TRANSCRIPT OF A SPEECH MADE BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE 5TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS OF THE KAMPONG TENGAH COMMUNITY CENTRE ON 28TH NOVEMBER, 1965.

Friends,

I don't think this is a particularly auspicious evening to make any speeches, but I am particularly encouraged by the fact that in spite of the deterring weather, so many have decided to stay on to listen to whatever that might be said.

I would like to believe that there is something worthwhile for all of us to foregather on occasions like this -- if nothing else, to renew our pledge to try and make what there is in this island survive the vicissitudes of power conflicts in this region.

National Archives of Singapore

It would have been difficult to believe just a few years ago -- before Malaysia and before confrontation -- how quickly the whole picture would have changed, and with it the thoughts, the mood of the people.

Ten years ago, we were unaware of the perils which at present beset us. By and large, the people were unaware of the perils of having truculent and

unhappy neighbours who have a lot of hardware, fire-power.... This doesn't produce goods; doesn't produce happiness; but it gives a sensation of power; it gives the people who have got this sensation of power a sensation of greatness -- if only momentarily. And so it creates and generates, in its turn, amongst the other smaller peoples in the region, a fear and a desire to get -- behind the umbrella of some protective power -- a fire-power of their own.

And I have no serious worry in the immediate future -- and I don't think you have either -- that we shall be conquered. It is not possible. The juxtaposition of power in the region and in the world is such that no one single group of nations can move to weaken the position of another group or even to erode into little bastions like Singapore without there being a violent reaction immediately forthcoming. But, underneath it is a constant process of attrition.

I was supposed to go to Pasir Panjang today to spend the morning there.

National Archives of Singapore

But my own intelligence agencies said, "No, it shall not be so"... because a group of men who styled themselves as the "Tentera Nasional Republik Malaya" -- just an "anti-group"partly of our own citizens, partly of Indonesians, who have gone over to get training and arms in Indonesia -- have got through ... We have managed to weed out the party, but one escaped, the Ulu Pandan Party Rakya'at branch secretary, a man called Johari Santo.... He was with four others. We

have knocked out the four others who came back with explosives and other light weapons, but he himself is missing, and he may be in the Ulu Pandan area next to Pasir Panjang. So, despite my own desire to visit Pasir Panjang today, I was persuaded not to test my good fortune!

But, you see, behind it all is a constant process of testing the other man's will and patience -- always trying to weaken his resolve, to upset his economy, to upset the even tenor of the other person's society if, for nothing else, just for the sheer joy it gives to see the other fellow in the lurch or in a bit of trouble. And that is the Southest Asia that we've got to learn to live with. And, just as I have got to live with it, so have you.

Five years ago, I moved freely first, because nobody was organised enough to get rid of any one of us - let alone me; and secondly, in any case, it wasn't worth getting rid of people.

National Archives of Singapore

But today, in independent Singapore, it is a very different situation. If people do get "bumped" off, then a great deal of uncertainty may follow. The net result is: I have got to learn to live with a great deal of what, I hope, is unnecessary security but which, if ever it became necessary, would be effective. And the people as a whole have also got to learn to live with it.

I think the worse that we can do to ourselves is to forget that although we are out of Malaysia, we are still not out of this region.

The human being has a defence mechanism in his mind, and I notice it amongst even my own immediate colleagues.

You see, now that we are out of Malaysia, we read the newspapers and what is going on in Malaysia with philosophical detachment; for instance, people say, "Well, so much money is being spent for this, that and the other. And there are so many taxes, and there is this wastage and that wastage"; and other people talk about monuments which don't look like themselves, and who won the battle for the Emergency and what hats they wore ...

It no longer directly affects us and therefore we read about it with a great deal of dispassionate and somewhat cynical interest.

National Archives of Singapore

But I do hope you are reading constantly what is happening because it does have a lot to do with us - because, if things go wrong around us, it will catch up with us very quickly indeed!

We never sought independence ... We wanted to face up to the problems of living in this region ... But independence was thrust upon us and this independence has given us one very valuable asset: independence of action. And, if we are to exercise this right, then we must be fully alive to the options which are open to us: what is happening around us; where these things are going to lead to; and what the options are before us which we can take up in order to make things go more in accordance with our wishes. And, to do that, we must have a population alive and alert to what is happening around it.

If we begin to talk only of Singapore and believe that forever and ever you will have the Seventh submarine squadron believing that it is their sacred duty to defend you and your sacred duty to allow yourselves to be defended then the day will come when you will find that the people who pay for this Seventh submarine squadron may decide it is not worth their while ... And, if you have not moved by then into a position where you can say, "Right, from there I move thus ...", then you will be prostrate as other invading forces come in.

National Archives of Singapore

So, you see, whilst we are grateful for the sense of security that for the time being I think we have justifiably got, we would be foolish if we did not calculate in terms of the next decade. What happens if certain other powers in this region become bigger and stronger, and the powers that are interested in our security become weaker and less willing to go on defending us to the scale that they now are? What are the options? What are the alternatives?

These are problems which I do not expect the average Naval Base worker to be concerned with. But I do expect them to understand that we cannot go back to 1955; you know, on the one hand "Down with imperialism! Down with colonialism!", and on the other hand, "Please give me more pay so I can denounce it roundly and at the same time go to the bar and have a jolly good drink, having denounced it all round."

In other words, what I mean is: whilst we watch all these things slipping and shifting around us, we have to make arrangements for ourselves. By all means, let us have the Seventh Submarine Squadron and have very good public relations commanders who make friends with our community centres and the people who frequent them. But, most important of all, let the community centre leaders realise that if you do not create an atmostphere in which the people begin to think ahead with you and with your own government how to ensure that whatever happens we survive, the submarine can slip away and, in a very short time, so can all the wives and other family possessions. But we cannot slip away from Southeast Asia. I am determined, whatever else happens, that we shall always be masters of our destiny in this part of the world.

National Archives of Singapore

And so, within that context, I would like to say what a great relief it is to find that the Naval Base over the years also tries to present a better image of itself.

I am quite delighted this evening to see the British Navy learning to fit in into independent Singapore. It is many years since I have had anything direct to do with them... In the old days I used to have to negotiate on behalf of the Naval Base Labour Union.

But the Navy learns. And so we will negotiate and so they will give us a bit more ... But eventually, never forget that no one does anything for us because they owe us a living. They don't. They do it for themselves - for what they believe to be in their higher interests. And, if you and I haven't worked out what is in our higher interests, we will be up the creek when the awful moment comes, and their interests and ours do not coincide.

So, all the time, behind all the comraderie and all the goodwill which we hope will be generated as a result of people coming together in community centres like Kampong Tengah, never forget this: this is yours; this is mine. 140 years of British colonialism left us this; and from here we move forward - never backwards. From here, we will build a civilised society, however inhospitable the circumstances in which we dwell.

National Archives of Singapore

And finally, may I congratulate you, Mr. Chairman and the members of your committee, for having arranged what to me is a most unusual occasion. I have been listened to in the rain on many a previous occasion, but only when there is something stirring the people; you know, when there has been a riot or there is a likelihood of a riot!

And, I am quite happy to learn that the atmostphere is quite relaxed. Nobody expects a riot; nobody wants a riot; and yet, they are listening in the rain. So I say, obviously you and your colleagues in the Community Centre must have done a power of good in keeping them all reasonably happy and reasonably confident that, whatever it is the government is doing, it must be in their best interest.

On that note, may I wish you, your Community Centre and your kampong many happy returns for Kampong Tengah.

Thank you.

28th November, 1965.

National Archives of Singapore