

TRANSCRIPT OF A SPEECH IN ENGLISH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT
A LUNCHEON GIVEN BY THE PASIR PANJANG RESIDENTS AT PERAK
HOUSE ON 5TH DECEMBER, 1965.

Friends,

I want to thank all of you for the trouble you took to prepare for my visit last week, and I want to say how sorry I am that tour did not take place as scheduled.

As I said just now in the National Language, I had chosen Pasir Panjang because I believed it was the most secure and safe constituency in Singapore. It has the sea-side; it has a mixed multi-racial population; it had no instance of animosity in the two race-riots of last year when all was well in the area. But, unfortunately, we overlooked the fact that in neighbouring Ulu Pandan there were a group of people who had hopped over to Sumatra for some military training in how to let off weapons and other objects of destructions, and we were unable to account for all the weapons which we knew from interrogation had been given over to this group. There was also the fact that one person was not accounted for. So, I'm afraid we will have to leave the tour for some other occasion.

But I am glad to be able at least to come here to meet you this afternoon and to say a few things about our future.

I think it is important, if we are to succeed, that people must know what we are going to face and how we can overcome the problems that are facing us. That is, you must first define where it is that you want to go; what it is that prevents you from going there or, what is likely to obstruct you; and how to overcome the obstacles.

You all know where we want to go. We want a happy, harmonious, multi-racial, tolerant society which is prosperous, ever surging forward. In fact, Singapore has got used to it over the last few years -- people have better schools, better clinics, more community services, water, electricity, drainages, community centres, homes, jobs, better standards of living. And it was to achieve all those things, to secure them, that we joined Malaysia.

We never sought independence for ourselves because we calculated that in the long term, although Malaysia's standard of living was lower than ours and so on, nevertheless, joining in Malaysia was better. But we did not make allowance for certain other factors which evolved within the two years that we were in Malaysia. There were people who believed that we could just be reduced to the

state of Kelantan or Kedah or Perlis. They did not understand why Singapore, which was so small, insisted on setting the pace. So they said, "Right, out with you." Well, if that's the way people feel, so be it. And, the first thing they will have to understand before business can be done is this: the fact that we wanted merger does not mean that we are not viable merger.

You know, there's a great deal of strength and stamina in this place. It is the human beings -- the skill, the versatility, the expertise, the drive, the relentless pursuit of success and performances -- that have made this island what it is. And, all those qualities are there unchanged. But now, with independence, comes independence of action, opportunities to create the conditions for the eventual success of what we want: survival in Southeast Asia -- a very turbulent part of the world -- as a separate and distinct people, not absorbed or swallowed up by more backward hordes and bigger hordes.

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There are lots of people bigger than us who would like to absorb us, and I don't think that is good for us. We want to be ourselves -- which means that we've first got to show everybody that we can look after ourselves.

Hence, the need to raise a militia, why volunteers are needed. We must be able to defend ourselves in two respects: one, in our own internal security. If

anybody starts trouble, whether it is communal riots or communist riots, we must be able to handle these things ourselves. The British first, and then the Malaysians, have helped all these years. British troops came out in any riot. Then, in the two riots, Malaysian troops came out and you saw the Royal Malay Battalions and so on. Well, that wasn't a very happy augury of what was to come. But, anyway, these things are now part of our own duty. We have to do it ourselves, and we can. But, it requires planning, training and, what is most important, effort on the part of our young men. They must understand this is their duty. If you depend on other people to look after your country for you and they don't happen to be loyal to you in a moment of crisis, then you only got yourself to blame. And this is a very important lesson we learnt in the two years we were in Malaysia. And, you must always prepare for all eventualities.

Next, we have got to create our own international viability. You know, as a small nation with a large military base, people will think -- if we do not watch out -- that we are just a "stooge" state: the British pay for the bases, therefore they can tell us what to do. We have spent four months -- and three of my colleagues have been stomping all over the world --and what we have said, what we have done, our attitudes, and the personal contacts have convinced them that we are not such a people; that we have got a mind and and a will of our own and

that we have got a right to do what we want to do to ensure our survival. And they believe that. That's why we are not isolated.

And, I would say that one of the most back-handed tributes, really, comes from the Indonesian Radio. I read it every morning. We've got a group of stenographers who monitor, who tune in at night to Radio Indonesia, and they do a summary in the morning. I read the summary. And, over the last few weeks, as they found that it was impossible to isolate us and brand us as stooges, they have now slowly swung round to the other side; and they say, "What a progressive, good regime Singapore is. Lee Kuan Yew fights the feudalists. He is a brave man!" And they carried in full yesterday, the fact that we have banned trade with a white racist regime in Rhodesia.

Mind you, we do what we say. We said that we don't recognise.... It hurts us, you know. We have lost the trade in tobacco. We buy a few other things too, from Rhodesia which will cost more now. Our neighbour across the Causeway has only had import controls, foreign exchange controls. Well, that is their prerogative. They have also said fierce words... But, when it came to the awful moment... You know, Rothmans. You see it advertised in Kuala Lumpur. It buys Rhodesian tobacco.... And you know, all the Dato's and the Tun's have got shares in this... When it came to that awful moment, they said,

"Just foreign exchange controls -- that's good enough!" You know, the whole of Afro-Asia is watching all this. They say, "Ah, so what they say and what they do are two different things."

We must never be caught in that kind of a hypocritical situation. People must know that what we say, we will perform. The performance and the promise must match. And over the years, we must establish our own international position in order to secure our own survival in this part of the world.

And finally, what is all this for? For your future -- yours and mine -- so that a thousand years from now, we will be here, distinct and separate, and lost.

You know, the history of human migrations and conquests ... Civilizations grew, then were overwhelmed and disappeared. And, it will give me no joy

whatsoever five hundred years from now if I am in my grave and they come and dig up bits of Singapore and they say, "once upon a time there was a civilization

here, in the twentieth century. They built concrete and steel buildings, they had nice roads, fountains, even an underground car park! But, something happened.

It was overrun, looted, plundered, burned to the ground." Well, that's no good.

You will then go back again and you will find fishing villages where there once was an enormous harbour, the world's fifth biggest port.

My job and yours is to ensure that the world's fifth biggest port becomes the world's fourth biggest port, and so on -- not to go back to a fishing village!

How do we do that?

I say, first, new markets. You see, it so happens that we are in an important corner of the world. If we were not, and we were all by ourselves like the Fiji Islands, it would have been the end of the works for us. Nobody would have been interested. But, as it is, a lot of people are interested in us; and I say we strike out (for) new markets.

I'll give you an example. You know, I was talking to the Australian High Commissioner. He said, "Yes, yes. What is it that we can do to help you?" I said, "That's a very good, healthy approach." I said, "We start off first by asking what is it that we are making that you can buy but which you are not buying because of high tariffs?".... You know, strange as it may seem... We make tyres, for instance: Bridgestone tyres are made in Singapore. Well, if these tyres could go into Australia, for instance, on Commonwealth preference, then instead of just seven million Malaysians, we would have eleven million Australians to which to sell the tyres. And the Australians have got more wheels that use tyres than the Malaysians have. But now it is being blocked because we don't get

Commonwealth preference. Now, why nobody ever cared about these things, I don't know. Probably, because nobody then thought of making tyres. Well, now we do.... And, since we do make tyres, we have to find out where we can sell them to. And I say, Australia is a good market.

So, that's one of the things that we're going to do, by way of example. Somehow, we have got to convince them that they have got to find a way out of all the rules of international conventions and treaties to ensure that our goods get through.

Australians also make ships. And, for their own trade, their own coastal trade with New Zealand, only ships made in Australia and New Zealand can run that trade. Well, we can now make ships too. We have got the Jurong Shipyard... The Government has got a share in it... Since they are our friends and allies -- you know, we give them a good, secure base in this part of the world -- well, they should include ships made in Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. Then, there are more ships we can sell.

So we can go on, ad infinitum. We start off with one or two items -- show them how they can help us, and we can help them. Similarly, we will branch off into Africa, Eastern Europe... You know, the Poles are coming, the Romanians

are coming, the Russians are coming, the Yugoslavs are coming. We are going, and they are coming. More trade to and fro. We must do it that way. The Japanese too... They are going to set up an embassy here because they are the chaps with the largest amount of expertise as to how to manufacture things... You know, they made the cheapest things in the world, once upon a time, and they still do... Only that some of the most expensive items in the world are now being produced by them, including some of the world's best cameras. And, what they can do, we can do.

Now, the markets will be there. It will take one year, two years, as we work out these arrangements. But what is most important, our people must be ready and geared to meet the situation.

You know, you are competing on the international market -- not on the local market -- and you cannot afford to be inefficient. You see, if you are selling soap or shoes to Singapore, it doesn't matter how inefficient or how bad your soap is. All you do is put up the tax on everybody else's soap, and you go to the shop and you've got to buy Singapore soap. It is as simple as that. And however bad it is, well, you have just to use it, because you've got to keep your jobs open for your population. But when you're selling outside, competing with everybody else's soap and shoes, and you produce either expensive, or, worse,

expensive and poor quality products, then you are out. Then, even though the Australians abolish their tariff on tyres and let our tyres in, we can't sell them in competition with British tyres and American tyres. So that means it requires a disciplined labour forces; high efficiency, good discipline at factory level, and stable labour conditions which will bring in more and more enterprises.

And it can be done, provided we are ready to acknowledge what is required of us. And this is the task for the next two to three years.

Now, why do I say two to three years? Jurong took a long time to get going... But I think if we make a breakthrough in the markets in a few products... and we are, you know -- our shirts, garments dresses and cotton products are now selling throughout the world. We are selling pyjamas to Americans. I don't know why they like our pyjamas, but they are buying them in large quantities -- which I think is good for them and good for us. And by the time we can do that, we can do a lot of other things besides. All this is designed for one thing -- to strengthen our position, to make it clear to everybody and our neighbours in particularly, that we can do without them and still prosper.

You know, the Indonesians thought that if they stopped trade, we would die. But it is not true. They stopped trade... And, you know, I was just going

through the figures this morning for this coming Budget session. We lost 8.7 percent of our national income as a result of Indonesian confrontation. Our rate of increase used to be 4 percent and we expected to clear this, make up... You know, this is just two years now, and we have cleared it -- the 8.7 percent has been wiped off and we have gone ahead by another 2 percent. All the figures show that the Minister for Finance will read all this out to the great satisfaction and relief of all colleagues. In two years, we have wiped out the 8.7 percent deficit, and have gone forward another 2 percent.

And, I'll tell you why. Because nobody is sitting under a coconut tree, scratching his head, waiting for something to fall into his hands! Everybody is doing something. This is the key thing. These things don't fall down from the sky. And when we have establish that, then we talk to our neighbours again.

You see, some Malaysian ministers believe that if they don't allow our products to go in, then they can control our rate of economic advance. I don't think it's true. You know, a good people cannot be kept down that way. If you don't want to buy, we will sell to the world. And we've got large sectors of the world with a vested interest in our survival; and we will forge forward. And then after that, we'll say, "You'd like to share my prosperity? Now, we'll talk" -- with the positions of strength recognised. Not with them believing ... you know,

it is no use talking now, because they believe that they are one up, you see; they've got a big country, so they're one up. I think that's not true. First, we prove to them it's not true, then we will talk. And I say we can succeed, and more than succeed.

Because, you know, the events in Indonesia mean that whatever the official policy, the new government which is emerging in Indonesia -- in which the army has a big say -- must find a way out.

You see, either they went with the west and got American help which President Sukarno did not want to do -- or they went with the East -- which President Sukarno did -- and the Chinese helped them, bought their rubber and built GANEFO buildings, and so on. Now the Chinese Government have decided that in view of what has happened there, it is off! And the Generals have got to pay salaries to the soldiers. And they can't go with the west! You read Radio Indonesia. I read it every morning, you know. It is part of my breakfast to see what they have said the previous night. And the generals have no intention of stopping confrontation. They denounce neo-colonialism. They denounce Malaysia as a neo-colonialist outfit. I look through and I say "Oh well, they have let Singapore off"... You see, now they just denounce Malaysia. I say that's good -- well, I'm not saying that that's good for Malaysia; I'm saying that

that's good for Singapore! And I say, in the end, they and us... well, we can provide them in the end, as an American economist has pointed out, with the best outlets to the world. And, if they want -- I'm not talking about tomorrow or the day after tomorrow -- I'm talking now about the problems facing the Indonesian Government which has emerged... It doesn't want to go with the west; it has cut off its lines with China. It must find some other way of developing. It has got to settle its problems. And I say, all in all, the future is reasonably bright if we play it intelligently.

You know, don't act big. Don't tell people what they should do, and so on. We just be friendly all round. Whoever wants to buy, we sell -- cheaper than anybody else can sell. Whoever wants to sell, we will buy and give them a better price than anybody else can give them. And they are bound to sell to you because they get the most benefits from it. And, in that way, in three years we will come back, all the biceps and muscles rippling; and we will say to our friends across the Causeway, "Now, would you like to talk about how to share my prosperity?"

That is our task, long-term. You know, nothing has changed by this separation. The problem is there -- how to rationalise one hundred years of British colonial rule. People have come in, migrants -- Indians, Chinese,

Indonesians -- they are here. We've got to live with them. I've got to live with you, you've got to live with me. So, since we've got to live together, we've got to learn to like each other. And all that has happened is that the area has been out into two, one in Malaysia, one is Singapore. And the arena is which we stage the more rational, the more effective solution to a multi-racial society, that arena is the one that counts. And I say, in that context, I have every confidence that we can triumph.

We've got a politically sophisticated population; we've got them prepared to work hard. We've got a compact unit. We can win. And, what is the more, we cannot afford to lose. Too much is at stake. Therefore, we must win.

And I feel relatively reassured... You know, by the time your opponents -- and in this case the Communist, Barisan Sosialis -- don't know whether they should attend or they should not attend the opening of Parliament, I think they are a very confused group of people. They don't know what to do now. They say, "Be friends with Indonesia. Open with diplomatic representation" Well, their own comrades who fled to Indonesia are now probably in jail or, if they are not in jail, running from place to place before the Indonesian army catches up with them. So they are in a jam. All their theories have fallen to the ground.

But I say we should make sure that they never come up again. And we can do that in two ways: economic progress, hard work, good planning; and keeping the people mobilised on constructive policies.

Thank You.

5th December, 1965.

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