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SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

TRANSCRIPT OF A SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE CHINESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE ON 4TH JULY, 1966.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of my colleagues and myself, I would like to thank you and the representatives of 400 associations who have given us this dinner.

Singapore is a place with a reputation of its own that of being an island of very shrewd, very skillful traders -- people who know how to make money. And, of course, this business acumen which is highly respected and envied makes it easy for me to establish new trading links and new trading contacts. I believe that in the next few years, there will be an expansion in trade and in industry, in exchange of goods and all will be well for the next few years -- maybe five, maybe ten. But after that, it depends upon what happens in these first ten years. We should, within this time -- these ten years -- acquire an added reputation not only as shrewd and highly-skilled traders and shopkeepers, but also as a people

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with a great stamina, endurance and resolve -- a determination to do what is fair and right by ourselves and by our neighbours, and to ensure our future in Southeast Asia. What is required even more than business acumen, is courage.

There is a fundamental difference in our position today from what it was before the 9th of August last year. Before that, either when we were in Malaysia or when we were a British colony -- if I can use a picture metaphor -- our life was reasonably secure because whatever we did, we knew that if we made a mistake as it is with circus performers, they perform with a safety net; -- if anything goes wrong, you bounce on the safety net, you bounce back and carry on where you left off! And so, whether you were a political leader or a leader of the merchant community or trade unions or professionals and intellectuals, you had your go; and, if it was a mistake, it did not matter. I would like to remind all of you that it is a very different situation today. This time, we are playing for keeps and, if we make a mistake, there is no safety net underneath. You will fall down with a big 'bump' and the chances are you will never get up again.

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And, every act -- either of doing or 'non-doing' -- must be carefully weighed. And often, an abstention from an act is more meaningful than the commission of an act.

This is something which the leadership in the business community must learn. The idea of a man being interested only in business -- not interested in what is politics; not interested in relations with other countries; interested only in business -- in profits, anything that eases and greases the way to profits. I do not say that that attitude was wrong, but I say it is inadequate in this new situation. We must learn quickly to think and to act circumspectly.

By way of an example, let me discuss this problem, the strength of feeling, which is involved in the Japanese massacres during the War -- the question of the blood debt. The Japanese talk of an act of atonement. The President of the Chamber has referred to it as a "blood debt" as distinct from a "war debt".

Let us sit back and think. What is this worth? 50 million dollars! What percentage is this of the revenue collected last year which was $450 million? One-ninth, one-tenth. For one-tenth of the revenue, you will wash away all the sins of the past and all is forgiven and forgotten? Is it worth the pursuing at this time? Let us take a deep breath and re-calculate.

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What is at stake in our relationship between our neighbours and ourselves -- and that includes Japan -- is worth more than $50 million. And I would myself prefer to have that $50 million unpaid -- unless the gesture of atonement is one

accompanied by a deep and sincere regret for what has happened. Not a cash payment to wipe off an evil they perpetrated.

But I think these bones and all the sadness of the past should make us think of something even more important than a blood debt: can you be sure that this will never happen again?

How many people died the last time? 10,000? 20,000? Make it 50-thousand. If something goes wrong in this part of the world, I doubt whether there will be people left to pick up the bones that will be left littered around. And some of the things that are happening in South Vietnam should give us cause for anxiety and concern. For what happens there -- a miscalculation as to the tolerance of to the Chinese Communist Party or, more important, of the Russian Communist Party, the point beyond which they can no longer tolerate an exposure as paper tigers or, worse, as betrayers of the Communist cause -- can trigger off a holocaust. The end result of such a mishap is too horrible even to contemplate.

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And on this point I would like to explain our attitude to what happened yesterday. You know there was some minor protests. We explained to these Barisan and Party Ra'ayat activists: by all means protest, by all means

demonstrate your indignation, your anger, your wrath. There was the Badminton Hall ... We made sure it was free for them today. They wanted to choose the 4th of July, a special day for them, as it is for the Americans. And we said, "Yes. There is the Badminton Hall ... 15,000 people can go in. But please, don`t do illegal things. Don't march around and take stones and beat up people and throw stones into glass windows, because that is not good for Singapore." And, they decided that they would beat the gun. They thought the police would wait for them today. So, they beat the gun and held processions yesterday! But, you know, it is the duty of the police to be sure that they are never caught napping. And so, no processions took place in the way they planned.

If it was in Singapore's interest that there should be a massive procession which ends up with cars being broken and stones thrown through glass windows --- and American buildings always have vast sheets of glass then I would say: by all means, let us have it. But, we have calculated this is no good for Singapore.

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It may be good for Barisan because what they want is more confusion. You know, broken glass, blood, air of uncertainty, bitterness, disorder ... But, it is no good for Singapore. Whether it is good for the PAP or not is not the criterion. The test is: it is not good for Singapore, and so it must stop.

Finally, I would hope that, over the next few years, whatever people say about us ... some people say we are a potential "third China", a dangerous place in an important corner of Southeast Asia, preserving a base for an extension of the capacity of bigger powers in Asia to meddle in Southeast Asia. But it is not what people say that should worry us. Because some people are bound to say these things. Let them say it. What is more important is whether we act and comport ourselves in a way which gives the impression that that is what may happen.

But what is more important is that other people who do their calculation on the basis of careful observation should, after assessing all the facts, come to the conclusion that Singapore -- a multi-racial, forward-looking, active community -- is a factor for good; that it will help stability and development in the whole region and is not a factor for harm and trouble. That is more important ... It is not only the political leaders but the merchant community and the trade union leaders and every section of our society who must give this abiding impression to those whose job it is to observe and to assess for their Government; that here is a community of Phoenicians in Southeast Asia, worthy of respect, whose future, progress and prosperity could contribute to the well-being of the whole region.

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And, if we give this impression -- never mind those who are out to see evil and to speak evil -- mind those who are out to assess the truth, the possibilities and the probabilities, then you and I have a secure future.

Never mind the bones of the past. Let us mind more about the many more bones that will be glistening on our sea-shores with nobody to pick them and put them in earthen-ware jars under a monument.

I would like to think that we have the capacity to adjust to new situations with verve and resolution, and to meet new challenges with the aplomb that enabled us to overcome so many older challenges with conspicuous ease. I wish you all not only a prosperous but, even more important, a secure future!

5th July, 1966.

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