably. What is the future of us as an appendage to Asia?  
Having been there, where do you think we fit in?

*Mr. Lee:* It's a subject that fascinated me, you know, as I went through New Zealand and Australia. I'd read about it. I read about Australia and New Zealand and I've read about the people. The thoughts that passed through my mind as I watched it, there were territories which but for the Europeans would still be having Maoris and Australian aborigines, and there won't be apples and pears and wheat, and sheep and cattle. There also wouldn't be rabbits. There would be lots of kangaroos. They weren't there 200 years ago and so was I not, or my ancestors, not here in Singapore. It is a problem which I think I understand because I am in a not dissimilar position.

One hundred and fifty years ago when Stamford Raffles came here, there were one or two fishing villages. Today, you've got a modern metropolis, the biggest in Asia, on the continent of Asia, with the highest standard of living. I think my forefathers didn't do it just to create this. I mean, they did it for themselves. They sweated and so did lots of other Chinese and Indians and others came in and sweated to build this place up. The thought that struck me is, what will be there in 200 years' time? Will I be here? While you are asking me, will you be in Australia in 200 years' time? And frankly, I say yes. Because I think the Australian is becoming a different person. He's not just an Englishman or a Britisher, there's an Australian personality emerging. He's realising that he's different from the British, that he's got interests which are different from the British, that in extremities he'll have to fend for himself. And he is. He's throwing out lifelines elsewhere, militarily to America, economically to Japan and Southeast Asia. They don't want to sell all their wool and beef and mutton to Britain and the thought that also passed through my mind was this. That if anybody, having built this in Singapore—and this is ours, you know, we built this—and if anybody, whether from Indonesia or anywhere else, thinks that he's

going to come here and take it over and take it away from me, then I say it will have to be over my dead body. And before I'm dead, a lot of other things would have happened. And if eventually I am to die, then I think this place would be razed to the ground. And if I feel like that, then I think Australians must feel likewise. I saw Sydney, I saw Melbourne. There weren't these places before. I mean, these are modern cities with all the amenities of a modern civilised community. And if people think that all they've got to do is Indonesians land in canoes and march up to Melbourne and take over all the people in Melbourne, just bow down deeply and say, 'Yes, here you are. There are 103 million of you, you can take this over', I think they are greatly mistaken. In the same way as I feel passionately about what we have built in Singapore and in the rest of Malaysia, similarly, I think the Australians cannot but feel likewise and they will defend what they've got.

**Petersen:** Did you find any misconceptions about overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia? The feeling that they may have been more orientated to Peking than to their own countries?

**Mr. Lee:** Well, yes. It's inevitable. I don't think it will be dispelled for a very long while. I mean, the Chinese—the first question I was asked in Canberra in an interview was, 'Well, as a Chinese, what is your feeling...?' this, that and the other. Well, my question was, 'Are you an Englishman?' And he said, no, he was an Australian. And I said, 'Well, if you are an Australian, then I am a Malaysian'. You see, I am more Malaysian than that interviewer was Australian because, I've cut my links with China; he's probably still in contact with his relatives in Britain. He speaks the English language. Well, I speak the Chinese language but I speak the English and the Malay languages too. And he, this Australian, spoke nothing but English so, if he's become a different person, so have the Chinese in Malaysia become. And I think that is about the only way to salvation. If you treat the Chinese in Malaysia as Chinese and not as

Malaysians, then you'll have a lot of—by you I mean the people who will do these things—they'll have a lot to be sorry for in about 10, 15, 20, 25 years. Because you treat a people as different and they will stay different. Then, they don't integrate and there's a very big problem in Southeast Asia.

**Petersen:** It wasn't long ago, I think, when you were in the opposition here before the PAP came into power, that the Australians might have thought that you were a communist sympathiser or a communist yourself. Were you asked about this in Australia?

**Mr. Lee:** Yes, well, now and again. And I don't know. Probably, some of them still have reservations as to whether I am sufficiently a democrat, you know, sufficiently anti-communist. And I think that's one of the problems we've got to get over to European countries or people of European descent: that the Asian is not interested in being anti-communist. He's interested in being pro-Asian, pro a successful Asia. And insofar as the communists want to thwart such a successful Asia, then he is anti-communist because they are trying to thwart something he is trying to do for himself. But we're not going to thwart the communists just in order that there'll be a democratic West thriving and trading with the rest of Asia on unequal terms. That's not the practice of this.

**Barker:** On roughly that topic, one of your purposes as I understand it in Australia and New Zealand was to meet local socialists and some of the trade union people. A lot of us, the younger generation in these countries, say that the socialists down our way are fighting a battle we won about 20 years ago. Did you find that you were ahead of sort of old-line socialist groups in Australia? Where do you think you can find some sort of common ground between the people here, trade unionists here, and those in Australia?

*Mr. Lee:* I think there's a lot of common ground. I don't think we are ahead of them or that they are ahead of us ideologically speaking but I did get this feeling, that they had a more Australian bias than we have a Malaysian bias. You know, I mean, they are more preoccupied with domestic issues and Australian issues and less actively taking into consideration the whole of the surrounding circumstances, the international situation. I think that's a passing phase because it's probably the result of what, 12 years in opposition.

*Barker:* A long time.

*Mr. Lee:* Well, if they were in charge, after six months all that, all the cobwebs would be swept away because they'll have to face some agonising problems about Southeast Asia to begin with. But, mind you, there's a lot in their view that they've got to make quite sure what they are supporting, what they are committing Australian troops for. I don't say I sympathise but I do understand the views of quite a number of the militant trade union left-wing types I met and the Labour Party types who felt that this committal of Australian troops in Sarawak and in Malaya on some vague, inchoate understanding is something which may involve Australia in a lot of problems if things go wrong. If in the end, they find themselves out on a limb supporting a reactionary, discredited regime, what is Australia's international position? What is their image to the rest of Asia and Africa? And I think it's a fair point of view and one which perhaps, we can help allay by reassuring them that we are also aware of these problems and we don't want to be identified in Afro-Asian minds as stooges and puppets of British and Australians, and New Zealand militarists—if there is such a thing as a New Zealand militarist. And we are doing this for ourselves. And insofar as Australia and New Zealand are prepared to help sustain a democratic government which expresses the will of the people, then I think she's bound to get the sympathy and understanding of other countries in Asia.

**Petersen:** Sir, what kind of association—socialist association—did you have in mind?

**Mr. Lee:** Well, our connections have always been with Britain and so has the Australian Labour Party (ALP). The centre of all things was in London. And we hadn't maintained the same kind of dialogue with the Australian Labour Party as we had with the British Labour Party. You remember 1961, as we were meeting Malaysia, we had Tom Strachey, then shadowing for Commonwealth Affairs for Mr. Gaitskell—he was out here. Then, we had Arthur Bottomly out the following year and we maintained fairly close contact with them over the last decade. Not so much with the Australians because, well, the bus always went the other way. And this time, we felt that we've got to rectify this and we've got more to do with each other in fact than either one of us has with Britain in the long run, in 20 years' time. So, it was an agreeable surprise to find that the secretary-general of the Australian Labour Party was an Englishman whom we knew from the British Labour Party. So, I think we'll keep our lines open with them.

**Petersen:** Did you gain the impression that the Labour Party in Australia might come into power shortly?

**Mr. Lee:** I wouldn't like to be a fortune teller in these things but I should imagine that one of these days, the Australian public would want a change of government.

**Petersen:** Do you think the ALP might be more preoccupied with winning back power in Australia than they are with associating with you at this stage?

**Mr. Lee:** Oh yes. Surely, we are all more interested in our own party fortunes than we are with the fortunes of other parties. But I think being associated with each other would help our own party fortunes. For instance, they would be

better briefed on Malaysia and Southeast Asia and the questions that will be asked in the House in Canberra would be more to the point. And similarly, we will not be without some benefit if they pass over some of their ideas and views and other help to us. I think we're bound to help each other.

**Barker:** People say that New Zealand, where I was born ...

**Mr. Lee:** Were you?

**Barker:** Yes, I'm sort of an insect, you know, I live in Australia and was born in New Zealand. They say that New Zealand is more socialist than Australia and they both appear to be run by what might be the right wing. Did you find that in New Zealand you were closer to the political people than you were perhaps in Australia? Robert Menzies, for example, is no socialist. How did you find the differences between the two?

**Mr. Lee:** Well, first, the society itself. I thought, this is a fleeting impression, I thought the New Zealand society is more classless, I mean, people move up and down classes just meeting people in hotels and in functions. I'll give you an instance. We went into a small town somewhere in North Island—Rotorua or Wairakei or some places like that or Palmerston North—and the mayor had his aldermen or councillors and we had lunch. It was about the best hotel in town and there, two or three tables away, were the drivers who took us there. They were also having lunch and enjoying the speeches being made. I mean, the fact that they were there is not so impressive because there probably wasn't another good hotel in town of the same quality where they could have a good meal. But the way in which they conducted themselves, I mean, this was the thing that came most naturally to them. They were part of the landscape, they were part of the milieu. I don't think it would happen in Britain, I mean, it's unthinkable that half a dozen chauffeurs would go down, say, 'We went down to Henley-on-



Thames for the regatta, and they went down to the poshest local hotel and we went down to the Swan or something', It's unthinkable that you'd have your chauffeurs taking off their caps and putting it on the table and generally enjoying the conversation and joining in the applause. I thought there was less of that in Australia but that is perhaps because I visited places, bigger cities.

**Barker:** Well, there're more economic differences.

**Mr. Lee:** It's a more satisfied society, I would have thought on first impression.

**Barker:** Were you asked any pointed questions on socialism in Singapore? For example, why as a socialist government, you haven't nationalised anything in Singapore?

**Mr. Lee:** Well, I was asked that in private conversation with Australian Labour Party types, left-wing types. And it took some explaining to put them in the picture that this is an entrepot economy and if you start nationalising your import and export business, you'll be nationalising the desks and the paper and the pens and the ink. And the first thing we want to do is to get industries going and that socialism in the end will come to Malaysia, not just to Singapore.

**Barker:** You've obviously, if I may say, made quite a success of this trip. People in our country seem to understand Asian problems and Malaysian problems a great deal more. Do you think that other people from the Malaysian Government, perhaps from the central government, say Dato Albar for example, should possibly go down?

**Mr. Lee:** I think that would do a world of good, both for Australia and for the central government. Because then, Australia will, Australians will know. I think the Commonwealth Government of Australia already knows what this is all about and what they are committing themselves to. But Australians as a whole

will get a vivid impression of what this is all about and form their own opinions accordingly. And equally important from my point of view is that members of the leadership in the government in Malaysia should have a clear impression in the minds of what Australia and New Zealand are supporting—why they are supporting, what they are supporting and where they will opt out. I mean, if this is going to become another Vietnam, I say Australians and New Zealanders are not going to go on. There is no point. And the sooner they realise that, the sooner we're going to have some rational settlement of our problems. If people believe that all they've got to do is be an anti-communist and pro-West government and then the West owes them a living, it will go on with them to the end of the road, well then, there's a lot of problems for us because that's not true.

**Barker:** Did you find on the other side that Australians and New Zealanders generally tend to be a bit insular about Asia and not very well informed? Or did you find understanding?

**Mr. Lee:** I would say that with the opinion-forming groups, political leaders, political commentators, university types who specialise in Southeast Asia, they were very well informed on the minutiae of Malaysian political life as I found out in quite a number of the seminars. They make a point of reading our papers and trying to decipher what it all means.

**Barker:** There is still, do you think, a need for what we might call education between the two sides?

**Mr. Lee:** Yes. I would say there's a big gap between your thinking population—I mean, thinking in the international sense—they are aware of the implication of these international events to Australia and the mass of the people. The mass of the people are, I think, alive to this problem of being fairly naked defence-wise to a populous north and they haven't quite yet deciphered what are the strong

points in the region from their point of view and how they could be strengthened, and finally the whole area stabilised.

**Barker:** That would involve, I suppose, Australia's immigration policy. Did anybody question you about that?

**Mr. Lee:** Yes. They all wanted to ask me what I thought of it and expected me to denounce it roundly and so on but I hadn't come there just to quarrel with Australian immigration policy and as you know, this is not an issue here. We are not thinking of abandoning Malaysia and migrating elsewhere. If we were, then we would get very hot and bothered about the fact that we're being kept out but at this moment, we are more concerned about keeping what we've got. And this is not bad in Southeast Asia. It's worthwhile keeping and building on. Of course, if people wants to chase us away, then as I say, the thinking is not 'Where can I run away to?' but 'Over my dead body!'

**Peterson:** So, just getting back to the question to the central government sending people to Australia, there was a report in an Australian newspaper that the federal government might send people to counter the effects of your visit. What kind of effects do you think they had in mind?

**Mr. Lee:** I don't know, I am amazed. I went out of my way, I thought, to present a broad Malaysian picture. I don't think Australians are interested in our party political squabbles and our problems about the textiles quota and how we decided to take action and then they decided to take away the fruits of our proposed action. They are not interested in these things. They are interested in events in Malaysia insofar as these events will affect Australia. And the rank and file, the man in the street doesn't see the nexus between Singapore textile quota being denied and no economic development leading to unemployment, leading to communist unrest and agitation, leading to subversion. They don't see

that nexus with Australia's security. Well, we leave that to the Ministry of External Affairs. I think they saw the nexus so I didn't have to convert them. They knew what it meant—that if there is no economic development, then all this is a waste of time. I mean, we went into Malaysia for the economic development offered to us and if it doesn't take place, then the *raison d'etre* for Malaysia would have disappeared, whereupon we go back to where we started—instability, more unrest and more adventure which is not the idea of Malaysia.

**Petersen:** So then, very briefly, do you think Australian investors might be a bit scared off by Confrontation? Are they still interested in coming here?

**Mr. Lee:** Oh yes, I would think they are. I spoke to quite a number of them in Sydney and I think in Melbourne. They are cagey and they want to know just how far all this protestation of firmness to defend Malaysia by Australia, New Zealand and the British, how far this will go. I mean, or is this a wasting war in which case, people will cut their losses and their factories will be left behind in Singapore. No, I think after a year or so when they realise that this is part of a wider strategy and that Malaysia must be held, must not be allowed to go under, then their confidence will come up and they will come.

**Petersen:** Thanks very much, sir.

**Barker:** Thank you.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you.

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