

SPEECH BY BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER AT PRESENTATION
TO MR. LEE KUAN YEW OF THE BADGE AND GRANT OF DIGNITY
OF COMPANION OF HONOUR ON 18TH JULY, 1970

Mr. Prime Minister, Mrs. Lee, Mr. Speaker, Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The duty which under the command of Her Majesty the Queen I have just performed is not only an honour and privilege but also a great personal pleasure. Although I first met you, Mr. Prime Minister, in 1966 it was not until I came here to take up my present post in January 1968 that I really got to know you. That, if you will cast your mind back on recent history was perhaps not the most auspicious moment for a new British High Commissioner to present himself to you and to Singapore. It was not, I confess, without some slight feeling of trepidation that I embarked upon my mission. But when a few days after my arrival you asked me to go to see you, you welcomed me with great warmth and friendship and I well remember that, on that first of our encounters, you related to me how, after a difficult passage between Her Majesty's Government and yourself just before the transfer of power, Sir William Goode had asked you to call at Government House and had received you with cordiality, affection and understanding. I thought then, and have always thought since, that you chose

that particular occasion to tell me this because, just as we then, through Sir William Goode, wanted to assure you that, in spite of the odd political difference we intended to remain friends, so you in early 1968 wanted to assure me at the outset of my mission here that the rather uncomfortable political passage we were then going through would in no way diminish the friendship and goodwill which you felt for us. Since then I have had much further evidence from you of this goodwill, and for this, here before your family, your colleagues, your friends and well-wishers I should like to say a plain, simple but most sincere "Thank you".

You, Mr. Prime Minister, are the Queen's Companion of Honour. There could not be a more appropriate acknowledgment and mark of the relationship between our two countries. It is an honourable relationship. Except for a period of three and a half years when we were physically unable to maintain our obligations towards you, we provided, for almost a century and a half, albeit not perhaps always as intelligently as we might but always in honesty and goodwill, the peace and stability under which the good people of Singapore could live and prosper. When the time came to hand over responsibility to you not only maintained your inheritance: you vastly improved upon it, so that today Singapore stands out in the world as an example of what, with good leadership, a courageous, honest and hardworking people can do. When with the passage of

time History separates the wheat from the chaff she will record that, the vicissitudes and accidents of life notwithstanding, the relationship between Singapore and Britain has been an honourable one.

But you Mr. Prime Minister are a Companion of Honour - and if I stress the ‘Companion’ it is because that too gives the essence of the relationship between Britain and Singapore. It is a companionable relationship. It does depend on formality and protocol, but rather on the fact that we are old and good companions. As with all old and good companions walking together on the highroad we may have an occasional lurch or stumble, but we keep going, and will continue to keep going, not only in step but in friendly companionship.

Modesty, Mr. Prime Minister, must not deter you from acknowledging how much this happy situation is due to you, to your zest and vigour and enterprise and to that warm personality which has won you so many friends and admirers in Britain. I know that you have some reservation about being called “Mr. Singapore”, and you have often told me that what has been achieved here since independence - and it is a most exciting and impressive achievement - is the result not of one man’s effort but of a good team spirit. We will all accept that, but we know too that a good team spirit can spring only from dynamic leadership, and that is precisely what you have provided. Universally, and quite

rightly, you are personally identified with Singapore, and Singapore is identified with you, and your name will ever be associated with the high destiny of this gallant Republic. I can say, and do say with total confidence, that the esteem in which you are held by your own countrymen is matched by the esteem in which you are held abroad, and nowhere more than in Britain. You, whom the Queen delighteth to honour, are today the recipient not only of the mark of high distinction which it has just been my proud duty to present to you but also of the respect, the admiration and the affection of all the British people.

To you therefore, Mr. Prime Minister, to Mrs. Lee and to all the members of your family we offer, not merely our formal congratulations, but our most sincere good wishes and the assurance that we want to continue on the road as good companions with you and with Singapore.

National Archives of Singapore