Mr. Acting President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have come to Tokyo because of three reasons; one, because of my German Social Democrat friends wanting to try and help democratic socialism in Asia and get people of like minds to come together; and second, because I wanted to get away from some of the things which pre-occupy me day by day and I thought Tokyo might be as good a place to take a respite from my daily chores as any other place; and third, because since I have chosen Tokyo to get away from my daily problems, I might as well try and keep the investors who have put some chunk of machinery and other bits of capital in Singapore reasonably confident that they ought to put in more. (laughter) And therefore, really, I have very little to gain from the kind beneficial multiplying effects which the Press Club in Tokyo could give me because the kind of investments that will pour into Singapore depends upon keeping out of the news.(laughter)

So, as I told your acting President, I should say very little; I shall answer whatever is asked of me as truthfully and shortly a I can, briefly as I can and I
shall only made a few introductory remarks about what I am going to say in Tokyo to this little seminar by Friedrich Ebert Shiftung.

The Germans defeated and flattened after 1945 have come to Tokyo also defeated and flattened in 1945 to try and resuscitate all the Social Democrats and the democratic socialists who took over from time to time in Burma and Indonesia and others but who are now flat on their faces. (laughter) And this about sums it up. (laughter)

The theme which my German Social Democrat friends have asked me to speak about is "The role of developing countries in world politics"

I thought there was a touch of the ironic about it -- asking me, (laughter) representing Singapore, to speak about the role of developing countries in world politics. Because, as I understood the meaning of the word "politics", it is concerned with the exercise of power whether for good or for the reverse. And one thing developing countries haven't got is power. (laughter) So, if you haven't got power, then your role must be that of the chorus. Either therefore, you are useful to somebody's baritone or soprano as a sort of backdrop for it or you are not. And this where I think, to a certain extent, Southeast Asia will be interesting at least from the newspaper man's point of view for quite some time.
There are three ways in which one can be important if one hasn't power in world politics: first, one can be important by being an accretion to the power of somebody else -- which is always a useful thought. We spend a lot of time thinking about it (laughter) ourselves because being conveniently placed in the middle of Southeast Asia, we sort of calculate our credit-worthiness to those who have got the credit (laughter). Second, if you although individually haven't the power, you collectively can create some sensation of power -- like Afro-Asian solidarity once upon a time looked as if it might create that sensation of power. (It is) not the reality of power but the sensation of it. And third, if for diversity of reasons, the big powers decide to contest for supremacy in any particular underdeveloped region.

It is in this third circumstance that Southeast Asia is interesting. It is sad really, for developing nation that the keen contest for the hearts and minds of ignorant black, yellows and browns have lost the same attractions for the Russians and the Americans. I think the disillusionment (lies in the spending) of large sums of hard cash either as aid in food or other forms of assistance like hardware and surplus arms and tanks and other weapons of peace-loving or peace-keeping operations (which) have all come to nought. And I think the first
period of disillusionment has worked to the disadvantage of both underdeveloped (and developed) countries throughout the world.

I think after all the cynicism is wiped aside, there is a genuine interest in the underdeveloped countries to ensure that there is competition between the big powers for their fealty because otherwise, they can remain underdeveloped till the end of time. And hence a very crucial role which the Chinese -- the mainland Chinese as they are referred to in Tokyo -- can play in this, in two ways. First, the kind of problems they pose to South and Southeast Asia; that makes for some creative activity or at least some activity -- you know, Asian Development Bank, ASPAC, ASA and more in the offing. And I think a constructive, creative reaction to the kind of problems which would otherwise develop if you have economically weak peripheral states, in the long run, barring accidents, may begin to emerge.

But then, even if it does not, there is the other possibility that after this particular generation of leadership has had its policies worked out, nobody can say that there will not again be the great rapprochment between the Communist parties of the world once again to march in world crusade to achieve this world brotherhood.
But whatever it is, for the underdeveloped countries, it is crucial that there should be some competition for their participation either on behalf of one or the other side. For, nothing can be more catastrophic than for all the developed nations to come together and say, "Let us all decide that this shall be the shape of things to come; that the history of the human race has been settled by the events of the last 400 years since the Industrial Revolution, and those who have emerged stay emerged and those who have not, so be it". For, in that situation, the destiny of the have-nots really, is to find out just how much they haven't got for the rest of time.

I am not suggesting for one moment that all nations can be "have" nations - - because I do not think that is true.

I think you must have something in you to be a "have" nation. You must want. That is the crucial thing. Before you have, you must want to have. And to want to have means to be able first, to perceive what it is you want; secondly, how to discipline and organise yourself in order to possess the things you want -- the industrial sinews of our modern economic base; and thirdly, the grit and the stamina which means cultural mutations in the way of life in large parts of the tropical areas of the world where the human being has never found it necessary to work in the summer, harvest before autumn, and save it up for the winter. In
large areas of the world, a cultural pattern (is) determined by many things including climatic condition. As long as that persists, nothing will ever emerge. And for it to emerge, there must be this desire between contending factions of the "have" nations to try and mould the "have-not" nations after their own selves. If they want that strongly enough that competition must act as an accelerator, and no more than an accelerator to the creation of modern, industrial, technological societies in the primitive agricultural regions of the world.

I speak in Tokyo. It is geographically, I think, proper to speak about Japan as part of Asia(laughter). Really, I think Asia is too broad a term. This is one of the problems which bedevil lots of Europeans when they talk about Asians. We are Asians but that means we live on the continent of Asia.

But I think Asia can be very clearly demarcated into several parts and very distinct parts -- East Asia is one of them. It has got a different tempo of its own. So has South Asia, and so has Southeast Asia. I think this is crucial to an understanding of the possibilities of either development for the good or development which is not in the interest of peace and human happiness in the region.
And vaguely, I like to demarcate -- I mean not in political terms -- demarcate them in terms of half-in-jest, but I think half with some reality in the basis of difference in the tempo according to the people who know what these things are. I mean East Asia: Korea, Japan and mainland China and including the Republic of China in Taiwan and Vietnam. They are supposed to be Buddhists. And then there is Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, Ceylon which are supposed to be Hinayana Buddhists. According to the Hinayana Buddhists, if the bed-bug disturbs you then you take your mattress and shake it off; there is that compassion not only for the human being but for the bed-bug and you give it another chance and you let it off. (laughter) Either it finds its way on to some other creature or it finds its way back to your bed. But watching the Japanese over the years, I have not the slightest doubts that is not what they do (laughter). And I think this makes some difference. I am not talking now -- isms or ideologies. It is something deeper. It is part of the tempo, the way of life.

My interest now in this thing is that I have Mahayanas and Hinayanas all mixed up in Singapore. So (at) any one particular time, I have to find out which is the dominant consensus. There is always a consensus either on one side or the other, but I have to find out which is the dominant one. And I would like to believe that, in the long run, besides Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhists there are lots of other people interested in maintaining peace, stability and some semblance
of man's inevitable progress -- or, at least, supposedly inevitable progress --
towards the better life for everybody to make it possible for all those in South
and Southeast Asia who want -- this is crucial -- who want and are prepared to
pay the price of what they want, to join the world community of "haves".

So you see, what a difficult task my German Democratic Socialist friends
have asked me to do! It is all right talking to hard-boiled foreign correspondents
in these terms but to talk to democratic socialists who are my comrades from all
these various regions in these terms is quite an exercise in semantics. (laughter)
So I hope you will forgive me if I say no more because it is one of those delicate
subjects which, if I were a journalist -- as I have seen it happen from time to time
-- whenever there is a very difficult problem around the region, journalists never
write about it (laughter). But the politicians, they are always foolhardy enough to
have a try and I hope I won't come out the less happy for the experience.

National Archives of Singapore

Now, if you want to find out anything else which you think you can get out
of me (laughter), please try (laughter).

TRANSCRIPT OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS AFTER
THE PRIME MINISTER’S SPEECH AT THE FOREIGN
CORRESPONDENTS ASSOCIATIONS’ DINNER IN TOKYO
ON 21ST MARCH, 1967.

Question: Mr. Prime Minister, there seems to have been some time lapse between a moment when you once upon a time drew out an apologetic letter of Dean Rusk concerning certain actions in Singapore and the time when you made or have been reported to have made a statement that the American presence in Asia gives underdeveloped nations in Asia time to develop in their own free sense and will. How do you see the American role in Asia?

Answer: I don’t think how I see the American role in Asia is very important. I think what is important is to find out what the American role in Asia is -- in fact -- going to be. That is far more crucial. I would like to preface my remarks first by saying this:- that if the role becomes too expensive in the long run, then of course whatever protestations of faith and determination which can be made from time to time will, in the long run, be meaningless because it is the long-term price. But the commitments as we can see have gone to a point where very large stakes are involved in South and Southeast
Asia, at least from the point of view of the immediate neighbours of Vietnam. American creditworthiness will be judged by the proximity between performance and promise. The promises have been made to the Thais and their other friends in the region, and I am quite sure these are extremely sensitive peoples who are very keen to see whether the performance will match the promises. But so far as we are concerned, I think that our long-term interests are served by ensuring that there is no permanent occupation or permanent establishment of American occupation forces or armed forces in South and Southeast Asia. It is only natural, as it is even in the case of Europe -- unless their circumstances are sufficiently pressing and excruciating. It is not only the French who want to be masters of their own house. It is part of the ethos of being a human being as against being an animal. If that is so, it means that there must be a solution which ensures that South Vietnam, or what is happening in South Vietnam, cannot be repeated. It must be a credible formula which does not allow, after a lapse of time, the same processes which have been emasculating South Vietnam to emasculate all the peripheral regions. Because if there is that
possibility, or worse the probability that the process can be repeated -- that after a halt, it goes on -- then the countries in the peripheral regions may well prefer some permanent American military presence to (amour propre) or self-respect. And I think that about sums up the problem of South and Southeast Asia -- or at least Southeast Asia.

Question: Mr. Prime Minister, this is a related question: I think it was late last year a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee stated that your views on Vietnam war has changed and are now more in conformity with the American position on the war. I think it was Dayer McCoughie. Can you please comment on that?

Answer: Well, I don’t follow the Senate Foreign Relations Committee very closely (laughter) partly because of the exigencies of aerial traffic, hence we don’t get this kind of publication. I really would like to know what the phrase “The American point of view” means because as I understand it the American public, or at least the American leadership, is going through a very acute phase of deep and excruciating heart-searching. So if you mean by “the American view” what Senator
Fulbright says, what Senator Kennedy says or what so many other people say, I say, “Well, perhaps there is a lot in what they say and what we think”. If, having said those things, they were then entrusted with the responsibility of solving it, I am sometimes persuaded that they may well come out much nearer the final position of what the present American Administration may well find itself, in the long run, to have to settle for.

Question: Mr. Prime Minister, you mentioned the question of the American presence in Southeast Asia a moment ago. To revert to that, Sir, do you have any ideas or suggestions as to what should be done in the Vietnam situation?

Answer: What do I get for all this? (laughter) A lot of rotten eggs and stones?