

TRANSCRIPT OF A SPEECH MADE BY THE PRIME
MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT A TEA-PARTY HELD IN
CONNECTION WITH GURGADHI DAY IN THE PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION
AT KALLANG ON 31ST OCTOBER, 1965.

Mr. President and friends,

This is the second time that I have the pleasure of attending your annual tea-party.

Last year, it was my pleasure to tell you how important my colleagues and I consider religious and linguistic tolerance to be for the survival of multi-racial societies like ours.

Like it or not, we are here to stay. Over the last 150 years of British rule, people have come from many parts of Asia: from India, from Indonesia, from China, even from Burma and Ceylon. And we either stay peacefully and harmoniously together -- in which case we will prosper and thrive -- or we constantly bicker and quarrel to the unhappiness of everybody and to eventually the destruction of all that we have inherited from over 100 years of effort -- not just British effort, but your effort and my effort.

As migrants, our forefathers came here seeking a better life. I don't know why you or your forefathers came here. But I am quite sure it must have been in search of something more than just adventure. I am quite sure that my great grandfather came here because he was having a very difficult life in China. And I do not want to be dishonest and say that he came here in order to help this country develop. He wanted to help himself develop, but in the process he and others like him together made this country. And, this belongs to all of us.

I am fond of the Sikh community because I know about their habits and their customs not least because I was once engaged in a number of law-suits in which Sikhs and the problems amongst them were expounded in the courts. And I came to learn that they were a brave, a physically courageous and a very determined people, sometimes to a point where settlement and compromise become impossible.

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Many Sikhs come here with nothing to become night watchmen. I see their children emerge as lawyers and judges and doctors. That is good for the country, for the community; good for you, good for us: this thrust, this effort to build something better in the next generations than what we have for ourselves. But, in this process, let us always remember that when we thrust upwards, we

should help others to come up with us. And not least of all, in independent Singapore, I want to remind everybody that we will honour what we said when we were in Malaysia: what we promised to do for our Malay fellow citizens in Singapore. We did not say these things because we were intimidated into saying them, or because we wanted to win their votes. Our policies were decided by the principle that we must find lasting solutions to our multi-racial community by an integrated society.

It is very unlikely, even in the next hundred years, that we are going to have a homogenous society, because as I go around Singapore and as I used to go around Malaysia, I noticed that there are deep and abiding roots in tradition, in history, in language, in religion, in custom. And inter-marriage between vastly different racial groups with different religious taboos, with different diet habits will be marginal and a slow process.

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One hundred years from now, it is most likely that we will have a lot of Sikhs still wearing turbans, or if they are not wearing turbans, recognisable in some form or other as Sikhs. And I am quite sure that my progeny will also be recognisable as what I am.

It is important, therefore, that we should seek to find some common basis. Like India, we have to create a multi-racial nation. And, India has in many respects, succeeded. I think we have no choice but to do that: to find common ground for social and economic integration.

There can be no religious or racial integration by legislation. This is not possible. You cannot legislate and say that you will, from being so many Chinese, Indians, Malays, Indonesians, all become one homogenous community. It is not possible of creation just by legislation.

What is possible is that by a series of legislative measures and policies, we ensure that different though we may be in our backgrounds, our children will all share a common experience and understand that they have a common future. If this place goes down and you go back to the Punjab, you will find that it is not quite what you believe it to be. Those of you who have been here for one or two generations will find it is not the Punjab of your dreams that your father recounted to you.

It was my unhappy experience to read many letters written by idealistic Chinese students who went back to China, who gave up their Singapore citizenships and discovered after two, three years that they really belonged more here than there; that the sociological and the political milieu to which they were

accustomed in Singapore -- the sunshine the multifarious food, the friendly atmosphere -- do not obtain in China. And they found a tightly organised and disciplined society in which they were expected to make constant effort -- something the glorious and glossy pictures of the progress in China failed to convey to them.

Today you have in your midst a man from Johore. Now he is technically a foreigner. When I met him last year, he was a Malaysian and I was a Malaysian. This year, I am a Singaporean; he is a Malaysian. But I say he is welcome.

And, the best way to achieve this is through economic integration. If through economic co-operation, gradually the territories benefit from each other and come closer together, this will come about again. But then at the moment, there are people determined that there shall be no economic co-operation. But looking at you and at all the others in Singapore, I have not the slightest doubt that we shall continue to thrust upwards.

Some of you come as watchmen; some as milk vendors. You saved your money; your son is educated. He emerges as a lawyer, a surgeon, a dentist, an engineer. Good luck to you. That is the way we want our communities to be: always striving for a better future.

Finally, may I say how unhappy I felt when I was asked about a Sikh shrine which is in the General Hospital grounds. A decision was taken after very careful consideration of nearly 11 such cases throughout Singapore. They were not just Sikh shrines alone. They were structures which were becoming more and more permanent and more irremovable. They were growing up in road circus and at junctions! You know, it starts off and particularly with those who like to put money on horse and numbers. They go to a tree and the word spreads around that if you go and pray by that tree and offer penance, you will be a rich man. And after a while, candle-sticks appear. Then a tablet appears; then a table appears; then a roof is put over it. Then, a caretaker takes over to make sure that the devotees of that particular spirit of that particular tree leave behind a suitable offering -- not for the gods but for the caretaker and his friends. And ultimately, we get permanent building, right in the middle of a circus or at an important junction.

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I am not against anybody wanting to seek solace from spiritual sources. If any one can get spiritual comfort or psychological release by either striking the four digit numbers or praying to the Infinite, I say "Good luck to him!" But it is not possible to govern this place with its teeming population without taking some firm and even unpleasant measures.

I am sorry about the lady who garlanded me. I am told that she is a devotee of the shrine in General Hospital. Well, the shrine can go to wherever you can find another place to put it. But it is not possible for us to allow a structure to gradually assume larger and larger proportions right in the middle of General Hospital where the sick go.

You know, I have myself watched that shrine over the years. First the roof was put on top. Then, a fence was put up and it is becoming a wall. Then fluorescent lights and running water were installed, and I finally saw pots and other cooking utensils!

It is not within my dispensation to take public property and say, "Here, I give it to your particular sect of devotees," It cannot be done. You know,

Moulmein Circus opposite Tan Tock Seng Hospital? There is a big tree and a big shrine appeared there. The shrine then disappeared. Then it reappeared and now again, it has had to go. Now, if you go there you will find a nice plot of luscious green grass -- as it should be -- for everybody.

So in this way we ensure that our population is born, bred and housed in a healthy environment.

In some parts of the world, I have seen people born and bred on the pavements. I have no intention of allowing that to happen in Singapore. And I am quite sure that the Sikh community has got the drive, the thrift and the dynamism to ensure that they are a prosperous part of our community.

And with those few words, I would wish you all many more anniversaries and tea-parties in the years ahead.

31st October, 1965.

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