

TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY PRIME MINISTER

LEE KUAN YEW IN TOKYO ON 22ND MAY, 1975

JAPANESE OFFICIAL : I am sorry for the delay. Today we have here Mr. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore. I would like to request you to please kindly refrain from smoking for the one-hour press conference session because Mr. Lee does not like smoking very much.

PRIME MINISTER : One hour? Half-hour.

JAPANESE OFFICIAL : Mr. Lee would like to give a short speech and then we invite him to a question-and-answer session. According to a special request by Mr. Lee he would like to have questions asked first by the Japanese press people. I would like to request that the proceedings would go like this.

PRIME MINISTER : May I just explain this. This is a problem of language. I speak English and the foreign correspondents speak English, and if we don't allow the Japanese ...

I have come here, I have spoken to Japanese ministers, and this is in a special Japanese context. So I would rather have them ask the questions first and overcome minor hesitations about fluency of speech, and then, after that, after half-an-hour, then those who speak English better than I do can have a go. I got a very brief statement to make. I am afraid I have been rather busy and I have only got the first page. I will read it and if the second page doesn't come before I finished it I promise to read it after the first question.

In the two years since my last visit, Japan like the rest of the world has been adversely affected by the oil crisis and prolonged recession. However, Japan and Germany have done better than most other industrial nations in overcoming the balance of payments problems and reducing their rates of inflation. The recovery of the Japanese economy including the reduction of the Japanese inflation rate from over 20% in 1974 to 15% as of March, 1975, with wage settlements of 13% to 14% means that the Japanese economy can and will help the recovery of the economies of the countries of Southeast Asia. The more trade and investments between Japan and Southeast Asia, the less the unemployment and the lower the number of recruits into insurgency movements in the non - communist countries of Southeast Asia.

The new Japanese Cabinet has a much improved reputation in Southeast Asia as not only being realistic and aiming at growth rates which will be lower than those before the oil crisis but as also being prepared to invest in manufacture in Southeast Asia and to import more from these developing countries.

I am satisfied with my discussions with the Japanese Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Finance Minister and the International Trade and Industry Minister. I am confident that the pledges made by the Prime Minister and the International Trade and Industry Minister to support private Japanese investments in Singapore in practical terms, especially in petro-chemicals and machine tools, will be reflected in export-import bank and OECF support.

QUESTION : Prime Minister, I understand that you have been to the United States and naturally ...

PRIME MINISTER : I assume that DOMEI is well-informed.

QUESTION : Naturally, I assume that the question of Indo-China has been of major concern to America and the US Government in the

search for new policies. Now, the question in terms of Indo-China-Japanese relationship : During your interview when you were interviewed by an NHK correspondent in New York City, in a passing phrase, I have been informed that you told him that Japan improved abacus originally invented by the Chinese and also improved the computer originally invented by the Americans. But this work has not been evolved and could be utilised ... and can do even better. This perhaps, your implication was that Japan's policy which has been geared to sort of US-orientated dependence should now change its attitude and then move more towards an independent posture especially in terms of Japan's policies towards Southeast Asia. What is your view of this?

PRIME MINISTER : Sir, first, I did not say that you improved on the American computer. You improved on the Chinese abacus? Yes. But I think Fujitsu has some way to go to catch up with IBM and (Univac). I would not presume to tell the Japanese how they should improve their presentation both with the communist countries of Southeast Asia and the non-communist countries of Southeast Asia. I think the Japanese are renowned for the capacity to present a package. Any gift is well-presented. And I am quite sure that you will be able to present a policy which is attractive and friendly to the communist countries of Indo-China. I hope it will be more solid in substance with the countries of non-communist Southeast Asia who, in the longer run, may have a

greater area of common interest with Japan. We are not particularly moved by the packaging. We are accustomed to it.

I assume that correspondents have read what I have said and I assume that they know all the latest in the newspapers which we together read, and so we just put the questions. The more brief the questions, the more questions can be asked and perhaps answered.

QUESTION : In conjunction with the last question, Mr. Prime Minister, you used the term 'communist countries of Southeast Asia'. The Japanese Government is not necessarily using that particular term. However, perhaps you indicated during the conferences with the Japanese ministers that it is not advisable that the Japanese Government gives very much economic aid to the communist nations in Southeast Asia. Is it that because you feel that if Japan gives very much economic aid to these countries that they become strong and perhaps they would pass and invade beyond the ...

PRIME MINISTER : I am sorry, I read your English-language newspapers. What does the Japanese-language newspapers call the governments in Indo-China?

Oh, socialists? I beg your pardon.

Well, we will use, since I am in Tokyo I will call things by the Tokyo nomenclature.

I am quite sure that your government has made their calculations and will know where the balance of interests lie. Whether or not you give economic aid to the socialist countries of Southeast Asia will not affect their capacity to any great extent in influencing the security, the political and the economic situation in Southeast Asia. You did not supply them with the AK-47s or the mortars or the rockets or the SAM missiles or the MIG-21s. They know who supplied them and who their friends are. And I think as far as I understand Southeast Asians, particularly those in the socialist countries of Indo-China, they have more respect for you if you are their friends helping them win before the victory than if you help them after they have won their famous victory. But, of course, I may be wrong and you may well believe the opposite which is your privilege.

(To the official) : What was your doubt?

OFFICIAL : He is implying that you said that Japan should have aided the government, the PRG before ...

PRIME MINISTER : No. Thank you very much.

Can I say, gentlemen, that I stand by my English version, and the Japanese version is authorised by my very competent interpreter. But he takes full responsibility. AP, UPI, REUTERS, please go by the English (version).

QUESTION : Apart from this question on Indo-China, in order to avoid the crisis of the Korean peninsula ...

PRIME MINISTER : I thought there was already a psychological crisis. Never mind, just carry on.

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QUESTION : ... I understand -- maybe my memory is wrong. But three of the participants of ASEAN nations already recognised the Pyongyang Government, the North Korean Government. I understand that only Singapore and the Philippines Governments have not recognised them. I wonder

in your view, would you consider that it will be better for you to recognise the North Korean Government?

PRIME MINISTER : We have a North Korean Consul-General in Singapore whose house has a very big picture of the North Korean leader, Mr. Kim Il Sung. And I think he appears in our newspapers in Singapore more often than I do. So I see no particular advantage in giving greater recognition. I think we recognised him already, equally Pyongyang and Seoul -- exactly the same. They can both raise their Consul-Generals' position to ambassadors any time they like. But we believe in not interfering in the present position that there is a government in Pyongyang and there is a government in Seoul.

QUESTION : (From US News & World Report).

The question is I am wondering whether the Prime Minister feels the US has lost its credibility post - Vietnam war and can it be recovered and if so, how?

PRIME MINISTER : That is a question I should have been asked in Washington or New York. However I don't think it is a question of losing credibility. What you have lost is a bit of the lustre that went with all the

technology, the wealth, the fire-power. Credibility is dependent on what people think your pledges are worth, and everybody knows that any American pledge made by the present Administration, if it involves funds, must be backed by the American Congress. So if the pledge is backed by the American Congress or agreed to by the American Congress, there is no question of credibility being questioned. If it is not, and, in fact, powerful leaders of either the Senate or the House of Representatives indicate views to the contrary, then, of course, everybody will have to take out their guide with the latest Congress and see whether a majority can be found to support the views of the Administration of whoever the Secretary of State may be ...

If you'd given me notice of that, I would have put it in a much more elegant and hyperbolic way.

I may add, however, that I have not the slightest doubts as to the sincerity of the views expressed by your President or your Secretary of State or your Secretary of Defence or your Secretary of the Treasury. The problem is to get funds from the United States Congress.

QUESTION : After the Indo-China war, movements by the members of ASEAN have been watched very carefully.

PRIME MINISTER : Watched carefully by whom?

QUESTION : By the Japanese people. And what is the prospect of a conference by the leaders of these nations?

PRIME MINISTER : I can only say that we would like to live in peace, develop a constructive relationship between the non-communist countries of Southeast Asia and the socialist countries of Indo-China. I hope this will be so. I think we have at least as much to offer them economically than they can offer us. Because, after all, we have not been engaged in war. We have fairly sound economies with adequate infrastructure which is available to help them in their reconstruction. And if I may quote my own Foreign Minister, my own colleagues who was in Kuala Lumpur, a little bit of time must pass for them to perceive us as accurately as we need to perceive them. Then they will understand just how useful to their rehabilitation we can be and how peaceful and secure and prosperous Southeast Asia can become if insurgency is not exported or at least arms are not exported, at least to Southeast Asia.

You know, if they sell arms to Southern Africa or give arms to Southern Africa to help the Blacks to recover their stature, well,

that may be rather sad for those who hold consolidated gold shares, but at least that may be better than having it exported to Southeast Asia.

QUESTION : What do you mean by 'they'?

PRIME MINISTER : By 'they', meaning the socialist countries of Indo-China. Because, you know, I am a social democrat. You call them socialists, so I call them socialists.

QUESTION : What would help us predict that peace in Asia after the Indo-China war? We are seriously interested in the moves made by members of ASEAN nations. Especially we are interested in Thailand. How would you view the current situation after the Indo-China war, especially in view of the fact that North Vietnamese government - owned paper criticised your recent statements made in Singapore concerning ASEAN nations.

PRIME MINISTER : The Thais and the Filipinos went with the American allies into Vietnam. Singapore did not go into Vietnam to fight. And the North Vietnamese representatives and the Revolutionary Government representatives are in Bangkok talking over terms for normalisation of relations. It is far better that I did not go and fight them in Vietnam and just speak. Tell it

as it is, as I see it -- but I never fought them. So I think it is much easier for me to establish cordial, and if not cordial, at least correct relations. If I start getting praise from Hanoi's newspapers I think I will get a bit worried, or at least my neighbours may get worried.

QUESTION : ... and Mr. Lee, you went to ...

PRIME MINISTER : No, let's not go into that. I never mentioned about my going to Bangkok. I did go to Bangkok but I did not tell him. And it is irrelevant to the question.

May I say that I wish the socialist countries of Indo-China well. As a matter of fact, we have allowed all these years a small little unofficial trade office of the North Vietnamese in Singapore. We even bought rice from them. So I am quite sure, given a bit of time, things can be sorted out. But not to worry about being criticised in newspapers. I got lambasted every other day by some newspapers or other; it has not done me much harm.

QUESTION : Sir, do you anticipate any increase in Sino-Soviet rivalry in Southeast Asia and how do you think this would affect these areas when it happens?

PRIME MINISTER : As I understand it, Sino-Soviet relations could not possibly be more different or more difficult, therefore all the countries of Southeast Asia would like to avoid being caught in any competitive clash of interests between these two communist powers. The realistics, however, are that the Soviet Union has greater military, naval and economic strength than China. And any country that wishes to avoid intensified insurgency may well be advised not to give the balance of advantage to the Soviet Union as against the People's Republic of China. I think -- as the Japanese are so adept and shrewd and equidistant, and if the American naval presence and their economic interest continue, then the isosceles triangle, the two long arms being the Soviet Union and the United States of America may make it more convenient and less uncomfortable for the countries of Southeast Asia to adept to the changes that are taking place in the balance of power. It will be many years before it is an equilateral triangle. If I can quote the Chinese Prime Minister, he mentioned 25 years for China being in the front-rank of nations.

QUESTION : The People's Republic of China has expressed opposition to the hegemony by the two strong nations of the world, and in Japan the government is in the process of preparing the treaty between the two countries. My question is two-fold. One, how do you think about China's position against the hegemony by the two powerful nations. Secondly, what do you think about the agreement between Japan and the People's Republic of China on this basis, on the view that to oppose the hegemony by the two powers? How do you think about the China position? Then how do you think about the Japan-China agreement of ...

PRIME MINISTER : If I were speaking for China, of course, I would be very much against any hegemony by any superpower. But I am not speaking for China. Therefore I have no views.

National Archives of Singapore ~~On the second question, no comment.~~

QUESTION : (Indistinct)

PRIME MINISTER : I have already explained that the greater the economic activity between Japan and the countries of Southeast Asia, the more employment and wealth it generates and the less the unemployed, the disaffected

who are likely to want to take up arms and upset stability and progress. It is in that context I believe the Japanese Government and indeed the Japanese people have an interest in the continuing economic progress in the non-communist countries of Southeast Asia,

QUESTION : Sir, I would like to ask one question about the Law of the Sea Conference. What do you think about the, what is Singapore's suggestion about the national waters limit -- 12 miles, three miles or so many miles, especially with the so-called international waterways like the Malacca Straits?

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PRIME MINISTER : Well, I am quite sure that eventually whether it is going to be in New York in March next year or whether the conference will be further adjourned to some other convenient place later on that a reasonable, sensible and just set of rules will be agreed upon. And I am also confident that whatever the territorial seas limits may be, that traditional highways of the traditional sea lanes which have been recognised as international highways for hundreds of years will continue to be so, because in that way trade will be facilitated and the whole world will be better off. And in any case, I do not see the superpowers agreeing to anything less than that : existing practices which have contributed to the growth of international trade, the wealth of nations.

QUESTION : Through listening to you, Mr. Prime Minister, your statements today, it seems to indicate that you are interested in maintaining friendly relationship between non-communist nations In Southeast Asia and the new socialist countries of Indo-China. It seems to me that members of ASEAN countries are moving towards a neutral position. How would you see the possibility that this neutral position be developed?

PRIME MINISTER : I think that is a non sequitur, I don't follow that. Can I have the question again? The first half he said, I think quite correctly, that I would like to see correct, if possible cordial, and best of all constructive relations between non-communist countries and the socialist countries of Indo-China. That is correct.

If by neutrality you infer that there will be no change of social systems either by overt or covert means, either by open or subterranean methods of changing governments, then of course I am for it.

Thank you gentlemen.

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