

INTERVIEW WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW

-- TUESDAY, 10TH JUNE, 1969 --

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QUESTION: The years following World War II were the years of the anti-colonial struggle in Southeast Asia. But now the wave of nationalism has broken all over Asia, with the possible exception of South Vietnam. Now that the countries of this region have achieved independence, what has happened to the Asian Revolution?

ANSWER: The Asian Revolution got bogged down in a great deal of problems with which they started, namely, lack of trained administrators, technocrats and entrepreneurs with sufficient drive and creativity. Different ethnic groups brought into one economic whole by a European overlord were not held together once power was handed over to indigenous majorities. They attempted to stay in office and prove legitimacy through the popular vote by making appeals to ethnic, religious and linguistic loyalties. These are some of the easiest of appeals to make. In short the Asian revolution has got bogged down with the mechanics of administration -- or lack of it -- and the plain facts of life, and economies of development.

QUESTION: Since the end of World War II, the primary task of Southeast Asian leaders has been to harness the forces of nationalism to gain independence, and after that to forge a national identity. Have these tasks been completed?

ANSWER: I do not think they have been completed -- the forging of their national identities. None of these countries in Southeast Asia have completely established a new identity. What they must establish is an identity which comprises the various ethnic groups in the various territories which a colonial overlord brought together into one whole. One of the problems is that these things take a very long time. Hence, you have Kachins and Karens in rebellion in Burma. You have some Papuans or West Irians not altogether happy at being in Indonesia. You've got racial difficulties in West Malaysia, and to a lesser extent in Singapore. You have problems with some Meo and Leo tribesmen in northern-eastern Thailand. There are all these minority problems in South Vietnam. The south western part of South Vietnam being more akin to Cambodians than the Annamites in middle Vietnam. The same is true of the Philippines. Even some of the European countries are faced with this problem. Flemish speaking and French speaking Belgians have not solved this problem after having been a nation for over 100 years.

QUESTION: Is forging a national identity the task of Southeast Asian leadership in the 1970's?

ANSWER: That is one of the tasks of leadership. First to forge a people with a unity of purpose who find fulfilment by working together and giving each other a better life. They have got to feel that they together belong in one whole. If you are making the effort for the prosperity and well being of a group you do not consider a part of you, then people find it very difficult to make the effort.

QUESTION: What should one do to get the Asian Revolution going again?

ANSWER: I think you move into a new phase. Not revolution in the sense of sudden political change, of getting rid one set of rulers and a system of government to establish another set of rulers and another system. That has already been done. The question now is how do you fulfil the expectations of the people that you have mobilized to get rid of European colonial regimes? You have mobilized them on the basis that once the white man was gone they would occupy all the big houses, the big desks, and the big motor cars of the European. Well that is fine. But unless you know how to run the economy, you find you cannot afford the spare parts for the Rolls Royces and the Cadillacs you have inherited. And in any case these things go obsolete and you have got to get new ones. You can get aid for some time. But in the long run you have got to pay for

these things. And that means getting your economy going. From a purely agricultural, to plantation-mining economies, to commercial economies, on to higher levels of industrial production and higher technology. This means educating your population into higher skills. Without discipline you cannot even begin the education and training. Once you have chaos, riots and civil commotion, people do not go to school, and teacher training colleges close. So the teachers are not produced and so on. You can tie yourself up into a knob.

QUESTION: No one can predict the outcome of the Vietnam war, but what is your instinctive feeling, your hunch if you will, about the outcome. Do you think that in the long run South Vietnam will come under the control of the Communists?

ANSWER: I would hope not. But nobody can predict that. It would depend upon what political leadership the South Vietnamese are given, or can produce. Militarily, American intervention has prevented the Communists from winning. But politically, in order to win, the South Vietnamese have got to create a government which commands the loyalty and support of the bulk of the population in South Vietnam and galvanises into self-help. And that is something which only South Vietnamese can do. I hope that American troop withdrawals that have been announced, and undoubtedly will continue, will be at such a rate

so as not to generate a sense of insecurity among the armed forces and the Government of South Vietnam. There must be sufficient time for the South Vietnamese to be trained and to stand up to fight for themselves. If they can't do that, well ... that's that.

QUESTION: Some people feel that if South Vietnam does go Communist that it will put intolerable pressure on the rest of Southeast Asia in the form of continued insurgencies. Others believe that the main danger will not come from a wave of Communist takeovers -- that the real danger will come from the failure to solve the social and economic problems that confront this region. What do you think?

ANSWER: It is really two aspects of the same problem. If your country is moving to a higher level of achievement, of prosperity and the better life, then no one is going to listen to the rabble-rousers. The Communists are going to find it extremely difficult to recruit people. If this is the case then what has happened in Vietnam will not be easily repeated elsewhere. But if you get more and more hungry and angry people, then Communists will find it easier to recruit people as guerillas. Eventually, they will take over. In a chaotic situation, with the economy going downhill, a well organised, tightly knit Communist minority has a good chance to seize power.

If South Vietnam is lost, then the chances are that whoever is the successor government -- whether it be North Vietnam or a combination of Communists of North and South Vietnam -- they will want to be the successors to French Indo-China, which included Laos and Cambodia.

Whether they will be able to create a Communist guerilla insurrection in Thailand is another matter. I feel that if the Thais do not let their will melt away at the thought of being on their own and having to fight themselves, with American aid in arms and resources, but not in men, then Thailand will stay non-Communist. It is not a question of the Vietnamese taking over the Thais. That is not the method of People's Liberation Wars. And if Thailand sticks, then West Malaysia has a better chance, and so Singapore will stick.

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QUESTION: But you think that the will of the Thais is somewhat in question?

ANSWER: Really, the will of the elite. The mass of the people may or may not express that will periodically in some form. I think it is absolutely crucial that the Thais do not over-react. I noticed the Prime Minister

of Thailand has not commented on President Nixon's announcement of troop withdrawals. Other people who have troops in Vietnam have expressed their views. The Field Marshal has expressed no views.

QUESTION: It would appear that Southeast Asia in the 1970's will be more on its own than it has been for several hundred years. How will the region react to that situation? Much has been said about the need for regional co-operation in Southeast Asia. It seems to be the great hope of the area. Yet so far the results have been quite disappointing in that countries have been unwilling to put aside their own narrow national interests for the good of the whole. What do you think are the chances for really meaningful regional co-operation in the 1970's?

ANSWER: First of all it depends whether things take a constructive turn, whether or not the different countries try to make sense of themselves and of what they have inherited from former colonial empires. But the first thing to remember about regional co-operation for economic development is that geographic proximity does not mean that one forms a natural economic unit for advance into the industrial and technological society. If blind persons get together you are unlikely to get anywhere. You need somebody to lead the way, to blaze the trail. The O.A.U. expresses the desire for African



Continental Unity. But after the last few years, all have accepted the fact that the northern part of Africa, the Arab part, is very different from West Africa.

Economic co-operation between, say, Kenya in the East and Sierra Leone in the West just doesn't make sense. There are no communications between them other than by sea around the Cape. How do they industrialize when neither has an industrial base.

Putting it in a Southeast Asian context is putting it into a more sensitive context. Obviously we all need a more advanced economy to generate growth providing the capital and expertise. Who is more advanced? I accept the fact that Japan is an advanced industrial country. I accept the fact that although there are only 12 million Australians -- they are much more advanced in both the pure and applied sciences and in industry. Although not as far ahead as the Japanese, they can nevertheless make a contribution to education and training, industry and technology in Southeast Asia.

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QUESTION: What are your views on regional co-operation as far as defence is concerned?

ANSWER: Who are we going to defend ourselves against? When Americans talk about defence arrangements in Southeast Asia they usually mean

defence against China. But is China going out on a predatory expansionist policy? I do not expect the Chinese People's Liberation Army fanning out through Southeast Asia. That is not their method. Their techniques is through People's Liberation Wars. Vietnamese not Chinese have to die in Vietnam. And to counter that the government of the country must give fulfilment to their people, isolating the ideologically convinced Communists and preventing them from setting on fire the rest of the population.

QUESTION: Do you think that the countries of Southeast Asia should try for a better relationship with mainland China? And if so, what is the best way to go about it?

ANSWER: The whole world has got to live with 'Mainland China' as you call it. Once an American say it is not China but Mainland China, he implies that there is another China. How do you begin to come to terms with China as such? The countries of Southeast Asia are not big enough to come to terms with China on their own. It will have to be up to the major powers to come to some accommodation, first, namely America, Russia, Japan and the countries of Western Europe. Then the countries of Southeast Asia can find accommodation with China within the framework of the United Nations, I hope. The disparity in weight is too overwhelming.

When the United Nations was constituted in San Francisco in 1954, they gave China the veto in the Security Council together with America, Russia, Britain and France. Since then the Chinese veto has been exercised by the Republic of China based in Taiwan. There has been also the emergence of Japan. She has expressed her view that she ought to occupy a more important role in the United Nations, considering her GNP. The Germans have also emerged. And if I may quote the Foreign Minister of the German Federal Republic, he says they are not claiming to be a world power but they cannot be treated like a Portugal. Adjustments will have to be made. It is not just an acknowledgement of the realities in regard to China, but also in regard to the very changed world of the 1970's.

QUESTION: There is a feeling in the United States now that the

Americans have become over involved in the affairs of Asia and should be less involved in the 1970's. What do you feel America's role in Asia should be during the 1970's?

ANSWER: That is a question Americans have to answer for themselves. What kind of a world would they like to live in? Only they can answer that. Your President has said that he is not a 'half-worlder'. By that I

understand him to mean that he is not just interested in Europe alone. You look eastward towards Europe and Russia. You can look westward towards Asia and also Russia. The Russians claim to be both a European and an Asian nation.

Distances mean less and less. So you must play the role you think is in your best interests. I would like to believe that you can discern your interests dispassionately so as not to have the pendulum swing away from Asia because of your rather tiresome experiences in Vietnam. If you recognize that Vietnam was not the kind of war in which an army that is heavily dependent on conventional fire-power and gadgetry is best equipped to fight, then you may discern that American national interests can be advanced congruently with the interests of the countries in Southeast Asia. The more there is a recognition of this, the easier it is for countries of this region to reach an accommodation with each other and with the bigger powers of the world.

QUESTION: Do you think our role should be to lend economic and technical support rather than sending troops to Asia?

ANSWER: I accept the world as I find it. One of the things I find is the disillusionment and even revulsion of the American people against the losses they have sustained in those killed and maimed fighting this war in Vietnam.

But at the same time what is not underlined as much is that you have prevented the Communists from taking over.

QUESTION: What do you think will be the future of Singapore's relations with Malaysia after the present state of unrest is over?

ANSWER: First, much depends on what the position in West Malaysia actually is. The dust has got to settle. Everyone, including us, will have to make his hard-headed assessment of what has happened and what the resultant position is. That is very different from what it was before the afternoon of 13th May is obvious. Secondly, what will be the policy of the Malaysian Government when they have sorted things out? At some point the domestic emergency or crisis must end. Once it is ended officially what will be the policies of the Malaysian Government? Where we are concerned we are prepared to continue co-operation for mutual advantage, in defence and other fields.

QUESTION: The recent riots in Malaysia, and indeed the rising tensions here in Singapore last week, have shown once again how close to the surface are the racial hatreds that divide Southeast Asians. What

caused these riots and what can be done to achieve a truly multi-racial society?

ANSWER: I can not express any public views on the situation in West Malaysia. It is not proper, nor profitable. You mentioned racial tensions in Singapore. There were some. But they were within manageable limits. They will continue to remain manageable as long as the Government, through its law enforcement instruments, the police, the courts, with the backing of the army ... remain completely impartial in the maintenance of law and order and the administration of justice. There can be no question of the Government being more partial on the side of the Chinese as against the Malays because the majority in Singapore is ethnically Chinese. If we get into that sort of position, we cannot solve the problem, because then we shall generate a sense of insecurity amongst the Malays and eventually bitterness and hatred against the Government.

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QUESTION: How do you view Singapore's role in Southeast Asia in the 1970's and what are the most serious problems Singapore faces in the next decade?

ANSWER: That depends on how Southeast Asia develops. If it is constructive development, then we could play a useful role in speeding up development around us because we are a convenient source of expertise and a convenient channel through which these countries can get foreign exchange, which is important for the purchase of machinery and other capital equipment. Then, using a very broad metaphor, we can act as a spark plug for economic progress and development in the region.

If it goes the other way, chaotic and nihilist, then, like Venice, I hope, we shall have enough wisdom and skill to isolate these forces of chaos and destruction. As the dark ages descended on Europe, places like Venice maintained relatively civilized standards of life in a very dark and gloomy chapter in European history. I would hope that such light from Singapore would eventually help to brighten up the area again.

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