

TRANSCRIPT OF THE SPEECH OF THE PRIME MINISTER,  
MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE CONVENT OF THE HOLY  
INFANT JESUS, SERANGOON GARDENS, ON SATURDAY,  
11TH DECEMBER, 1965.

Mr. Chairman, friends and fellow citizens,

Sometimes I find it difficult to feel differences in space and time. It is two and a half years since I came here, and in these two and a half years, so many things have happened -- not just with us in Singapore, but around us, in Malaysia and in Southeast Asia, and in South Asia. In 1965 there is a very different world from that in 1963, when I last came.

Our immediate problem is, what do we do, now that we are on our own? I say it comes back to what we wanted to do: to find a secure and enduring basis for ourselves and our posterity in this part of the world. But the experiences we have gone through, and which our neighbours are going through, make it a slightly different proposition from what it was.

You know, I heard over the 1.30 news that the Chief Minister of Sarawak said he thought it was a good idea to have bilateral talks between Indonesia and

Malaya, Indonesia and Sarawak, Indonesia and Sabah, and between Indonesia and Singapore. I did not say that. He said that, the Chief Minister of Sarawak. All we said was, we have noted the proposal with interest and we are always open to any reasonable proposal to maintain peace and stability and the happiness of everybody in the area.

But what has happened in this two years, so far as Malaysia is concerned, is that we came nearer to the bone of the problem. There was skirmishing -- a lot of fluff around, and a great deal of circumlocution. Finally, we came to the crux: whose country was this? What kind of country? Who does it belong to, and how is it going to be run? That came very close to the bone. And when you come to moments like that, those are moments of truth when you face eternity.

The first thing I have noticed over these last few days, last few weeks -- I think things are all right again in Singapore because people are piping up, saying all sorts of foolish things again. Somebody says, "We must have a legal commission to investigate this, that, and the other, and open the whole Constitution, and get chaps to come here and recommend what kind of constitution we are going to have."

All I said, at the time of partition, was that we'd have a commission. Legal experts, Chief Justices would help to find out how to protect minority

rights. I never said I am going to get a legal expert to tell me what kind of Constitution to have and how to run Singapore. I knew that better than any legal expert, because I knew what this place is in for. But you see, the very fact that people are saying these things shows that all is well; because these are people who, when it comes to moments of truth, are silent. They have no message for you when there are riots. Then, they have nothing to say. They duck for cover.

We as a people did not duck for cover. If we had done, then all the efforts of my colleagues and myself would have come to nought. It was because, as a people, we just dug our toes in that today we are still ourselves. But, the problem has not been resolved.

We sought the larger whole, the more secure basis. We supported Malaysia. These problems were there. But now it cannot be solved by reason, argument, discussion, compromise, adjustments. We were prepared to make the adjustments required, but others were not. So, this is still a big, unresolved problem.

Meanwhile, our even bigger neighbour has gone through quite a momentous time. Two coups took place within 24 hours. What is the outcome of all this? India and Pakistan came to the brink of war.

At the end of it all, we say to ourselves, "Insofar as we can influence our corner of Southeast Asia, we are here to stay." And the first lesson we learn is, how do we survive?

We do not survive just by being meek and humble. Being meek and humble is a very useful attribute because you do not annoy people; but when being meek and humble is not sufficient to evoke relationships of mutual respect, then a little muscle is sometimes necessary -- and resolution. And our first lesson is how to act collectively.

Small though we may be, two million, it is the quality and the verve of a people which is mobilised. We can make up by quality for what we lack in quantity, just as we make up in geographic and strategic location what we lack in size of area. And that will give us, eventually, in ten or maybe 15 or 20 years, a position from which we may ultimately discuss again the relationship of the bigger whole.

Nothing has changed. We are one people with the people in Malaya. I have said that before, and I say that again now. But, we are two countries. How long it will be, I do not know. If ever we become one country again, you know as well as I do that it will have to be under very different circumstances and very

different conditions. The best thing is not to talk too much about it for some time. We just get on with our side, with our job.

To run a country, you must have people who care and feel for it. This is important. If you care and feel for yourself but you have not identified your people with the country as a whole, it is very difficult to give it the momentum the thrust, the verve, the elan necessary. And so I say it is very necessary now to sustain the patriotism. On the 9th of August a lot of people I know breathed a sigh of relief and said, "After what we have gone through, well thank god that now we are out of all that."

But, there are other problems. And, one of our biggest problems is, how do we defend what we have got? This is a very serious problem. I have not the slightest doubts that our Commonwealth allies will strain their utmost against big powers coming to conquer us, and their strength is adequate, for a long while to come, to ensure our survival.

But remember, there is a passage ... I don't like to talk 'ad lib' on these matters, because a wrong note struck leads to a wrong impression. So, I would just like to refer you to what his Excellency the Head of State said in his address to Parliament on Wednesday:- Let it never be forgotten that there were people in Malaysia who wanted us in, not because they loved us and wanted us as part of a

growing multi-racial tolerant society, but because they wanted to suppress us. And they view an independent Singapore with dislike. And, what is worse, with apprehension; for a successful multi-racial society in Singapore -- successful not just materially, because that, I think, they concede ... Even in Malaysia they could not keep a break on our material progress.

Whichever way they played it, whatever taxes they put, we had arranged it such that "you take one dollar, you give me back 60 cents." Whichever way they tried to play it, we kept a tight hold on a share of the money. If you count profits and losses in that sense, I don't think they really made, but on what we paid them and what they paid for Federal services and departments in Singapore, they made 25 to 30 million dollars per year -- plus, ten million for currency profits which we did not take. You know, we run a joint currency, so they made about 35 million dollars a year -- over two years, so that to about 70 million dollars.

But, if you read the figures, you will see that our national income did not go down. It went up by two percent, in spite of all this. And it was done by the sheer industry of man, ingenuity, and hard work.

How do we protect that? We will prosper, and a multi-racial society will take roots here. And it will do so because when you don't allow people to play

communalism, or racial bigotry, or religious bigotry, you breed an atmosphere of tolerance.

Some of the newspapers, after they have been smacked down, keep quiet. The important thing is to make everybody understand that the red will be used. So, there is peace. You would not believe, would you, that 1½ years ago we were running around like mad animals, killing each other on the basis of the colour of the hair or the colour of the skin. But it happened, you know; and all it needed was a few lunatics to fan the fires. All that has disappeared, and we can succeed.

But as we succeed, their fears for their society become deeper, and what the Yang di-Pertuan Negara's address said was, can we safely assume that such people will never assume power? Now, we had our disagreements with the Prime Minister of Malaysia -- I don't want to be a hypocrite and pretend that we are the best of friends. We cannot be after what has happened over the past few years. But at least we are civil to each other, and at least he did not try to clobber and butcher and destroy us. He said, "Please leave."

But there were other people who wanted to do that. Fortunately for us, the Prime Minister of Malaysia knew the price for clobbering us, the repercussions

which we had made sure would take place if they did that -- not just in Singapore, because if Singapore went down, well, they do not feel for Singapore so why worry? -- but the repercussions throughout the region and throughout the world.

In other words, our first necessity is to develop sufficient capacity to deter any such people from trying to do it now that we are out of Malaysia. We must develop sufficient strength on our own. We must breed a fit and fighting generation. We cannot waste our effort running around hiring mercenaries. We already do hire a few Gurkhas -- and they are first class, too. Whether it comes to riots, you can be quite sure that they strike terror into the hearts of evildoers. One good, solid thing about them is that when you give them an order, they go out with a knife and they execute your order with a determination and a summariness which makes law and order all that much more respected.

But that is not the way in which we can run the whole country indefinitely. For special jobs, going around troubled areas where people have decided that the law need not be obeyed, well, you have to send out specially-trained troops like that.

Some people were absent in Parliament when they moved, there to expel us. They took the bolt. Quite a number of prominent members in UMNO were



absent, in open disagreement with their own Government as to what should have been done to us -- not that we should have been let out, but that we should have been clobbered. How many more, I asked myself, were in that chamber, voting, but at heart and in spirit with those who were audacious enough to openly flout and defy their own government?

These problems may not arise for a few years, and I hope that they never will. I say that our first problem is to make sure that it never arises. We must show everybody that there is enough strength. In other words, a fighting generation must be bred.

In the old days, the whole process of education was designed for different purposes. The British were not interested in education as such. They ran the place to exploit the mineral resources. The climate was inhospitable, the people they found here, a few fishing villagers, did not want to work for money rewards in terms of fixed hours. So, they brought over people, migrants, by the thousands from India, China, Burma, and Ceylon. The British were not interested in educating the migrants' children, so the migrants educated their children themselves. Eventually, when the British did run schools, the schools were meant to produce menials, subordinates, clerks and penpushers. You learned how to be obedient. You did not learn how to be proud of your independence, of

your country, of your people. You did not learn that life depends not just on passing examinations and scoring good marks. That is one facet of life.

But if you want a nation and a society to flourish and to prosper, it must produce leaders. And leadership is not just being clever and writing essays. You need men of action: sportsmen, gymnasts, rugby players, boxers, outward bound school types, rowers, sailors, airmen, leaders of debating societies, organisers of men. In other words, the whole orientation of your education is different. Your purpose is to breed a fighting, effective generation with the guts and the will to survive. And if we are finally to be overwhelmed by forces bigger than ourselves, then I say it will be "Over our dead bodies". Then, when it is over lots of fierce dead bodies, nobody really makes the attempt.

In other words, the first lessons we learn is that the stronger we are, the more likely we are to be left in peace and to have peace-loving neighbours. It is a paradox, but a very true paradox. Many little countries in this world would have disappeared but for the fact that they, by their strength, make it worthwhile for their neighbours being peace loving. We must put a high incentive for our neighbours being peace-loving because the price for not being peace-loving will be very unpleasant for all. This must be done, and done quickly.

Next, a re-orientation for our adult population, the young boys who are now leaving school. We originally planned that as from 1966 we were going to give free secondary education for all. But, as you know, confrontation came and we had to make back the 8.7 percent of our National Income which we lost, and just this year we were going to start it for next year, as we watched the recovery of our economic activity. Now, we are out of Malaysia on our own, and we say to ourselves -- and we have done a bit of calculation -- "Right, do we really want that kind of secondary education where you produce a lot of literate, grammar school types -- people who can read history, geography, write essays, do you summaries. Or, do we need more technicians, vocational schools?" The whole process of secondary education is undergoing a very close scrutiny, because this is a different education. We must give our younger pupils, our citizens of tomorrow the kind of training which will equip them to meet the kind of situations which we know will arise. And so, we say, "Right, let's defer that."

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It is not just the six to eight million dollars it will cost us, but what is more important is that we have to get parents to accept the fact that the child, their son or their daughter, is what he was born to be. You cannot make a scholar out of a person who has other aptitudes. But that does not mean that he is not a valuable citizen. A man who is good with his hands can be more valuable in certain circumstances than just an intellectual type. We must now find ways and means

by vocational guidance, by aptitude tests, to see how we can persuade parents to, in turn, persuade their children to strike out into new fields.

Technician today, a technical man who knows how to wield a lathe in the iron and steel mills, is earning more than your stenographer. What is the point of producing stenographers, worse, half-baked stenographers because they were not actually equipped for the job? Why not get them to do something else -- full utilization of what nature bequeathed them. In other words, a gradual readjustment in values of parents.

The career opportunities are different because the society which we are building is so much different from what we thought it was to be. My colleagues and I, I can tell you that our parents did not envisage our training to fill the roles we were doing, and that is one of the reasons why I spent so much time training and educating myself to fulfill the role that I have to play today.

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In my father's generation, they thought that the acme of success was to be a successful professional man. Then, you made a lot of money, you bought a lot of houses, you had a lot of cars, and that was the symbol of success. I was trained to meet that situation, and to be successful in that kind of situation. But we discovered that that was not the way in which the society was going to survive; and, you know till today I spend hours every week just getting a greater

grasp on language in order, first, to make contact with the maximum number of persons -- immediate contact, a meeting of minds. Not via the interpreter -- I understand that man and he understands me and he can tell me what is all about. And when I speak he can understand me and there is rapport. My lessons have been going on for years.

So, similarly, the world that your children will meet will be a different one from the one that it is today. I will give you a simple example. We are now looking for a really good man to be General and Commanding Officer --and he is a very important person. He should be tough, he should be a man of integrity, he should be a man of action, and he should be a man of intelligence and decisiveness. But at the time when he should have been recruited, 20 years or 25 years ago, the British did not want such types. We were trained, if at all, just to be volunteers; you know -- corporals and privates -- not to be Generals. But, today, we need a general, and it is a job now to produce a General within the next three to five years. And one must be found. At the moment, we have a Brigadier borrowed from the Malaysian Armed Forces. However grateful we are for their consideration in lending us their Brigadier, I think it is much better all round for our agitprop and our sense of patriotism if we have our own General in charge. You see? So it is with so many other things. We will require people to do these things.

And, at the end of it all, I think we will succeed. There is one quality which I have noticed about Singapore which makes us slightly different from our neighbours: this place is prepared to work. Nobody asks you for something for nothing. They ask you something and they say, "Well you do that, I'll give it to you, you do it." They try and that is a valuable asset. Our people are prepared to try. They all work. They are talented. This place will succeed.

Then, new problems will arise, just as your Chairman has said. Problems are posed. Now, those are the wider ones: I say the first problem is, let us get strong so that others will leave us alone; second, let us proceed and build this successful, tolerant, multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-religious society; then, let time and the spread of ideas yeast it up for us. Just wait. Time must be on our side, provided we never give way on basic points, provided we are patient. They are two different things, but they are not contradictory to each other. By being patient, it means we do not have to be unnecessarily aggressive and precipitate an unnecessary collision for no rhyme or reason.

But, when people are aggressive and are pushing us against the wall, we have just got to dig our toes in. When we know that this is a fundamental point, don't give way, we cannot give way.

Not so long ago, in June, they tested our metal - openly, in Parliament in Kuala Lumpur. They got a prominent back-bencher to move the address of thanks to the King's speech. He said, "the trouble with Singapore is that it is not accustomed to Malay rule" -- very fierce words to tell us, face to face, in Parliament! And that was a moment of truth for us. They stared us in the eye and said, "You are not accustomed to Malay rule, and you are going to get it:" Had we melted, I say it would have been lost. We stood up on our hind legs and we said, "You show me where we agreed to Malay rule. We have never been accustomed to it and do not intend to become accustomed. We will fight." We did not actually say it in words so crude as that. At that time, if we had said that in that crude way, it would have led to a fight. But we said it politely, leaving them to the clear conclusion that if we have to die, so be it. They said, "Right, in that case, get out." Well, if that is the way they feel about it -- what to do? You know, I get so tired of trying to be non-committal so that I do not annoy anybody. We spent three meetings to settle the Yang di-Pertuan Negara's speech, my colleagues and I. I put up the first draft; then my colleagues put in amendments and their drafts, and we put in a second draft. Then they said, "no, no, no. Let us not be provocative. Let us be polite, and let us say what we have to say, but say it politely." And we said it politely. And yet, according to 'Malaya Merdeka', some people want to take offence. They say we are a thorn in

their flesh, and so we have to be got rid of. Well all right, if that's the way they feel about it. But, at the end of the day, remember this. we are one people.

And this is the contradiction which I want to take the occasion now to explain. We are one people, and yet we are forced reluctantly to take certain steps to deny our own countrymen who are not Singapore citizens, who are Malaysian citizens, from enjoying things which we have given them all these years. They come here, and they get free schooling.

We give their children free education, better than they could get elsewhere. I don't mean to say that all our schools are better than all their schools, but you know they have more rural areas than we have, and when they go back, they leave their children behind with friends and relatives to continue the better schooling.

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In some cases, we even allow them, where they have large families, to get special allowances to buy books and so on.

When we are in Malaysia, when we were part of one nation, it was all right. Never mind, we gave them this. But now, in order what our part can thrust forward and not get bogged down, we say, look, not for the time being,



please. We will talk about all these things later. But first, I must stabilise my own home. I must know what my budget is. And I cannot keep on solving their problems until our problems have been stabilised. So out with free schooling for new pupils unless of course we employ them. If we give them any jobs and all our top jobs are open even today, you know. Any Division I and Division II appointments we advertise are open to all Malaysian citizens. If they are good and they want the job here, they can take it. I have not the slightest doubt that they are loyal and that they will serve us without question.

And we give them jobs, they come here; they take all their perquisites. We might even have to make adjustments in our citizenship laws in order to confer citizenship quicker in certain cases upon those who serve us because it is good for them.

Our civil service the top ranks will always be open. But with the unskilled jobs, we must require a work permit. Too many have come down. The hawker first moves down from Johore Bahru to Woodlands; then from Woodlands, month by month he gets closer to town, and he ends up at the 4th milestone Bukit Timah.

Finally, he joins the rest around town. So it is with pirate taxi drivers and all other kinds of people, including beggars. To all those, I say, we feel very deeply for them. But I think there are other people who are supposed to do something about them, and they ought really to do something. These people can help make their own leaders do something for them if they go on pestering their own leaders.

This is an intem period. Over that and above that, I would like to say this: that this is something we must always have at the back of our minds: in a real crisis can we really say "No". That is the essence. Supposing some mishap were to happen on the other side, to the north of us, can we really say, close the Causeway. I say to you I do not think we can. It is inhuman. You see, half my own colleagues have their families there. Do you want to close the door? Half of our judges and our top civil servants have families there.

I have an exercise ready to be mounted. We say, "All Division I officers in all sensitive jobs who have families in the Federation, please list them". I have done that for my own party branch members who have families there is quite phenomenal. Can you really say in that moment of crisis we can close the Causeway? I say it is very difficult. Therefore we must accept that this is an arrangement we keep in order that slowly they on their side will begin to

understand the need for co-operation. And co-operation can come only on the basis of mutual respect.

Did you read the newspapers a few days ago? It was said that we have to be friendly towards them because they export things through us: rubber , palm oil and their other produce. But they do not depend on us. Well, it is true that we export their rubber, their palm oil and other produce. But if they could export it elsewhere, why have they not done so?

This would lead to serious dislocation, Mind you, it is always possible that you might get a group of leaders emerging who are thinking in terms of oratory and end up with having to accomplish and fulfill what they have said in a moment of heat on a public platform. This has happened in other parts of the world. If they do that, then massive economic dislocation and suffering would take place for us -- but perhaps more for others.

But, in an awful crisis, I say this is one people. There is no way of dividing us and therefore we have on the one hand to try and keep this part whole; ours, controlled, manageable. Yet we must concede and make contingencies in the event of a crisis. In a crisis condition, a different situation prevails. We cannot let our own people down. This is important.

I was asked this morning by some foreign correspondents what we are going to do -- Dr. Subandrio says "separate talks with Singapore". I said, "Yes, by all means. We will talk, we will listen. If it is a good proposition, a good and reasonable suggestion on how we can solve our problems, I say yes".

The British, in spite of fighting the Indonesians on the borders of Sabah and Sarawak, and whose navy protects us from incursions and raids, have an embassy in Jakarta. They have an ambassador in Jakarta. They are trading with Jakarta. But at the same time, we have long-term interests in the survival of our own people in two countries: Singapore and Malaysia. And I think it is only fair that we let everybody know that we cannot take any step which will damage, or in any way jeopardise, the long-term interests of our one people, a good number of our one people, a good number of whom are in Malaysia. Within that ambit, there are plenty of permutations and combinations which can perhaps give us some short-term advance and might be useful to them, to the Indonesians; might be useful to the British.

What I am saying, really, amounts to this: nobody can accurately foretell the future. We can see certain trends, but we are not fortune tellers. We do know that the forces are going in this direction. We know that for our long-term survival we have to think in terms of the larger whole. Now we have got

independence of action. We will use it to consolidate this base which is ours and defend it and show the world that we are prepared to defend it and from there, with time and success, the yeast spreads throughout the region.

I don't think we will ever forget our two years in Malaysia. Nor do I think Malaysians on the other side will ever forget our two years in Malaysia.

We have got to ensure that whilst Singaporeans were the first of the Malaysians, let us hope that we were not the last of the Malaysians. We are no longer Malaysians now; we are out. But if Singaporeans, like the Mohicans, were the last of the Mohicans, I say it is very sad. Because, if you get communalist forces all around, there is a lot of trouble. So let us hope there are more Malaysians to take the place that we left behind. And when the Malaysians emerge there over the years, decades maybe, when multi-racial minded Malaysians emerge, then the stage is set for the next phase. Meanwhile, hold this place! Thrust forward! Never hesitate to do what we know to be right! And if in the end we do not succeed, well, so much the pity. But never let it be said that we failed for want of trying; that our nerves, our courage, our conviction were not equal to the challenge that is posed.

This is the big challenge: how to find an equilibrium of indigenous forces, forces within ourselves, to take the place of European or British authority that kept everybody in place. That authority is gone; we have got to find our own authority to replace it, which is made very difficult because first it must have the consent of the people. And the people now consist of many races who speak many languages, who worship different gods, who have different diet habits, and so on. But somehow it must be done, for too much is at stake.

And as the Head of State said in his speech: there is no time, no place to start building all over again. What we have built, we must keep. It is ours, yours and mine, for all our posterity. The schools cannot run away; the buildings cannot run away. The institutions we have built cannot run away; the factories cannot run away. They are there. The roads we are building, they are all assets to our nation. And I say, build up fighting generations prepared to defend it and build it up.

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Thank you.

11th December, 1965.