

Transcript of question - and - answer session following the Prime Minister's address to the New Zealand National Press Club in Wellington on (7.4.75)

Chairman : Now I would like to ask for questions to be put to Mr. Lee. You could just indicate to me if you've got a question to ask and we will hopefully be able to get through as many as possible. Just one or two ground rules for questions. Questions may only be asked by full-time working journalists. We ask that the questions be kept as short and to the point as possible. No statements, questions rather than statements. And if you would identify yourself and your organisation when you ask questions.

Question : I am Joe Reily from Radio New Zealand. Could I take two points you have made on separate occasions, and add them together. You talked about a change in posture in Southeast Asia, I think with reference to Singapore. Then later on you talked about taking sides ...

Prime Minister : May I just correct you. I said of “a change in posture necessary in Thailand”. I never said anything about Singapore. I haven’t come to that yet.

Reily : ... and about a general change in posture in Southeast Asia, you mentioned. After that, you talked about taking sides with reference to PRC and the Soviet Union. Could I ask about Singapore’s possible change in posture, particularly following the visit of your Foreign Minister.

Prime Minister : As I very carefully wrote out, and I hate paraphrasing what I have written out, in case it is not an improvement, “would like to maintain equable relations with both”.

Reily : Well, I just follow that very quickly and say -- do you believe that at the moment this can be possible?

National Archives of Singapore

Prime Minister : Also as I have spelt out: “I thought the prospect of being caught in a competitive clash, a most unpleasant one”.

Question : ... of Press Association. Mr. Lee can you see yourself accepting American military presence either on Singapore itself and / or on one of your islands?

Prime Minister : I don't know the amplification system was adequate in your direction. But I thought I carefully explained that Southeast Asia understood the Nixon Doctrine, namely material aid to those who are ready to help themselves but that this doctrine died with Watergate. Mr Ford hasn't spelt out a doctrine and even before he tried to he has been chopped down by the American Congress. So I think it is an unprofitable business certainly from my point of view to talk about an American presence in one of my islands.

Question : Mr. Lee, I work at the Press Association, and I am asking a question largely to satisfy my own curiosity. Can you comment on the tendency of newspapers and news agencies to refer to any soldier, who fights against Americans, on his own soil as a communist. Would you say they are communists or would you describe them as nationalists or would you describe them in any other way?

Prime Minister : I would say in South Vietnam that considering the large numbers who try and move ahead of the North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces, that the majority of those who were fighting with the North Vietnamese share the ideological convictions of the North Vietnamese and that is why they are trying to run down south. In Cambodia, I think Prince Norodom Sihanouk swung a considerable neutral ground of nationalists over to the Khmer Rouge or they would never have made the gains they did.

Question : [Gopal] of the Far Eastern Economic Review. Mr. Lee, I wonder if you would give us briefly some comment on the relations between New Zealand and Singapore are the usual Commonwealth association Commonwealth relations between New Zealand and Singapore?

Prime Minister : I think as all the countries in the Commonwealth grow up and develop their own bilateral relations, particularly with Britain in the common market, it is no longer via London or Malborough House to Wellington. It is direct Singapore to Wellington, and with the earth satellite stations, it makes very good sense.

National Archives of Singapore

Question : Mr. Lee, could you explain perhaps what is your answer to one point, what your opinions are towards the stationing of New Zealand troops in Singapore and how long do you expect them to stay there?

Prime Minister : My views are that they were there as part of an ANZUK brigade which did an excellent job in maintaining a sense of stability and security, a psychological sense of stability and security which extended beyond Oct 1971 when the British Far East Command was disbanded.

This is now 1975. It gave an extra 4½ years in which everybody, whose minds might otherwise have wandered in adventurous ways, to do their own calculations and decided that the future, the best future for everyone lay in getting together and trying to keep outside forces from manipulating us against each other. This was a valuable contribution which the New Zealanders made to Southeast

Asia, not just to Malaysia and Singapore because I think minds in Southeast Asia were given time to work out the implications of trying to resolve issues by force.

As for the future, they are welcome to stay as long as it takes them time to decide when they like to leave.

National Archives of Singapore

Question : Prime Minister, Hearst, Press Foundation of Asia. Could I take that answer of yours a little further and say would you be a little unhappy if New Zealand public opinion asked if the New Zealand military forces could be removed from Singapore? Having answered that, could you explain a little further ...

Prime Minister : No, one thing at a time, could we? Partly because I am a simple-minded chap and I like to answer one issue at a time.

No, not at all. I think it is a perfectly understanding situation. It is a different position - 1975 from 1971. If

they like to stay there for recruitment purposes because

they like to see the world, I wouldn't object to it at all. I

would like to be able to say, "Well, how about allowing my

own troops from time to time to come over here and climb

up some of your mountains." We run a National Service

army and we don't expect ever to use them. But that's one

of the problems, you see. Life gets easier and more secure

and trouble seems far away. But you got to keep them on

their toes and you got to keep units in competition with each other, and if the best unit, the best battalion, say, that won the most points for jumping or sommersaulting could come to New Zealand in the summer, not in the winter because I think that will lead to logistic problems, it will be a valuable contribution to friendship, co-operation, understanding and all the rest of it.

Question : Thank you for the answer.

Could I follow that further with the economic question I wish to ask. As I understood, your original desire to have New Zealand troops in Singapore was part of your economic strategy - that you did not wish to see the pull-out of military forces so rapidly and thus increase unemployment in Singapore, what now would you like New Zealand's economic contribution to be to the future of Singapore, if at all?

Prime Minister : I am sorry if I have been so poor in my articulation. It was never part of my thesis that New Zealand troops or for that matter, British troops, created employment and therefore enabled us to have enough jobs for the people who need jobs. The argument -- and I think it turned out to be right -- was that a small contingent there acts as a stabiliser which enables economic development to take place, which enables social changes to be undertaken and paid for without aid and which creates conditions under which revolution is less likely to occur, and I think that is fortunately what has happened in the last few years.

What would I like to see in the future? Well, more

economic co-operation, more trade, more dissemination of your technological expertise and food processing and other

things, using Singapore as a centre to plug into Southeast

Asia.

National Archives of Singapore

Question : Mr. Lee, could I ask you how many political prisoners ... ?

Prime Minister : I can't say offhand. I think they run on the fingers of your hands - less than 20, I would think.

Question : (Inaudible)

Prime Minister : Apart from three who were involved in religious fanatic activities, they are.

Question : Do you think the communists are opportunities in your part of the world?

National Archives of Singapore

Prime Minister : My electorate didn't think so.

Question : Prime Minister, can I get away from Amnesty International ...

Prime Minister : He wasn't Amnesty International, he didn't announce himself as such.

Question : I am from the New Zealand (Press Club).

Prime Minister : Yes, that is why I gave him a serious answer.

Question : Sorry. I was quoting an Amnesty International matter. Getting back to New Zealand troops, our Prime Minister said, "New Zealand troops would stay in Singapore as long as the Singaporeans want us." How long do you want us to stay in Singapore?

National Archives of Singapore

Prime Minister : I thought I have given you the answer. You are welcome to stay. You can make up your mind to leave whenever you wish to do so.

Question : Mr. Lee, John Mill, New Zealand Herald, one time a Singapore Herald correspondent.

Prime Minister : That doesn't make you anti-me, does it?

Question : I like to ask what is the proportion of New Zealand troops in Singapore to your own armed forces - 1%, $\frac{1}{4}$ %?

Prime Minister : I am not very good at arithmetic. About 1 to 70, which is slightly over 1%. But that doesn't mean that the fighting qualities of the New Zealand contribution, if it came to it.

Question : Mr. Lee, you became Prime Minister in 1959 and was still a young man. How much longer you ... ?

Prime Minister : Well, I don't know. I was reading the other day about this Rumanian woman who came through with - geriavital, and she was 86. And from the newspapers, she looked on the right side of 50. So I thought I should make an appointment to see her.

Question : (Inaudible).

Prime Minister : I am sorry to hear a young man like you getting frustrated.

Question : New Zealand and I think a number of other countries are keen to pour some kind of aid into Vietnam. Generally, they are finding difficulty at the moment where to put the aid with the confused situation there which I think may continue for some time. Would Singapore as an Asian nation in the area to be an intermediary for the countries outside the area and help bring countries like ourselves to re-establishing or rebuilding what is a clearly devastated area?

Prime Minister : We are not brokers in the aid business. I would hate to be making a percentage out of aid to devastation on the scale that has happened. Nor are we with representatives of the PRG, that is, the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Vietcong. They are not represented in Singapore. I have got the North Vietnamese. If you like to meet them I will introduce them to you.

I think Dr Kissinger tried to get something through Congress for the rebuilding of Hanoi and Haiphong. He wasn't very successful. I don't think Hanoi is particularly impressed at the moment with rebuilding with aid from those who have thwarted or up till now have thwarted their scheme to reunite Vietnam and have associations or close links with Laos and Cambodia. Their rebuilding will have to depend very much on those who supplied them with the weapons with which they have now captured and got control of large chunks of South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Question : Does Singapore trade with any communist nations, Mr Lee?

Prime Minister : We do. But as the communists themselves tell us, with them politics decides trade, not profits. So since my politics is not particularly attractive to the communists - I don't know why Amnesty International always picks on people who are not very popular with communists. They are very friendly to communists. Perhaps one of these days I will tell my PR chaps that we ought to change our image. But they tell us quite frankly - politics-trade, not profits-trade. I am not very good in total figures. But last year trade with all communist countries would be less than 3½% of our total trade: 2½% would be with the PRC and 1% with the Soviet Union and the eastern bloc countries.

Question : How do you promote ... South America ... trading ... China and Russia?

Prime Minister : Not at all.

Question : Mr Lee, you have talks about the not very substantial trade with the communist bloc. What is the state of your trade with the members of the Association of Southeast Asian nations? What would be ... ?

Prime Minister : The health is excellent. The state of the trade has gone up by leaps and bounds mainly as a result of rocketing commodity prices, but as they have been going down this year, I am afraid I will have to report a drop in the actual value of trade done.

Last question I think.

National Archives of Singapore

Question : Mr Lee, ... the death of Chiang Kai Shek ... from the Asian scene, what significance do you think this will have on local Chinese situation?

Prime Minister : Well, as much as ... I think Chiang Kai Shek was a bit younger than Winston Churchill when he died, but his political activity was as minimal as Winston Churchill was in the last ten years of his life. So I think the world would have to make do.

National Archives of Singapore