

TRANSLATION OF A SPEECH (IN MANDARIN) BY
THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT A DINNER
GIVEN BY THE NANYANG UNIVERSITY GRADUATES
ASSOCIATION ON 12TH FEBRUARY, 1966.

The situation in Southeast Asia has become increasingly critical, particularly the war in Vietnam, which is worrying the whole world. What is taking place in Indonesia is not very clear; and developments in Malaysia are not easily foreseen. At the moment, Singapore, it would appear, can ensure its own survival and consolidation.

We have to ask ourselves: how long can we confidently maintain our position? Let us suppose the British decide to pull out from Southeast Asia and from Singapore, and to leave the countries in Southeast Asia to decide the relationships between themselves. What will happen to us then, with our present defence capacity? The Indonesians have an army of 400,000, and other neighbouring countries are much more powerful than us.

We must calculate carefully, taking everything into consideration. All must understand that this is not more a matter of survival of the individual, but the matter of survival of a large group of people, of millions!

What are the prospects of our survival?

First of all, we must understand that whether the Chinese in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia or Vietnam can or cannot, have or have not been completely assimilated with the indigenous peoples in Singapore, Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak and Indonesia, the descendants of the Chinese will be identifiable from the other races even a hundred years from now. They find it very very difficult to be assimilated completely with the indigenous peoples. This is not only because of language and culture, but more because of religion, a very important factor.

And this will probably give rise, in the future, to a grave problem for the several millions of Chinese descendants in the region because there are many people who think that because you are a Chinese, you will one day become an agent of China or become a subversive element. It is not easy to dispel this sort of thinking.

In the circumstances, do you not think you should quickly make up your minds how to defend your own interests?

It has been said that if the military might of China today were able to stand up to that of the United States, the problems which are being faced by the overseas Chinese -- the Chinese in Southeast Asia -- would be completely different. I cannot say how much merit there is in this view. But I have always felt that we are not so much overseas Chinese (i.e. Chinese who sojourn in the South Seas and then to return to China) as descendants of Chinese. Nobody can change this, China is China; and we are -- ourselves.

However we must nevertheless, sometimes take note of what others are thinking.

Let us consider the confrontation policy which is being pursued by the Indonesians. It has been said that the Indonesians suspect the stand of leaders of Singapore. They may maintain that the government of Singapore is in the hands of Chinese, and so the issue of confrontation can be solved only if, first of all, the position of the Chinese in Southeast Asia and of the Malaysian Government is clarified. And there are countries in the East and West who subscribe to that Indonesian viewpoint.

But there are also some countries -- Australia and New Zealand especially -- who understand our position. They understand that though they are descendants of Englishman, they have -- under the influence of geography and history -- long become a different people from the English.

And these countries want to help us find a way out -- for their own interests. But if people equate all descendants of Chinese with the people of China and as inseparable from China, then it is likely they will believe that the might of China will one day extend to Southeast Asia. It is better to solve this problem quickly while there is still time.

Of the 300 million people of Southeast Asia, there are only about 16 to 17 million overseas Chinese or descendants of the Chinese. And it is only the descendants of Chinese who are in a position to chart their own destiny. If we do not take note of this, we will bring disaster not only on ourselves but on our brothers across the Causeway. Their destiny cannot be separated from ours. We may take such temporary measures as the issuing of work permits and having brighter school fees for the children of non-citizens. But history and geography, ties of blood and economics have inextricably linked the destiny of the people of the two territories.

If Singapore goes under, there will be unhappiness for many people.

I hope that everyone will come to understand that all these measures which are being taken arise from an urgent need to limit our economic problems.

Singapore is only 224 square miles, and our neighbour is approximately 130,000 square miles. They believe that if the 250,000 Malays in Singapore leave the

Republic and are replaced by four million Chinese, our failure will be certain.

They probably evicted us from Malaysia without much thought for the future.

Our decision to accept separation at that time was based on our thinking that we

would take a step backwards for the sake of being able later to take two steps

forward. But, they may have decided on separation for the same reason too! The

question now is: who is in the right? It will be a long time before we know the

final outcome of things. But if we do not take immediate measures to meet the

present situation, we will be inviting disaster on ourselves. And our failure will

affect the lives of others.

National Archives of Singapore

Each month, about 2,000 people ranging in age from 20 to 30 years enter

Singapore and change the address in their identity cards. Last year, about

24,000 people had their addresses altered. Today, I read a letter in the English

press written by a Malaysian citizen. He said he had three children in our

schools and he had now to pay a total of seventy-five dollars in fees a month. If

one Malaysian citizen brings with him three children when he shifts to Singapore, you can well imagine how much we will have to spend on education when 24,000 families are added annually. A small nation like us would, in such a case, be helping a larger nation to solve its economic and social problem! And, if that happens and the spirited, the adventurous come into Singapore, non-Communists, anti-Communists and pro-Communists, the net result would probably be a very activated Singapore which would be the opposite of her neighbour! This is not the way out. We must face reality. People with the qualities of leadership must face difficulties squarely. Those who believe in democracy, in the constitutional struggle, who have respect for justice and human dignity must face realities.

There are, of course, some people who think that they have not the capacity and ability to take care of the lives of a few million people. Such people think only of themselves and of those close to them. Their attitude is: why choose the difficult road? It is easier to keep to oneself and to cut oneself off from trouble. If this is the case, I have nothing to say. But this is not how a man of worth will act; it is not sensible conduct and is the surest way to destruction.

Whatever it is, we hope that those who live in Malaysia will, for the time being, face their problems bravely and allow us time to solve our problems in

Singapore. It is very difficult to predict at the moment what the situation will be in 10, 20 years. But we must not be influenced by the policy of powers in either the eastern or western bloc. We must ourselves decide our own destiny.

I have been asked this question very often: how can the few millions of Chinese in this part of Southeast Asia survive, regarded as they are with suspicion by various quarters? And my answer is: establish a multi-racial society where one community helps and respects the other.

What some people dread most is the eventual establishment of such an equal and multi-racial society. What they dread most is our being able to solve the problems of the Malays and our then being able to join hands with them. Why did they force us to leave Malaysia? If we were able to mobilise only the Chinese they would not have cared. But because we are also capable of helping the Malays, and of winning the Malays to our cause, they felt that it endangered their position. They then created contradictions and then exploited them without considering the outcome.

If you want a Chinese chauvinistic society, failure is assured. Singapore will surely be isolated. But even if you are not isolated and you extend your Chinese chauvinist influence to our neighbour, they will, if they find no way out,

join up, with another big neighbour to deal with you! And such a situation is definitely not impossible.

We must firmly hold on to our corner of Southeast Asia. It is not negotiable. But we must also try our best to establish a model, multi-racial society based on the principle of equality.

Our best way out at the moment is on the one hand to ensure Singapore's survival; on the other to keep watch of political developments on the other side of the Causeway.

We all know what the Indonesians hope to achieve. If their objectives are realised, all of us will be destroyed. Because it would mean our being completely surrounded.

Our attitude towards the other side of the Causeway must therefore, be flexible. We must not be too stiff. Although we have our strength, we cannot exert unnecessary pressure lest they panic. This situation must never arise. If the Vietnam situation does not worsen and does not develop into a global war, political developments on the other side of the Causeway may well take a turn for the better.

There are some who have repeatedly tried to establish a communal society and have not been able to meet the challenge of those who believe in multi-racialism as the only way out. These people have since been forced to compromise and to give way. In this way, a multi-racial society will certainly come into being in 10, 15 years.

In other words, if you and your descendants do not wish to be slaves; if you believe in multi-racialism, you have to prepare for long-term effort. Your stand must always be clear and firm. You will always need vision, foresight.

I believe success or failure is in our own hands.

But, on the other hand, the Vietnam situation may be greatly changed in 1966 and this will in turn have an impact on our destiny. Though we cannot influence the eastern or the western powers over the Vietnam issue, we must not be deaf or blind to events. We must not be caught unprepared.

The Vietnam crisis is not a problem involving only North and South Vietnam. The problem now is: what stand will the U.S. take? The U.S. believe that if they give way in Vietnam, it will mean putting the whole of Asia under the influence of China. As such, they may decide to have a showdown now and put

down all their cards on the table to prevent the problem becoming more intractable in 10 or 20 years. If the U.S. is confident that Russia will remain an onlooker in this great conflict between the "capitalist" and the "Communist" countries, there is a possibility that the U.S. will exploit this opportunity and wipe out the whole of China's nuclear power and industrial might.

If such a war takes place, nobody can predict what great changes will occur in the Southeast Asian situation and in the world. If the U.S. loses, how will it influence us? If China is defeated, what will be the attitude of the U.S. and some other countries towards people of Chinese descent in this part of the world? If war between China and U.S. breaks out, what will be the attitude of Russia? Will this nuclear war develop ultimately into a war of white versus coloured people? If a day comes when people become convinced that the whites will never allow coloured peoples to be strong militarily and economically, and so become their equal the whole world may see a great conflict on the basis of race and colour. If this comes about, we shall be severely embroiled and no one will be able to predict what the outcome will be!

We are living in a very unstable Southeast Asia and are always regarded with suspicion because we are of Chinese descent. We must, therefore, be fully aware of our real position. We must observe the local situation

attentively and be ready to meet our problems. And, we must find a suitable way out. We cannot afford carefree indifference or wrong assessments.

National Archives of Singapore