

SUMMARY OF SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER,  
MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE KAMPONG SUNGEI  
TENGAH COMMUNITY CENTRE 8TH ANNIVERSARY  
CELEBRATIONS ON 22ND MAY, 1971

On my way here tonight, I saw four large dinner parties along Serangoon Road. The roads are better, the people healthier, and there is an air of well-being. Things are better than they were three years ago, when the British first announced that they were leaving altogether in 1971.

In the next five years, short of a major disaster beyond our control, we can achieve almost as much as what we have already achieved in the last ten years.

But we must be constantly aware of the special conditions in Singapore. Singapore has not got a homogenous people.

Our Malay brethren, their religion and problems, require quiet sympathy and encouragement. When necessary, we have to be firm. There were two big riots, one in 1950 over the Maria Hertogh trial. The second was in 1964 at the Prophet Mohammed's birthday procession. On both occasions, religion was

involved. The first was caused, almost absent-mindedly, by a British judge sending a Eurasian Muslim convert to a convent. The second was caused by political exploitation of religion, using race riots for political intimidation. So religious communal issues have to be handled sensitively.

Next the Chinese-educated. All people are very sensitive over their language and culture. But especially the Chinese-educated. If you make the Chinese feel that the Chinese language and culture will disappear, or worse, that the government is suppressing it, there will be an explosion.


No Singapore government can want to destroy the Chinese language, education or culture. In fact it is the driving force of our economy, the drive and industry of our workers. Anybody who tries to work up communal feelings, on spurious and specious grounds, over fictitious dangers to Chinese language and culture must be firmly dealt with. Hence, the action against the four Nanyang Siang Pau executives and editors. We have allowed the paper to go on. They are still protesting about the detention of their editors and executives. But they have stopped filling the paper with Communist news, and there is no more inflammatory stuff on Chinese language, education and culture. I think they know that if they re-prime the line they were taking, the government must act again.

When Ly Singko was in Sin Chew, he did not write as virulent editorials and articles as he did when he transferred to Nanyang Siang Pau from February this year. Why? Aw Kow had received about \$4 million of communist money. Yet he, as managing-director of Sin Chew, kept Ly Singko under restraint. But when Ly transferred to Nanyang, he went all out to stoke up feeling. Why did the Nanyang owners let him do that? They claim open trial. But they know, and so does the government, that bringing them to trial at the moment means that all this communal arsenic will be regurgitated in the press, putting further poison into our society.

The English-educated are a different category. Those not rooted in their own cultural traditions tend to unthinkingly imitate the West whether relevant or irrelevant. Some get caught up with airy-fairy abstractions, like academic freedom -- whatever they believe it means. Some are naive enough to believe that freedom of the press is sacrosanct and unlimited. They do not, or perhaps cannot, understand that freedom of the press really means the freedom of the owner, the man who owns the newspaper, who hires and fires the journalists. But the English-educated as a whole as a rule do not riot. So even though a little froth is being generated about the freedom of the press, in the Herald case, no harm will be done to Singapore's social and political stability.

The Indians are by and large English-educated. The parents of those sent to Tamil schools usually intend, and do go back to India. So the Indians in Singapore are not riotous or violent in the mass behaviour.

It is in these circumstances that a government of Singapore has to govern in the interests of all or, when that is not possible, in the interests of the majority. We cannot allow anyone to stir up things and upset our political stability. Trouble and instability must upset the progress and the economic growth we are making. Then there will be no more new factories, no jobs waiting for the National Servicemen going out into the reserves, and none for the school leavers. Then social unrest and more riots are the result. The latest example of this vicious cycle is Ceylon.

 If anyone wanted to destroy Singapore, he would work on the different weaknesses of those three different language groups. Often they pull in contrary directions. Accentuate these contradictory pulls and you cause chaos.

Take a recent example. The Malay Teachers' Union has recommended a national type school, using English as the medium of instruction, Malay as the

National Language, compulsory, and Chinese or Tamil as a what they call “second language”, but in fact a third language. In effect it means closing down the Chinese Schools and teaching Chinese as a third language, next to first English, and second Malay. If any government is mad enough to accept this proposal it can only provoke the Chinese-educated to hostility. Perhaps most Chinese-educated know that the present Singapore government will never agree to this. That is why there has been no violent outcry from them.

Meanwhile on the opposite side, Nanyang Siang Pau had been demanding that the government should publish the Government Gazette in Chinese, since it is the language of the majority. They even complain that car-park attendants speak English. The logical demand they were working up towards, is that Chinese should be the official language, and used as the language of administration and the courts.

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The result of such a move must be bloody, literally bloody riots, as the non-Chinese, Malays, Indians, Eurasians, some 25% of the population are squeezed out. They can never hope to learn Chinese and compete for places and jobs with the Chinese, if Chinese is the language.

This is what happened, in Ceylon. There, Sinhalese and Tamils used to meet on common ground, in English. Then 20% Tamils were squeezed out as the

80% Sinhalese become the official language, and Buddhism the official religion. Today Ceylon is a shambles. This is the sort of trouble-making the government will not allow. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure that there is stability, that there is economic growth, a decent life for everyone. For your children, there should be better education and higher skills, better social and medical facilities. We must move towards a more just and equal society, where everyone gets a share, fair compared to what he has put into society.

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