

TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH THE PRIME MINISTER,
MR. LEE KUAN YEW, RECORDED AT TV SINGAPURA STUDIOS
ON 13TH AUGUST, 1965.

INTERVIEWER: FRED EMERY, TIMES OF LONDON.

Mr. Emery: Good evening. My name is Fred Emery, and I am from the
TIMES OF LONDON. With me is Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, the
Prime Minister.

Mr. Prime Minister, many of us, I think, in Singapore and
abroad feel that there is something more to the story of the
separation of Singapore from Malaysia that hasn't yet been
told; that this happened perhaps earlier than has been
suggested in another way than has so far been made public.
Can you tell me anything about that?

Prime Minister: Could I put it this way? After the Budget debate last year in
the Federal Parliament, we criticised Mr. Tan Siew Sin's
Budget. We felt that it was making the poor pay for a war to
defend Malaysia, in which the rich have the properties. And

they thought that this was subversion. He lowered income tax in the higher brackets here, put a tax on sugar and diesel oil -- which means the poor pay for it. I mean, lowered the income tax -- which was very mild one of 55 percent on the highest bracket -- he brought it down to 50... They said it was subversion. Well, after that they were, I think, just fed up with us and suggested that we should have a looser arrangement. So we were thinking it over: what kind of looser arrangement was reached.

Mr. Emery: Why did it fall through?

Prime Minister: Well, I think they want their cake and eat it. One of the proposals was that we run everything: we can have the police but the army to be under their control. In other words, we are a colony of Malaysia. You cannot accept that.

Mr. Emery: When did it become clear in your mind that there was no alternative; as you say, that you became convinced by the Tunku?

Prime Minister: Saturday, when I met him.....

Mr. Emery: Not before that?

Prime Minister: No. I could not believe that there could not have been a loosening of the bonds of federation to sort of lessen the friction. I know they do not like our democratic socialism and all our, what they call "hot-house politics." This is a city. It is an international concourse. People pass through from all over the world. You can meet anybody of any worth anywhere in the world; and if you had travelled anywhere in the East, you would have gone and stopped at Singapore. It is, what I would call, sophisticated in a political way. I didn't believe that this is the only solution.

Mr. Emery: And what convinced you, finally?

Prime Minister: I was on holiday at Cameron Highlands... It is up in the hills in Malaya. I went up on Sunday, the 1st of August. I brought up my family for the annual breather. Even a submarine has got to surface and breathe! On Friday, my Finance Minister, Dr. Goh Keng Swee, rang me... He is now Minister for

Defence and Security... He said I have to come down. It was very urgent. So that afternoon, I packed my bag and came down alone, leaving my family up there. I came down that afternoon and arrived at about dinner time.... In Kuala Lumpur, he told me, "This is it."

Mr. Emery: He had been involved for some time, I believe?

Prime Minister: For one or two days.

Mr. Emery: Only as much as that?

Prime Minister: Yes, I think it is... You know, the Tunku is a prince and he makes the decisions; and he came back on Thursday.

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Mr. Emery: But he must have had something pretty powerful with which to convince you against your wishes that this was the only alternative. What was it, in a nutshell?

Prime Minister: I want to maintain cordial relations between Singapore and Malaysia... But, do you know the letter the Tunku has written to....

Mr. Emery: Yes, I have seen it.

Prime Minister: My colleague, Dr. Toh? In a nutshell, the Tunku said to me, "I cannot live forever; and if I am not here, then you will have to face the consequences." And he mentioned the danger and folly of bloodshed and so on. People who do not like me and my colleagues are bound to say that we are cowards; that because we feared for our own safety, our own survival, our own lives, we signed something which we felt was not the right solution. But I was convinced, not on Saturday, the first day I met him; but I was convinced, having spent the whole night with my colleagues -- or a few of my colleagues who were in Kuala Lumpur about to attend Parliament -- that if we went on and there was conflict, it would be on racial lines.....

Mr. Emery: And it was imminent?

Prime Minister: It depended on the Tunku's health,....

Mr. Emery: Can you put a time on it?

Prime Minister: I am not a doctor....

Mr. Emery: Not on his illness - I mean on the conflict? You think the two are closely related?

Prime Minister: I would say myself that the Tunku, so long as he has got the strength, would never allow racial conflict to happen. But if his health... if he got another attack of shingles, for instance, and he was away for two months, then it will take place, and I don't think it will take place just in Singapore alone. I think

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it is pan-Malaysia. And I do not think you could put Humpty Dumpty together again.

Mr. Emery: I have heard another story, and I think I must put the question to you: It is said here in Singapore, by some people, that the Tunku in fact wanted this solution all along irrespective of what was threatening in racial terms; that he basically, no

longer wanted Singapore in the Federation. Will you comment on that?

Prime Minister: I think that is not fair me to comment on. You will have to ask the Tunku.....

Mr. Emery : I will go and ask him....

Prime Minister: My conversations with him on Saturday the 7th and on Sunday the 8th -- I met him only twice... If I am to do business with the Malaysian Government, I think I cannot breach the confidence with which we discussed things.

Mr. Emery : I understand that. The other solution that you have mentioned that was thought of: was it ever suggested to you that you should step down, since you were a personal target of many people on the other side; and did you ever consider it?

Prime Minister: Not this time... The suggestion was put after the last riots in September... I am sorry, first, in July and then the second riots in September, that I should step down and perhaps all would be well. I don't mind stepping down and I told my

colleagues so, provided that this was going to be a Malaysian Malaysia. I am not stepping down to allow this to be some others a kind of Malaysia where some are more equal than others.

Mr. Emery: Was there any split amongst your own colleagues on this kind of things, on this matter of your own position or on the decision to go?

Prime Minister: My colleagues and I have been personal friends and political colleagues for 15, 20 years now, and we have been through fire together... The communists were gunning for us... And you build a camaraderie that these little things cannot break; and they are all thinkers. If I step down, whoever takes my

place to hold the ground, he must be tougher and speak tougher than me. Otherwise, he is a stooge man.

Mr. Emery: So this was not just a conflict of personalities?

Prime Minister: It is not possible... If it were a conflict of personalities, I could catch a cold and go for a holiday. It is very deep and very abiding... Of course, some of the versions put forward in Kuala Lumpur was that I wanted to be Prime Minister of Malaysia, and therefore, a man with overweening ambition who wanted to oust the Tunku and take over and so on.

Mr. Emery: Didn't you want to be Prime Minister of Malaysia one day?

Prime Minister: One day, perhaps, but not for a very long time. We want to bring the races and the states together. It takes time. It would take one generation, I think, for the thing to happen. And we were quite prepared to help them in a secondary capacity. But they didn't want it.

Mr. Emery : This suggests that there may have been other solution some time previously such as a coalition cabinet or this arrangement you were talking about just now: having looser control from the Federation in Singapore. The fact that this time neither the Tunku nor you wished to consult Britain has, I think hurt many people; hurt some of your friends and they do not quite understand it....

Prime Minister: Could I take the question one at a time, because it is about five questions in that? The coalition was noted after we won the Singapore elections in September and before their general elections. But it never came about. They say because we participated in the Malayan elections and, therefore, soured the ground.... We sent nine candidates. We supported UMNO and the Tunku... But in my view, the real reason is this. That once we are taken into a coalition Government, they cannot tell the Malays in the kampongs that the PAP consists of Chinamen who eat Malay babies. Nobody will believe it. Three full years in the central Government -- building houses, community centres, clinics, improving agriculture -- we (will) break through the race line in the kampongs in Malaya, as we have done in Singapore. And there were a number of what they called UMNO strongmen -- the Tunku's party is called UMNO -- who will only be strong if they keep the Malays in the kampongs in segregated herds: You know, language, religion, race, culture. Once you begin to talk about ideas, social progress, economic advance, competition, who can produce the better programme, they

won't lose immediately at all. They want to be there forever.

So the coalition really was a non-starter. That is your first question....

Mr. Emery : Yes... I was trying... any British influence indirect, there may have been on all these decisions...

Prime Minister: I have forgotten your second question now...

Mr. Emery: What I was saying is this. I have heard that coalition way back was possible....

Prime Minister: It was not possible. Looking back now, I know it was never possible because they never intended to allow us to break the radical line in Malaya and be accepted as good Malaysians.

Mr. Emery: The second I was making was this independence, autonomy for the economic decisions in Singapore which was discussed last winter, and I was linking it with your lack of consultation with Britain this time. And I was asking you that the fact that you did not consult Britain: was this conditioned

by things that happened before or have we intervened to....
something?

Prime Minister: No... The looser federation last proposed by them, not by us, by them because we are quite prepared to go on, for one simple reason, we know we must win in the end, not I or my colleagues win, but the ideas and the policies we represent will win, must do, All these antiquated ideas cannot stand the fresh air and open windows of the second half of the 20th century. It is not possible. But it broke down because they wanted their cake and have it. I meant they wanted all these things given to us but they wanted us out of parliament and they keep the army.

Mr. Emery: So that was a non-starter too?

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Prime Minister: No, I mean it is a non-starter. Look, I am out of Parliament. I am not represented. My army such as it is, two battalions and a little navy and one battalion of territorials under their control. We are a colony. At least Britain paid for the regiments to keep us down. But here they wanted us to pay for it. It is too ridiculous for words: The question you put to

me is one which I feel very keenly about because both Mr. Harold Wilson and Mr. Arthur Bottomley are my personal friends. And I am very sorry I could not -- but there was no time to tell them beforehand. The thing was not settled in fact until very late on Sunday because nearly half my cabinet have families who were born and bred in Malaya have families in Malaya -- now still! And to them it was a betrayal of everything we stood for.

Mr. Emery : But why didn't you tell them - Britain, I mean?

Prime Minister: I think the danger of leakage is so great that if we took this to the normal course of legislative processes....

Mr. Emery : I don't mean that. I mean informing them of what was going on?

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Prime Minister It was a Saturday and a Sunday.

Mr. Emery : There was time. But did you feel that they would - I would have thought there was time - did you feel that they would intervene, as I think they would to suggest wait, don't rush it?

Prime Minister: Maybe, I don't know. But there are many reasons. I think myself having met the Tunku on Saturday and knowing -- I mean, I saw him man to man alone, and I had to make decision on what his position was and how long he can hold the situation with Singapore in it. I did not believe that, unless I have Arthur Bottomley in Kuala Lumpur with me and I could tell him face to face, I could never convince him.

Mr. Emery : I am sure you wouldn't have been able to, but I am sure there would have been a delay here?

Prime Minister: Face to face there was a chance. But sending a telegram, he would say. "no, no." You know the proposition is too radical, too fantastic, and if it leaked out, I think there would be riots both in Singapore and in Malaya. The Malays who are minority in Singapore - there were a few extremists in Geylang Serai who would riot. The Chinese who are a minority in Malaya but are not or were not in Malaya, if they knew about it they would riot. So both sides were vulnerable. I was vulnerable because I have small but concentrated group of Malays in Geylang Serai, most of whom are good law-abiding, honest citizens, amongst whom are some Indonesian

agents and religious fanatics and people whom I call UMNO ultras. UMNO is Tunku's party. They would have worked things up to a riot here. The Chinese in Malaya seeing Singapore cut itself adrift, so to speak, from Malaysia...

Mr. Emery: Or was thinking of doing it -- that would have been the kind of thing, wouldn't it?

Prime Minister: They couldn't take it because they would be lost. But I don't think they are. I want to add this. I don't think they are because Malaysia, even now without Singapore is very different from Malaya. There are 50-odd percent non-Malays. Of course, the Chinese are a minority now. They are about 36 per cent. But there are Dayaks, Muruts, Indians, Eurasians, Kadazans, Ibans and so on. They amount to, I think, nearly 55 percent. But to tell them that we are going to Parliament and do this, and I had addressed about probably two to three hundred thousand people in the course of the last two years in Malaya, I couldn't face it. I mean there was going to be trouble the other side too. So we, decided that it had to be done.

Mr. Emery : You preferred swift surgery, if we can call it that?

Prime Minister: Well, if it has to be done then with as little pain and suffering as possible.

Mr. Emery: You mentioned this problem of the non-Malays in Malaysia. I want to ask you now, since you said you have got to live with the Tunku, don't you think that under the circumstances, the present circumstances, your relationship with Malaysia, that your expressed support for the PAP Malaysia, the Malaysia Solidarity Convention, and this idea of "Don't worry we shall be back; our hearts are with you; it is not too far away;" -- don't you think that now realistically, this is sailing too close to the wind? In the sense that you are going to, by saying this, exacerbate feelings with Malaysia?

Prime Minister: No. Tunku sent his man, the Chief Minister of Malacca, Ghafar Baba to Singapore on Monday evening to speak to his own UMNO chaps, and there are a few ultras amongst them -- Syeds and Datos and so on; I don't know if you know

what they mean... Syeds are the descendants of the Prophet and Datos are people who are equivalent of, shall we say, a little knight. Let me put it like this. He sent his man here to try and keep them from sinking so low that they will blow up. Surely I have got to keep my chaps, or what were my chaps, sufficiently in good heart not to blow up. And as for coming together, I say this and I will always say this: this is an artificial separation. It goes against geography. It goes against history. It goes against economics. It goes against demography. There are blood ties, kinship which cannot be cut off just by legislation. It will come together but under very different circumstances and in a very different form because I don't think Singapore, after the experience of the last two years, will ever -- though we have all the large area of autonomy -- Singapore will not go back without cast iron guarantees. But I think it will come back. There is no choice.

Mr. Emery: Yes, but do you think now in this present situation, it will help matters if you, as a statesman, keep on saying so and giving encouragement to your people like Mr. Devan Nair and so on? I mean now they are foreigners. It is very

difficult to draw the line between where fraternal party support ends and active organisational help begins.....

Prime Minister: I have never in my political life ever uttered a political falsehood. I never say something that I know is false and untrue. I know that this separation cannot last forever.

The nexus is too close . That is the first point. Secondly we are human beings. We are not machines. Half my mind is calculating. Because I was calculating and my colleagues also were like that. We all have little computers. We said all right, lesser of the two evils. They had to pack Kuala Lumpur on the 31st of July. We signed on the 8th of August. Eight days ago, I was at the Kuala Lumpur PAP branch annual dinner. I let them down. I did not tell them. We are human beings and this is a farewell or rather, au revoir.

Mr. Emery: Are the farewell celebrations, so to speak, now over, so that we can look forward to a period of calm?

Prime Minister: At least we must say, "God bless you." "Good luck." You want me to say, "Close down?"

Mr. Emery: No, I didn't suggest that

Prime Minister: Even if I said to Devan Nair, "Don't go, stay in Singapore" which I did not, do you think he will stay in Singapore? He is a man of enormous courage and I can do, as a human being and as a political comrade is to wish him good luck. He is not a fool and I am not a fool. And if the Tunku goes, he may be in for some trouble or more than some trouble.

Mr. Emery: This is why I suggested. I asked you whether you thought that not the time had come to quiet down? Let me put it that way. I am asking this

Prime Minister: Is this not the time, now that the Tunku has got what he wanted, that five other people, at least five I can think of, like Ja'afar Albar, I am sorry, Dato, not the time that they should also gracefully retire and let the sane thinking, educated man be in charge, instead culture, race? Surely, either they take a stand now, or the five will work quietly in the course of the next two years and Dato Syed Ja'afar Albar will be back; and if Dato Syed Ja'afar Albar is back and the Tunku has retired, I

think, Mr. Devan Nair and my PAP comrade or my former comrades, they are now foreigners to me, they are going to face some difficulties. We are brought up in a hard school, having had to fight for our lives against the communists. But we are human beings and we know that they are human beings too. They are making a very courageous decision which I think is good for Malaysia, because if they succeed, as I hope they do, the door will be open again. You have seen what Sabah leaders have said

Mr. Emery: Yes, I have.

Prime Minister: You have read them. You have read the Chief Minister of Sabah, Peter Lo? He is cornered, isn't he without Singapore?

You have read Mr. Sundang, one of the Ministers? He is also grieved and fearful. I have received a letter from one of the Borneo Ministers, almost tearful. In a way, we let them down because we are all right; two million Singaporeans are all right for the time being.. But we have weakened their positions. But I had no choice.

Mr. Emery: May I change the subject rather abruptly, I am sorry, to ask you about the British bases here?

Prime Minister: Yes

Mr. Emery: Some people think that some how, in spite of what you have said so far, you are not keen on having the bases. Can you tell me how keen are you on having the bases? And how long do you think you are going to have them? And the other question is, don't they, in a sense, embarrass your position, your wish to have a posture of non-alignment?

Prime Minister: This is not a posture. This is something we feel, and is part of our make-up. We are a little bit different from people in the alliance government in Malaysia. They believe the British wanted to give up their base in Singapore. And we joined forces with everybody to fight amongst the forces we joined were the Communists, and we were nearly eaten up by them very nearly. 1961 was the razor's edge. The coin could have dropped the other way. In fact, many people didn't give us half a chance. But as it so happened, they were so stupid. They went against national feeling, national sentiment. Now

they are isolated. They are identified with Indonesian terrorists whom they lead in, and so for five, ten years, the bases. I am keen about Singapore's survival, my own fellow countrymen's survival. I am sorry if I put it bluntly -- I am keen about Britain's power position, and using this base as a bargaining point with America.

Britain defends this part, therefore, Britain's voice is heard in Europe and so on. It doesn't concern me. I get no benefit out of it. I had trouble even exporting some simple shirts and other textiles to Britain. Let us be quite frank. Your conservative M.P. recently raised a howl about textiles from Singapore, again. Yes, friendship and all that. But he has got his constituents to look after. And I have got mine and I

happen to feel very strongly about the survival and the future of my own fellow countrymen. And it so happens that I cannot survive without the bases. So I am as keen about the bases as I am keen about the survival of my fellow countrymen. To put it bluntly: If tomorrow, I become like the kingdom of Kuwait and I could have ground-to-air missiles of my own, and I get all the latest equipment to

prevent 400,000 Indonesian troops who are not only hungry but also worked up, everyday worked up. They have got a very powerful orator in their President who keeps them up. They are hungry, so he has got to boost their morale.

Mr. Emery: Do you consider yourself still in confrontation with them in spite of what they say?

Mr. Lee: No, I would like to believe that. Dr. Subandrio meant what he said that the confrontation is against Malaysia; and since Malaysia does not include Singapore, therefore, there is no confrontation with Singapore. But, nevertheless, it may be that, you know, structure is a bit complicated and delayed, and before they can reach their forward bases you know, their forward bases are just about five miles outside our territorial waters. And if the command does not reach them, and tomorrow I have another bomb outside my office. There was a bomb put outside the American Consulate, and the Australian High Commission was blown up. It is all very sad and bad for public morale and bad for business. But if I have one placed outside my office I am alright because I am pretty

secured, but my staff and officers have got to carry a risk:
and so I think we remain vigilant.

Mr. Emery: Well, that's clear too. You have talked this week and so has your foreign minister, Mr. Rajaratnam - about the possibility of waiting and seeing what Indonesia wants, how they are going to clarify their position. Now, my question is this: Do you think it is possible, realistically -- I keep using the word realistically because I think you do.

Mr. Lee: We are realistic ... realists ...

Mr. Emery: Do you think it's possible for you to have any kind of relationship with Indonesia without the Malaysian Government believing that you are up to some mischief?

Mr. Lee: No, I do not think that is necessarily so because I have made it clear in my very first statement on this. The first question, I cannot remember who asked me, I think an Indian journalist who came here, asked me: "Am I going to settle with Indonesia?" Which is more important to Singapore Malaysia

or Indonesia? I am putting it now again in terms of what
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people who are cynical call "real politics." Which is more important: Indonesia or Malaysia? And I say Malaysia happens to be more important. I will tell you why.

I have got more trade with Malaysia than I have with Indonesia; with Malaysia it is 24% with Indonesia it is 20 and I have lost that 20% any way with their confrontation and their boycott. But more important: I have got two pipelines carrying water to Singapore. Every time we open the tap, three-quarters of water comes from two rivers in Johore, two reservoirs in Johore and only one quarter comes from the reservoirs in Singapore. So if Malaysia were to fall into the hands of a regime or a group which is hostile to Singapore, then I think Singapore will be a very difficult place to live in because I am not saying we are finished: people fight to the end and we intend to fight to the end. We now talk real politics.

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Mr. Emery:

My question was:- can you have any relationship with

Indonesia without Malaysia feeling that you are up to mischief? I know that your prime regard is with Malaysia.

Therefore, it would seem to me that it was impossible for you to have any kind of....

Mr. Lee: No, no ... You know that is the trouble with the British. You always want to have things your way.

Mr. Emery: No ...

Mr. Lee: You want me to carry on being anti the Indonesians.

Mr. Emery: I don't.

Mr. Lee: I have never been anti the Indonesians. Confrontation was forced on us ...

Mr. Emery: I am asking you a realistic question about foreign policy.

Mr. Lee: Yes, And I am telling you and Malaysian Government already knows that we have got a firm guarantee of water. And the guarantee on water depends upon a Government which, at least is not hostile to Singapore. If I get a Government which is hostile to Singapore, we will have to dig wells, boil water, bathe once a week but we will still live. I do not want anybody to blackmail us on this. We have thought one step

further just in case people think why not now that they need this water, we "up" the price... (we are paying them three cents per thousand gallons) and make it 30 cents.

...

Mr. Emery: Has there been any....

Mr. Lee: No, no There is no such things. The Tunku has signed, and as long as the Tunku and his immediate colleagues are in charge, they will be honoured as I will honour our obligations on joint defence.

Mr. Emery: Well, that is very clear.

Mr. Lee: Is there any harm our finding out from the Indonesians that it is not possible to find some kind of an agreement which will resolve the conflict not only between Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula, but also between Indonesia and Sabah and Sarawak, between Malaysia?

Mr. Emery: Do you think that's a possibility?

Mr. Lee: You know.

Mr. Emery: I think it is good if you

Mr. Lee: I have a great admiration for Mr. Harold Wilson's turn of phrase. He was asked about Patrick Gordon Walker's going Peking and Hanoi. And he said, "The thing about dealing with such difficult problems is never to take "No" for an answer" And I am not going to take "No" for an answer: I am going to try and try and try. You can have short-term gains. They are already trying, you know., May be it is coincidental: a few Indonesian sampans ... people who have heard the radio: no konfrontasi against Singapore, they have come in with vegetables. They will come in next with rubber, and there is money to be made 20% of our trade may be resumed. This is a very big temptation. But, I have to calculate not for tomorrow and the day after tomorrow I am responsible for this: I am rooted to this country I have got nowhere to run away to neither has my colleagues. I have given three hostages to fortune: three children born and bred

here they will not fit anywhere else in the world. And I am calculating in terms of 50 to 100 years. And I say, less than 50 years, this will come together again. But we have got to be patient and we have got to be firm.

Mr. Emery: Mr. Prime Minister, my last question is about your wider foreign policy in this. You are closest of all to Indonesia. Do you find any.

Mr. Lee: No, no. I am closest of all to Malaysia.

Mr. Emery: I beg your pardon, geographically.

Mr. Lee: There is a Causeway which is only one mile long and half of that one mile belongs to us, the other half belongs to Malaysia. Indonesia is not our closest neighbour.

Mr. Emery: Indonesia has come up with lots of ideas in the past few years about world policy in general, and they seem to have found some community of interest with the Communist Chinese, particularly in their ideas of national revolution and New

Emerging Forces. What do you think about that, in a nutshell?

Mr. Lee : Before I express any comment on that, I would like to find out from them whether they classify me under New Emerging Forces or under Old Dying Forces.

Mr. Emery : They haven't given you any indications yet?

Mr. Lee : No, no. I think they are doing their calculations now, When they have declared their verdict, then I will be able to tell you what I think about it. If they classify me under what they call "OLDEFOS" i.e. " Old Dying Forces", then I think there is something wrong with their computer because you know, my colleagues and I are all in our forties; some of us are in our thirties. The expectation of life in Singapore is the highest in Asia because we happen to have the highest public health standards and medical facilities. So, if we are not "OLDEFOS", we are NEFOS", well then, it is worthwhile talking. And that is not for me to decide; it is for them. But I would like to assure them that I am in no danger of dropping any senile decay.

Everyone, no one beyond 50, some under 30; and we will probably outlive quite a number of them; and not only in age, but in ideas.

Mr. Emery : Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister.

Mr. Lee : Thank you.

13th August 1965.

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