

TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
MR. LEE KUAN YEW, TO FOUR FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS ON
AUGUST 14,1965, AT THE STUDIOS OF TELEVISION SINGAPURA.

The Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, will be interviewed by four correspondents. My name is Richard Croll from Channel 7 in Sydney.

My name is Sam Lipski from the Australian Bulletin; Gavin Young, I am from the London Observer.

My name is Rene Muccoll, Chief Foreign Correspondent of the London Daily Express.

Mr. Croll: Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, Tengku Abdul Rahman has said that you

were pleased and wanted to get out of the Federation. And yet in your last Monday's press conference you broke down.

Where, would you say, the truth lies?

Mr. Lee : Did the Tengku say I was pleased?

Mr. Croll : He said this yesterday.

Mr. Lee : Where?

Mr. Croll : He said you wanted to get out and that you are pleased to get out.

Mr. Lee : No, no, no. I haven't seen it in the press.

Mr. Croll : He said this at a press conference yesterday in Kuala Lumpur.

Mr. Lee : Well, I am sorry to hear that because I do not want to believe that the Tengku would utter something which is not truth.

Mr. Croll : His actual words were.

Mr. Lee : He knows my positions; and he knew how close it came to a real collision because my colleagues were not prepared to give way. You know, half my Cabinet were born and bred in Malaya. Their families are there. You mean to tell me you can abandon them like that? And they are abandoned now. They are foreigners now. My colleagues fought with me against the Communists. What for? To bring Singapore into

Malaya in order to lift up Malaya: bring fresh air, social development, economic development. I am not saying it is all purely personal, that is just because they have got their families there. But they were born, bred, rooted there. They just happened to have come down to Singapore which was the biggest city in South-East Asia. And they made a living here and they finally became ministers here. You think you can face your Cabinet colleagues. Let me put it in another way. Supposing Mr. Menzies were presented with an ultimatum by the American President that either Victoria gets out or the ANZUS pact is not valid. You think Mr. Menzies will be pleased and happy? It is easier for me. My family is here; born, bred, there; their families still there. How do they face their families? And they signed, you know. And I would not have signed unless they all signed. I am not the Tengku, I am not a prince. I cannot just sign it, and they signed with the utmost reluctance. And for them, when they look back at that moment, it will be a moment of anguish. It is going back on everything we fought for and believed in. And I do not care what nobody else says.

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Mr. Croll : Mr. Lee, were there any reasonable alternatives that the other members of your cabinet put forward at the time that looked as if they had a chance, other than complete secession?

Mr. Lee : I met the Tengku on Saturday, the 7th at half-past 12. I remember it distinctly. The appointment was supposed to be at 12 o'clock. I arrived. I waited for him for half an hour. Some of his ministers were there. We talked little nothings. He came and we went to a separate room. I said, "Tengku, is there no other way?

Why not loosen it into a confederation? Give me common market. We will run all our activities ourselves. We will go slow in the rest of Malaysia. Give me common market; give me the right to take initiative in security matters so that the communists cannot start riots in Singapore, and we carry on in Malaysia slowly: take it in 20, 30 years. And he said, "No". I said, "My colleagues, Dr. Toh?" Dr. Toh was born and bred in Taiping; his family is there. Every year, he does a bi-annual pilgrimage. You know, Chinese families have reunions: Chinese New Year and some other moon festivals.

Dr. Toh is not going to say "Yes". For two million people moving forward faster and quicker, we abandoned eight million people; abandoned them and left them in a slow and sluggish situation. And the Tengku did not want to see Dr. Toh . But he wrote Dr. Toh that letter and Dr. Toh did not reply. One whole night we sat down and argued. It is all over. Never mind about that. We will talk about that later on. It is part of the history now of South-East Asia.

Mr. Croll : There seems to be some contradiction here though, Sir. And is it a fact, for instance, that Dato Ja'afar Albar wanted to suspend the Constitution and rule by edict and possibly to jail you. And in fact that the alternative that was suggested was either that you resign from here or separation?

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Mr. Lee : Well, those who are unkind, those who do not like us will say that my colleagues and I were afraid for our personal safety and freedom and therefore we signed. But amongst my colleagues are quite a number who have been to British jails. Mr. Jek, for instance, Mr. Devan Nair. I do not think they are

afraid of going to jail. But we sat down and calculated that if the Tengku really could not keep his ultras down. Going to jail means I became a martyr. I must come out. Mr. Wilson who is a personal friend cannot see me languishing in jail for ever. I do not think Mr. Menzies, even though his political orientation is different from mine but he is a human being, he knew that we were fighting for something which was valuable for Australia. He cannot see me languishing in jail. In one or two years, I would have come out.

Question : This was the alternative then that was given.

Mr. Lee : No, no, ,no.

Question : Is it what Dato Ja'afar Albar wanted?

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Mr. Lee : Well, of course, that was what he wanted, isn't it? The man cannot think beyond the next election.

Question : The Tengku said yesterday that he was in control, sir, and in his letter he said he wasn't. Where do you think, the truth lies there?

Mr. Lee : No, it is not fair. You had better ask the Tengku. As far as I am concerned, I hope he is in. Syed Ja'afar Albar, now that he is out, I hope the Tengku will ensure that. There are five others, you know, with Albar. And if the Tengku wants to make sure that Malaysia, even though it has not got Singapore, I think these five should become ambassadors or ... There are very good jobs and important jobs like compiling dictionaries for those interested in language, anthology of Malay poetry and so on. But you keep on pushing this around, I do not think the people in Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak are going to keep quiet just because the PAP is out. They cannot. Human beings. You know Shakespears? The seven stages of man. And a lot of the people leading political parties are in that stages where they are no longer interested in fame and glories. They are interested in the future and what place their progeny will have in Malaysia. And they must fight.

Mr. Croll : Sir, the Tengku has said he wanted utmost secrecy and that he feared bloodshed. Now, is that the reason why you went

along with him from the secrecy point point of view? Did you fear bloodshed?

Mr. Lee : Yes, surely.

Mr. Croll : Did you fear that troops would be sent down?

Mr. Lee : No, no, no. Not that troops would be sent down.

Mr. Croll : Or that it would be a matter that they would possibly try and take over the government here and

Mr. Lee : No. We are not afraid of that. Let us say that they take over the Government and rule by edict. Right? Some of my

colleagues will be away. We will have a government in exile.

We were prepared for that. Prince Sihanouk is a very personal friend of mine and Phnom Penh is very close to Malaysia. I would be in jail because I cannot run away. But quite a number of my colleagues who have got international contacts could run a much, more effective campaign than the Indonesians and the Communists ever can. But I tell you

what deterred us: that in a moment of anger, race conflict takes place in Singapore. The Malays here are in a minority. The Chinese thinking that well, if this is it, to hell with constitutionalism, they will beat up some completely innocent people who have nothing to do with this. Troops come down; Malay troops come down, shoot the Chinese. Do you think it stays just in Singapore or do you think it spreads throughout Malaysia? If I believed that we could go jail. Then telegrams -- Socialist International, British Labour Party -- passed all over the place; and we come out and find Malaysia is still one whole. Then we would come out with a medal, isn't it? But I do not think we would have come out to Malaysia which was in one piece. You have got to calculate. I may be wrong. It may be that Singapore consists of docile people who could be cowed and brutalised into submission. But I don't think they could have. My estimation was that they would really give vent to their feelings. And if this spreads across the Causeway, the Tengku will have had it, too; because in that situation, the gentle, the charming, the soft-spoken leader has no place. And I want the Tengku to be there because I happen to believe -- not because I like him -- but I happen to

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believe that there is a little bit more chance of holding the multi-racial situation together with him in charge.

Mr. Croll : Mr. Prime Minister, we've dealt with the problem of separation and what would happen if you went to jail. But what about the situation if you personally were to resign? Do you think that would have helped the attitude between Singapore and Malaya? Do you think it would have made it any better? Kept the Federation together?

Mr. Lee : After the riots last year they said that if I resigned there would be better co-operation. I told my colleagues if there's going to be co-operation in Singapore and Malaysia will prosper, let's do it that way. I was even prepared to serve under Dr. Toh. And my colleagues, they've all got a little calculation. They don't play the thing by ear, take a stick or drop sand and read the palm. I resign, whoever takes my place, whether it is Dr. Toh or Dr. Goh, will have to prove that he's not a stooge-man. And to do that he'll have to take a very firm line. In fact, much firmer, much harder, not just an apparently firm line but

concessions and a real hard line. And they decide it could not work.

Mr. Croll : And did you agree with this?

Mr. Lee : I think that's right. You see, Singapore knows all of us. We've been looking after Singapore now for nearly seven years. They know us as a very closely-knit group. They also know the individual idiosyncracies or differences of style between the ministers. I do not think Singapore would believe that I resigned because I wanted to go back to the Law and make money.

Question : Then it was suggested , Sir, that you do resign, and you rejected this?

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Mr. Lee : No, no. I didn't reject this. I was prepared to resign. But my colleagues could not accept it because they would be a worse position. Mr. Tan Siew Sin openly said in Parliament that there can be no co-operation with Singapore as long as I am the Prime Minister of Singapore. Now this was said openly

in Parliament. Do you think if I resigned, Singapore would believe that there would be co-operation, or that the former Central Government which has had its way and now have has got its way (in this separation) that they would keep quiet in the situation?

Mr. Young : About the future of Singapore, Sir, as long as confrontation continues, Singapore's economy suffers. If confrontation does continue, how do you feel Singapore's economy can be assured?

Mr. Lee : Singapore has a very resilient, enterprising and resourceful lot of people. Everybody thought and perhaps the Indonesians might have thought that if they cut us off their trade, chaos would be out in the streets hungry and riot and so on. But it never happened because they've got a great deal of grit and the will to survive and to work hard. We'll carry on. We'll survive,

Mr. Young : What do you think the chances are now, Sir, for the common market idea between Singapore and Malaysia?

Mr. Lee : Well, you know what the Agreement says. Annex 'J' which were the provisions for a common market, has been cancelled. It was at Mr. Tan Siew Sin's personal insistence that clause be inserted in the Agreement. But the Tengku agreed to a clause that there will be either a joint council or Committee for economic co-operation. I've told the Tengku that without economic co-operation, there will be growing troubles in Singapore. Boys and girls pressing out from schools, more than there are jobs for them. And the situation would be a bit less stable, a bit more volatile, and the bases will be that much more rickety. The whole thing is interwoven. I was glad that the Tengku assured me that he understood very clearly that there was a clear nexus between defence and security, and commerce or trade and industry.

But we'll have to go slow. There must be a thaw first, because over the last one and a half years so many things have happened: attitudes have sort of hardened. We just want to take it easy for a while, and common sense, logic, the relentlessness of economics, must prevail.

Mr. Croll : What will happen then, Sir, with tariffs on rubber coming across the border? What will happen if Malaya goes ahead with its idea of this steelworks which they have been considering.

Mr. Lee : Tariffs on rubber?

Mr. Croll : Yes. What then would happen if tyres and things and tariffs at the border?

Mr. Lee : No, no, no. Let's get this clear. They have no seaport that can export their rubber.

The bulk of their rubber is exported via the Singapore harbour

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by rail or road to Tanjong Pagar by ship all over the world.

They've got Port Swettenham. They're going to expand it.

They've got Prai. Their geography - you can't change this.

Stamford Raffles chose Singapore. Why? It is the

southernmost tip of Asia, and the world spins from West to

East , and as it does that, the waters of the Pacific wash the

shores of Singapore and the Straits of Johore and we've got

three natural harbours comparable to any in the world:

Tanjong Pagar, Jurong now for the industrial site, the Naval Base which the Malaysian Navy must still use because they haven't got a harbour for their craft and we've agreed that they will use it. So if somebody is mad enough to say "We won't export through Singapore" then the rubber will pile up in Port Swettenham and Prai, and there is no use tapping rubber trees.

As for rubber trees, we can sort it out. They've got Dunlop's in Kuala Lumpur. And Dunlop's comes to Singapore free.

We are what I would call kind and easy without paying duty. Do you think that's fair? Well, if you don't want to buy any of our Bridgestone only, and not Dunlop's, that's fair

enough. I don't know how long it will take to percolate down to their officials, because really a lot of these problems are created by what I would call just petty officialese cussedness.

Mr. Croll : Would you say, Sir, that Indonesian trade with you is worth four hundred million a year approximately, if the total was eight hundred million before? And would you say that there

has been a flow of liquidity from Singapore over the last six months? And therefore, would you try and re-open trade with Indonesia in spite of the Tengku's remark that it this would be a hostile act and something would have to be done?

Mr. Lee : No, no. You're asking me several questions. Let's get it one at a time.

The trade with Indonesia amounted to only 20 percent of our total entreport trade. Remember that. It is not Indonesia alone which makes Singapore tick. It's just one part, one fifth, and that one fifth ships have been diverted to Sihanoukville to Bangkok, to other places, doing other trade and to Sabah and Sarawak. It's only 20 percent. We are not

going to jeopardise our long term survival. And our long-term survival demands that there is no Government in Malaysia which would go with the Indonesians and then between Malaysia and Indonesia and Singapore in between, life will be a little bit difficult. So, I have not the slightest intention of upsetting the Tengku on this. But I want to be friends with Indonesia, always have been friends. The last time I met Dr.

Subandrio at Bangkok airport on his way though, just before Confrontation began, he tapped my knee and said, "Well, never mind. You and I, we are friends". And I hope, personally I mean, he and I are still friends. And I've never said a harsh word about him, and he has not said a harsh word about me. But he's got his problems. My paramount interest is my right to live in my own home my own way. I order the furniture in my house the way I like it. My neighbour cannot tell me whether I should have my chair here, or my radio there. This is my little house. It's a small house. They are 103 million. They are big. I am not telling them how they should run Indonesia because ...

Mr. Croll : But the Tengku is telling you not to trade with them.

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Mr. Lee : You know, sometimes the Tengku says these things without knowing the full story of what we have said.

Mr. Muccoll : But the Prime Minister, he said in the last few days. He said it to some of us the day before yesterday. He repeated it again to a group of Japanese journalists yesterday, and he said specifically that if you opened trade negotiations with

Indonesia, or if it is permitted that the Indonesians opened a Consulate-General.

Mr. Lee : No, no, no, .. That's different.

Mr. Muccoll : Well, he mentioned both things.

Mr. Lee : Let me put it in another way.

Mr. Muccoll : There was an implicit threat in what he said.

Mr. Lee : Yes, that's the trouble, you see. Everytime a phrase is put in the form of a threat, my position becomes more difficult. I do not want to jeopardise Malaysia's security because my water-supply comes from Johore.

Mr. Muccoll : He said he wouldn't take this action, but he said he would take others which he wouldn't disclose.

Mr. Lee : You mean...

Mr. Croll : He said Malaysia must be forced to do something if Singapore did anything with Indonesia which would endanger Malaysia and it would be a highly hostile act to trade with Indonesia. He was then asked, would he cut the water pipeline. He said, no, he wouldn't do that. He was asked what he would do, and he laughed and said "well, we must keep somethings secret but we could do things."

Mr. Lee : Well, I am grateful for the assurance that he will honour the Agreement, that the water Agreement stands. But, let me put it in another way.

Mr. Croll : What do you think he could do, sir?

Mr. Lee : I don't know. There are quite a number of things, and to each one of them there are quite a number of counters. But this is a waste of time talking about these things, isn't it? Let me first answer Mr. Muccoll. Look, Britain still has an Ambassador in Djakarta, isn't it?

I don't propose to send an Ambassador to Djakarta. Now, let us assume that the Indonesians say, "Let's buy and sell because we need Singapore's soft drinks and manufactures, and so on, and we don't know what to do with this dirty rubber, very low grade rubber which only Singapore has got the facilities to clean, to re-pack, refurbish and so on." "Let us say he says, "Right, Pulau Samboe" that's an Indonesian island, right? "We will meet in Pulau Samboe and trade." This is purely military and other officials to see that there is no infiltration, there is no smuggling of guns and weapons I'm not calculating just for tomorrow. If he succeed in breaking in Malaysia, do you think they will leave Singapore alone, and leave the water flowing into Singapore? I am not saying I'm doing this because I'm a friend of the Tengku or I'm a friend of Dr. Ismail. I'm doing this because I have a responsibility for the survival of the 2 million people in Singapore. I thought that the survival was best secured by 11 million people, then it would have been like a stool on three legs. A three-legged stool: firm; stable. Now I have only got one leg. But if I may put it in the metaphor: now it's like a shooting-stick. We are resting on a shooting-stick. But let

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me just add this and I hope you won't think I'm immodest about my people. I am proud of them. They've got steel in them, and that shooting-stick is made of steel. It may not be as comfortable as the stool, but it will stand.

Mr. Croll : We're not talking about steel, Mr. Prime Minister, We're talking about liquidity in them. Liquidity has been going out of Singapore over the last six months?

Mr. Lee : Oh yes, before. Perhaps if I had a few million dollars which I don't have unfortunately because all Singapore Ministers are as poor as when they started office 7 years ago but supposing somebody, a great grand-uncle left me \$15 million in Malaya, I think I'll put a bit somewhere else may be Switzerland, and may be even Singapore. Singapore is the heart of South-East Asia; it is the lynch-pin isn't it? You take out this lynch-pin and you tell me what sense you make of Vietnam and all the American commitments and all the dangerous escalation going on is worth. The lynch-pin gone, do you send marines to Vietnam? We have done our calculation backwards and forwards. My colleagues and I --

we slept very fitfully the last few nights because we calculated all this. Some of it, of course, we calculated since last December, when the first proposals were a looser federation. So, we calculated every conceivable aspect. And I say there is a lynch-pin. You know my position: I am committed., But if you push me to the wall and cut off the water and try and struggle Singapore, I say any Government whether it is anti-communist or non-Communist, which is what we are. I am not going to join any power bloc, to help Formosa liberate the mainland or liberate Eastern Europe. That is all mad talk.

I'm non-communist because I don't want to be involved... I'm non-aligned as far as power-bloc conflicts are concerned. But

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I am not neutral where my survival is concerned: my people's survival. I am determined that they will survive; and I think they got enough grit in them.

Mr. Lipski: Sir, could you perhaps elaborate on what you have already said about the proposed constitutional provisions that you hope will secure this very survival that you are talking about?

Specifically, in what way do you think it might work to prevent any future communist subversion?

Mr. Lee : I have asked the Chief Justice. He is going to this Sydney Conference I think all the Commonwealth Chief Justices will be there and I want two things done. First, to ensure that nobody can come into power and then squat and say, "No more elections". That is number one. Second, to ensure that nobody under the guise of democratic exercises, works towards undemocratic ends. That is one part of it. And the other part is to ensure that Singapore is not going to be like other countries. We had the unique experience of the last two years, and everybody in Singapore - Chinese, Malays, Indians, Ceylonese, Pakistanis, Eurasians - everybody knows what bitterness is caused when one group thinks it can assimilate or otherwise make the others look, be like them. I want provisions put in to ensure that every minority group cannot be discriminated against; will be given every opportunity with everybody else. And that no Government can remove them. I'll tell you this. I don't expect to live forever nor will my colleagues live forever. We will probably stand more than a

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good chance in the next elections in 1968, but I am not thinking of 1968 alone. We can fly in an aeroplane and it may drop down; and something may happen; a few ministers disappear; elections something goes wrong or, I have said, a bus may knock some of my ministers down or somebody can arrange for a bus to knock us down. And these are things which do happen in South-East Asia, But whatever happens, I want built-in safeguards in so far as it is possible; and anybody who acts against them, against these safeguards, will have a very difficult time to live it down.

Mr. Croll : Mr. Prime Minister; you have some communists in detention I think they were first put in there by Tun Lim Yew Hock and then later, I think it was the Tengku, after Federation, that actually re-committed them after they had been out, and held positions. As Prime Minister now or a sovereign state, do you intend to keep them there or will they be released?

Mr. Lee : I do not think they are of any importance at the moment. It is a very unimportant subject. You know in the last elections, the Communist United Front Barisan Sosialis used them as

the election draw. All their posters were nothing but pictures of their so-called martyrs. Well, the people did not think they were martyrs because they were the boys who helped the paratroopers come in, helped to explode a few bombs and grenades. So they do not really matter. When Singapore has settled more urgent issues first, our relationship with the Afro-Asian countries I have to explain my position because some of the Afro-Asian countries although they know me and they know that I am not a little puppet, may be a little bit unhappy about the bases. But, I want to explain that. I cannot make a concession there because this is my survival . If they can devise a formula whereby my survival is secured and not just my survival, my survival and Malaysia's survival because the nexus is too tight then I am prepared to listen; but there is no alternative. There must be some defence arrangement which will prevent a bigger neighbour with a vaster army, much greater fire power from just over-running us. That is number one. And I'll face a problem which I have to resolve and I am hoping Mr. Rajaratnam and a few others, the moment he settles some of the urgent problems will be able to help clarify. That is number one. Then there is the

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economic side; this co-operation every day Singapore helps defend Malaysia, Singapore is in danger if Indonesian territories coming in just to teach us a lesson, isn't it? And I have got to help Malaysia because of my water and my hinterland. And when all these other things have been settled the constitution and so on there are several chief justices I hope who can be persuaded to help, and I am hoping, my Chief Justice will also be able to get a few of our own local lawyers of standing to spend their time helping, doing this. When all these things are over we will review the matter probably next year. We will review it first, from the point of their danger to the security of, not just Singapore alone but of Malaysia. If letting them out means suddenly they slip to the Rhio Islands, get training on how to use the burp gun and then come back -- well, I say we had better keep them happy. Doctors visit them regularly, two eggs for breakfast, quarter pound of butter a day, half pound of meat, rice, vegetables. You know, it is very easy. You can take an outboard motor and in half-an-hour, you are in Indonesia. And three months later, you come back with a burp gun or whatever the Indonesians have stay put until they convince us or rather. I

won't have so much time, they will have to convince Dr. Goh Keng Swee, Minister for Defence and Security; and they know that Dr. Goh knows all about Marxism-Leninism..

Mr. Croll : One last question, Sir, If you were the Prime Minister of Australia, and you were looking North to a country that was unstable..

Mr. Lee : Which country is unstable?

Mr. Croll : Malaysia.

Mr. Lee : I would have thought that Malaysia is far more stable than some of our neighbours around us and much closer to you.

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Mr. Croll : Well, in which there has just been separation and signs of inherent problems .. would you...

Mr. Lee : The problems are there, but look, let us....

Mr. Croll : Would you still ask for and would you still send troops to this country to help defend it.

Mr. Lee : First, I am not Sir Robert Menzies. He is a generation older than me. He is much more wise in the ways of men and nations. Second, I am not an Australian. Third, even if I were, I think it would be impertinent of me to tell Sir Robert what he should do. But I think certain facts Sir Robert must know: That whatever it is even after Singapore's very difficult position now.. surrounded by Malaysia, it is a far healthier situation than your immediate northern neighbour. So you have got to calculate on that basis; but what you do is for me to say.

Mr. Croll : You would still ask for this help?

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Mr. Lee : I am prepared to get help from anybody, any part of the world because, as I have said, my overriding, my paramount duty is the survival of my own people. And I have got a right to do that. And I must do it,

Mr. Croll : Thank you very much, Mr. Prime Minister.

14th August, 1965.

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