

EXCEPTS OF ADDRESS BY SINGAPORE'S PRIME MINISTER,
MR. LEE KUAN YEW, ON THE CHANGE IN GREAT POWER
RELATIONS AT THE COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF
GOVERNMENT MEETING IN OTTAWA ON FRIDAY, AUGUST 3,
1973

SECURITY

The Prime Minister of Fiji was searching for Shangri-la. So are we. Fiji has a better chance of achieving it for its wonderful land. It is in the South Pacific. There may be some nuclear fallout, but there is no great contest for influence between the super and major powers in the vast expanse of the South Pacific. I am not so fortunately placed. Singapore is at the southern tip of Asia, the crossroads between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the half-way point between Northern Asia and Southern Australasia, and a key communications centre. It is not due to any special virtue or attractiveness of my people that we receive considerable attention from the Americans, the Soviet Union, the Chinese and the Europeans, who were first there. I hope they will continue to be interested and may add to a more stable balance of influence. I have to face reality, otherwise I must perish. I too like to have Singapore turned into a

Shangri-la with a tranquil Indian Ocean and a Pacific Ocean, pacific in the literal sense of the word.

DETENTE & RIVALRY

Detente between America and China, America and the Soviets, has reduced the dangers of nuclear and even conventional war between America and the Soviet Union, and America and China. It has not as yet convinced the Chinese that the changed situation has lessened the danger of a pre-emptive nuclear strike on them by the Soviets. However, the contest for influence and supremacy still continues in Southeast Asia, especially between the Soviet Union and China.

The Soviet Union has a growing fleet of modern naval vessels. Nothing we can say or do here in Ottawa can or will exclude the Soviet navy from the Indian Ocean, the Straits of the Archipelago, including the Straits of Malacca, and the South China Sea. Nor can the Japanese prevent them from sailing through the Inland Sea of Japan up the Vladivostok. These are the facts of life. And lest we forget, the nuclear powered aircraft carrier, the USS ENTERPRISE, sailed through the Straits of Malacca into the Bay of Bengal at the time when Pakistani troops were retreating from the Indian Armed Forces.

When the Prime Minister of Australia said that because Singapore has a large ethnic Chinese population, therefore the Soviet ships could not come to Singapore, the Soviet Union immediately diverted four Soviet tenders, feeder ships, to Singapore for repairs, to see whether we were Chinese or Singaporeans. We repaired them. I would ask him not to provoke the Soviets, for the next time they will send, not a feeder ship, but a missile destroyer or even a nuclear vessel. The fact is, as the President of Tanzania has said, when elephants fight, the grass suffers. The thought occurred to me that when elephants flirt, the grass also suffers. And when they make love, it is disastrous.

In Mid-1971, after Mr. Nixon's dramatic broadcast that he was to visit China, he later announced a visit to the Soviet Union and he bombed Hanoi and mined Haiphong when the North Vietnamese launched their attack in the spring of 1972. Nevertheless, he received the full red carpet treatment in Moscow.

This had become, what the Americans would call, a different ball game. It has repercussions for all of us here. It has been suggested that the Americans allowed the Soviets to catch up and reach nuclear parity in order that there could be a successful SALT Agreement. Perhaps, one day, both the Americans and the Soviet Union will be wise enough to allow China to reach parity. Then, and only then, will China be a party to any SALT Agreement.

Indo-China, next to the Middle East, is the most troubled part of the world, with all the potentials for conflict. The Soviet Union, for its own reasons, has decided to mute the dangers of violence in the Middle East, so that at least it will not be drawn into collision with America. The Soviet Union wants American technology, American wheat, the good things in life. How long this phase will stay, we do not know. China, for its own reasons, also wants detente with America. Then it will have only one front. It also wants friends all over the world to outdo and isolate the Soviet Union. China openly exhorts the EEC to succeed. Then the Soviet Union will be kept busy in the West and have two fronts to keep it busy.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

This big power game is acute in Southeast Asia. We are trapped in the schemes of the great powers. There are two alternatives for us. One, to create a Shangri-la in our minds. The ASEAN countries, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, have asked, please, can we have neutralisation? Can we have a zone of neutrality, guaranteed by the big powers? The only major power that has responded is China but it is not yet in a position to guarantee it. The other two which can guarantee it, the Soviet Union and America, have not responded. So we are whistling in the dark, through the

cemetery of Indo-China. We have to guess what China's willingness to guarantee neutrality will be when it has a blue water fleet that can police the Straits of Southeast Asia, the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean.

In January this year, some thought perhaps there would be stability after the initialling of the Treaty in Paris. You, Mr. Chairman, were kind enough to tell us and other countries in the region, why the Paris Agreement did not bring peace. Your man in Saigon has said that what he was supervising was war, not a ceasefire, let alone peace. When Watergate made the American Congress bold and strong enough to force the President of the United States to compromise and agree to halt bombing after 15th August, a new phase opened. A collapse in Indo-China will bring advance threat of guerilla insurgency to our doorsteps by way of Thailand and West Malaysia. I do not ask my colleagues from Australia, or Britain, or New Zealand to defend me from this. They cannot. It has been painfully demonstrated in Vietnam. This problem we will face ourselves.

I beg to disagree with your proposition, Mr. Chairman, that because the major and superpowers have eased their relations with each other, therefore, the world is safer and, by implication, I am safer. On the contrary, I am in a more uncomfortable position. I believe even the middle powers of Western Europe are concerned, though they do not show it. The Europeans have to take a public

position in matters such as MBFR (Mutually Balanced Force Reductions).

Soviet forces go back five hundred miles. They can be back in a matter of hours.

American forces go back 4,000 miles, three thousand five hundred of it, the waters of the Atlantic. This could mean the gradual Finlandisation of Europe.

There are ABM's around Moscow and around Washington, as a result of the SALT Agreement. Estimates are that America and the Soviet Union have over 2,500 nuclear warheads. Let us say Britain has 50. When it really comes to the crunch, eye-ball to eye-ball, one has over 2,500 and the other 50 missiles. Can they really use it against Soviet cities without ABM's? This is the problem for the West European powers.

But what of us? We all want to live in peace. Let us all destroy offensive weapons and only have defensive weapons for internal security. But where is the dividing line between offensive hardware and defensive hardware? Australia has given a squadron of Sabres to our friends, the Malaysians, and another squadron of Sabres to our friends, the Indonesians. I believe they are defensive. But I am forced to buy from Britain two defensive squadrons of Hunters. But they are old, second generation, refurbished aircraft. They will augment our joint defensive capability. But what good are these aircraft against the most likely threat of guerilla insurgency. They are in the jungles with M-16's, hand-launched rockets and mortars. The Vietcong, at the height of the war, bogged down 560,000

American troops, one brigade of Australians, one company of New Zealanders, 50,000 Koreans, Thais and Filipinos. So Shangri-la is not for Southeast Asia, unless one seeks the poppy variety.

POVERTY

The longer term threat to the peace and security is the widening disparity between the wealthy and the poor. The whites are the wealthy, and the non-whites are the poor. The only exceptions are the Japanese and the oil-rich states. This is going to be so for a long time. Whether we meet at UNCTAD, GATT, the UN or Commonwealth meetings, the barely concealed feeling is the unfairness of it all. With every passing year, short of a fundamental change in human nature, this disparity will widen.

Many countries may never take off at all. When you compound race with poverty, when I believe, we have got the makings of complicated problems.

And that is where Southern Africa becomes the best arena for conflict. Let us pass all the resolutions of goodwill between nations. But for the moment the South African Whites have become more wealthy and more powerful. Gold has quadrupled in price. There is talk of its going up to 480 dollars per troy ounce. But the day the Soviet Union and China decide that it is time to cut down the

West, this is the safest and cheapest way. All they need do is to supply more and more weapons. And the Africans will learn to use more and more sophisticated ones. Many Africans will die. But die they must if they want to have justice in Rhodesia, South Africa and the Portuguese colonies. But the price is terrible. And it will not be Soviets or Chinese who will die. We all want peaceful solutions. But there are situations where peaceful solutions are pipe dreams.

ATTITUDE OF DEVELOPED NATIONS

We can issue comforting words. They soothe the oppressed for a fleeting moment. We may depart feeling better for having expressed hope of a better tomorrow. The comforting words are in big print. When you look at the small print, just like the Generalised Scheme of Preferences, you find obstacles.

We need all our trained talent and skills to jack up our societies. The Australians now say they will let in Asians. But it is professionally trained Asians they want, professional expertise. It think it is rather unkind. Unless we can have a clear understanding of our respective positions, however good Australian Universities may be, we cannot send our students there. We cannot afford to lose them. We have to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps.

In conferences such as this, let us have the small print enlarged. We live in the same part of the world as Australia. That Australia is wealthy, I know only too well. We are much poorer but want to be less poor. Is it not possible to help us, not just by token words but by sincere and hard projects like an integrated iron and steel complex which can benefit the whole region. Why not send Australian iron ore and coke to Indonesia where they can be smelted? Why not bring Japanese expertise, better and cheaper than most in the developed world? The under-developed countries of Southeast Asia can make the other products, steel plates, jigs, tools and dies and so on. One integrated regional project like that will make the Australian slogan 'We are part of Asia' more than a slogan.

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