INTERVIEW WITH MR. LEE KUAN YEW, PRIME MINISTER OF SINGAPORE, BY MR.CHANCHAL SARKAR, DIRECTOR, PRESS INSTITUTE OF INDIA, AS BROADCAST BY ALL INDIA RADIO IN ITS HOME SERVICE ON 3RD SEPTEMBER, 1970.

Mr. Sarkar : Mr. Prime Minister, at the banquet speech here the other night you said that non- alignment must find a new relevance in the vastly changed world of today. Will you spell this out in greater detail in the particular context of the Lusaka Conference?

Mr. Lee : Non- alignment started off with the underlined premise that if one was not tied up with some military bloc, with one of the cold war contestants, then one has certain freedom of action in the economic, cultural and international fields. No longer is it really true to say that the main exponents or proponents of this doctrine have really achieved what they sought out to achieve and in fact in an increasingly bi- polar world – that may become tri - polar with the United States of Europe – it

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may become four blocked if Japan or China develop a capacity to generate its own system of satellites, but the fact remains that through an insidious series of controls whether it be the supply of technology or heavy technical equipment or even weapons, either directly or indirectly, one need not be a member of a pact with a cold war partisan, as a member , as a party, to the pact. Yet freedom of action is fairly transcribed and I think non- alignment in the present stage, if it is to have any relevance, must be realistic enough, must face up with these problems and next find some way in which the new country or the countries without high technology and in need of both economic, social or other progress can achieve this without being too much in bondage.

Mr. Sarkar : To come more pointedly to Lusaka you think that out of Lusaka there may be a more militant faction in relation to South Africa, Rhodesia, French sale of arms or Cambodia?

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Mr. Lee : Well that is quite a hotch potch. For to state colonial issues, freedom movements in Mozambique, Angola, Rhodesia and eventually the Africans who live in the territories will have to fight their own freedom with help – both moral and probably military equipment from outside. Cambodia is a completely different preposition altogether. Again, unless the membership of the United Nations means nothing, I do not see how outside countries can get together and destroy the white regimes.

Mr. Sarkar : Well, short of invasion?

Mr. Lee : Short of invasion nothing will work. Rhodesia is different because there eventually something will be done about this both from inside and from outside. But Africa is a different proposition. The difference between Bandung 1955, Belgrade 1961, Cairo 1964 and Lusaka beginning 1970 is that we are now more concerned with making freedom mean something to our people than just a lot of empty slogans. I think slogans are necessary to mobilise people to action – but slogans without the kind of results which make life more

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worthwhile for people living in certain independent countries is not going to get us anywhere except a second revolution.

Mr. Sarkar : Let us take up another question, Mr. Prime Minister. When we last met about one and three quarter years ago, I had asked you : would the concept of multi- racialism in Singapore bear out if the Chinese and neighbouring countries are knocked about ? And you said that it would, unless there is actual pillage, plunder and bloodshed. You said that the concept would stand out unless there is actually pillage and plunder. Since then, as you know, there have been the terrible race riots in Malaysia. How did Singapore stand up to it? You said that what really mattered was the younger generation with education and social service. But you know, in countries like ours, you cannot wait for generations to change. There is in existence a number of generations and you have to work on them as well. What do you think? How do you react to that dilemma.

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Mr. Lee : Well, of course, I am happy and relieved to say that in the last riots in Malaysia in May 1969, there was just a little overspill

into Singapore. We were able mainly because the population believed and trusted in the impartiality which the law enforced to scatter out the force before it caught fire in a big way. I stand by what I said that actually short of a dramatic shock of seeing women and children mutilated coming into Singapore and people seeking refuge, probably a difficult situation that may arise around us. I think a long term solution must be with the next generation because the present one has already all the prejudices. Even with the next generation, part of the prejudices, the parents, will flake off on to their children. I would hope that there is a society which has inherited largely – cultures, multi- religions and multi- languages. The leaders, if not the mass of the people will have to do the calculation, and find out what is to their own total advantage, total in the sense of total happiness of the people grouped together into one community or society. That is tolerance in putting up with each others' weaknesses or irritations or difficulties and demands. That is much better than intolerance and worst is violence.

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Mr. Sarkar : In fact with the young you have a particular definite set programme. The national service and the common education. Do you have any programme to wean away the people with entrenched ideas, the older people?

Mr. Lee : I do not think it will wean them away from their prejudices, but we can isolate such people from positions of influence or prevent them acquiring the capacity to spark off something. And that goes on all the time.

Mr. Sarkar : Do you think the mass media will go on helping in this?

Mr. Lee: We try in every way, the newspapers, television, radio, cinema. And I think most of all, and more important than the impersonal message across some technical device, is the reality which a person experiences when he feels secure or when he feels insecure. If he feels insecure, we must do something even before something has happened to him. Leaving people with a sense of security that they will not be unjustly harmed or injured is one of the important single factors.

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Mr. Sarkar : I notice that in Hong Kong University recently you said that the brain drain can become and is becoming a problem for South East Asia. We in India, you might know, we have about 30,000 scientists and technologists working outside and about 65,000 unemployed engineers. So it is a major problem for us. Do we keep them here and leave them unused and unemployed? Or do we lose them abroad and the vast investments we have made on them? What is your reaction to this dilemma for you as well as us?

Mr. Lee : I am not really competent and qualified to give advice. All I can say is that there should be a method of trying to mitigate or lessen the debilitating effect of this blood- letting. We must first acknowledge the fact however unpleasant it is politically, particularly with the system of representative government. Let us acknowledge the fact that the high- level trained manpower, particularly in the English- speaking world, is an international commodity. It crosses caste barriers, national barriers and seeks returns which are higher probably in North America or Western Europe. And once we

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acknowledge this and get the people to acknowledge the fact, then it will be possible to see that the engineer or the scientist is being paid almost enough as in America in real terms. The unskilled and semi- skilled and even the skilled workers unfortunately who are not so mobile will have to lump it for quite some time. Until we hit the very top society, make technology a more sophisticated product with more value added, and as long as one can keep up with the myth that we have all to be dedicated – and we are all dedicated – particularly those on whom the country has spent more through higher education, then the best way is to ask people to put up with the harsh conditions for themselves and their wives. Once they are faced with the prospect of a bleak education, or inadequate education and a bleak future for their children, then loyalty and patriotism break down in the end. I think it is for us to find those mixed incentives, appeal to loyalty, satisfaction of positions of command, and not subsidiary positions in some foreign outfit. That will keep your best brains within the country and allow a marginal fringe to go out to seek a wider experience and come back.

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Mr. Sarkar : Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister.

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