

“MONDAY CONFERENCE”

Produced by Richard Smith

MONDAY, 18 OCTOBER 1976

GUEST:

PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW

Republic of Singapore

MODERATOR:

Robert Moore, ABC

PANEL:

National Archives of Singapore

Ken Randall - London “Financial Times”, “Le
Monde” & “Far Eastern
Economic Review”

Dr. Fedor Mediansky - Lecturer in Political Science at the

University of New South Wales

Robert Moore, ABC - Executive Producer and
Programme Anchorman

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“MONDAY CONFERENCE”

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ANNOUNCER: Tonight, on “MONDAY CONFERENCE” Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore.

ROBERT MOORE: Good evening, and welcome to “MONDAY CONFERENCE” again. The Prime Minister of Singapore is making his third official visit to Australia. He arrived yesterday and he will be here for 12 days. Mr. Lee’s first visit was in 1965 and to show that in a changing world there are still some strains of continuity, I recall that I interviewed him then eleven years ago for “FOUR CORNERS”.

Lee Kuan Yew has become the first Prime Minister of Singapore in 1959. And through the various constitutional changes in the 1960s he has remained so ever since. At present his People’s Action Party, PAP, holds all 65 seats in the Singapore Parliament. Singapore is, of course, one of the smallest independent states in the world, made up of one larger island and 54 smaller ones. Its population is about 2¼ million. In 1974, 3.6 per cent of Singapore’s total trade was with Australia which made us then Singapore’s sixth biggest trading partner. Singapore is, of course, a favoured country with Australian tourists. I should point out that tonight as well as going to all parts of Australia as usual, this edition of “MONDAY CONFERENCE” will also be seen in Singapore.

With me to question Mr. Lee are Ken Randall, Australian correspondent of a number of papers, including the London "Financial Times, "Le Monde", and the "Far Eastern Economic Review." Mr. Randall is the current President of the Canberra Press Gallery. Also with us Dr. Fedor Madiansky, a frequent writer on foreign affairs and defence matters. Dr. Mediansky is Lecturer in Political Science in the University of New South Wales.

Prime Minister, I mentioned our earlier meeting 11 years ago, because one of the things that struck me is that in 1965 there were no demonstrators in the street against your visit. And from what we have seen, there have been at least a few, what has changed -- with either you or Singapore or the demonstrators?

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PRIME MINISTER: Well, quite frankly, Australia has changed. There were then Australian students, probably not as numerous. They probably paid fees and therefore took their work a little more seriously and took demonstrations less seriously. The world has moved on. There are more university students, all for free, and there are more Malaysians. And I am told some Singaporeans, one-fourth Malaysians and they have gone with the times.

MOORE: You have been reported as saying that Australia was now a more hospitable place for dissident Singaporean students who come here. Why is that so?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't think I said dissident Singaporean students alone, I mean dissidents of all kinds. I don't really know. I think a different mood, anti-establishment. This is part of the American trend. The Americans have snapped out of it and undoubtedly sometime, some place, the Australians also will.

MOORE: Do you think the time might come when you may prohibit Singaporean students from coming here on scholarships?

PRIME MINISTER: (Laughter) No, what for? I don't think the average Singaporean who comes here is a liability either to Australia or to Singapore. He is, by and large, a fairly serious-minded sort of person. He probably wants to blend whilst he is in Australia. But he knows he has got a job waiting for him and he wants to climb up that ladder. And I would be surprised if there is any benefit in preventing him from climbing up that ladder either via a university in Australia or in Britain or in America.

MOORE: Can we look at some of the things that the students, in their publications, and I've seen one or two of them, I don't know how valid their statements are, but what they are saying, they are demonstrating against, in your Singapore, the kind of things like political detention, detention of political prisoners without trial, some of whom have been detained since 1963, the licensing of newspapers and printing presses; what is alleged to be a suitability certificate for students -- again, I don't know the technicalities of that -- and suggestion that the trade union movement in Singapore is a tame cat movement and is more concerned with keeping wages down to be attractive to foreign entrepreneurs.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I think they ought to have paid you for a free advertisement.

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MOORE: No, be fair, that's not an advertisement. You know as well as I do that those things are commonly said about Singapore. Whether they are true or not is for you to say.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I don't subscribe to this view that repeating a whole host of irresponsible things is responsible television media work. If you

want to go through that in a serious way, then we have to sit down and spend about at least half-an-hour to trace the history of it. You mustn't assume that the world is like you.

Singapore is a very different place and if you had visited it 11 years ago, it was a pretty scruffy place and revolution was round the corner. You could have a riot at the drop of your hat. Taxis were burnt up, so were buses, and the communists were in charge of the unions. And we spent the last, not just 11, really 17 years fighting them in the open argument and the people that you mentioned who were arrested 13 years ago were arrested not by me and my colleagues in the Cabinet alone. We then had a security committee comprising of the British, the Malaysian ministers and ourselves. And all they need do is to say: "I will not use violence, I will not help the Communist Party of Malaya", and we release them. That's all we ask of them. And if they refuse to say that, partly because they think they shouldn't unhelp the Communist Party of Malaya. Then we say; "Look, you can leave", some of them, two of them, are doctors, they could leave for any country they like in the world and practise. One of them I defended for sedition some 20 years ago. I know him, he knows me. Know what he stands for; he knows what I stood for. We were in a united front. And because he has lost, I have to feed him and look after him and have people like Mr. Robert Moore to ask questions publicly. But if I lose I don't

think you will have the opportunity of asking my captors about what has happened to me.

MOORE: No, but I think there is an unstated compliment almost in these criticisms that are made of your running of Singapore in a sense that people, perhaps, expect more of you than they do a number of other heads of state.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, you've got to understand that our communists - I don't know whether yours are like the Europeans, you know, they have become very domesticated. They don't believe in the dictatorship of the proletariat. They believe in multi-party rule. They have that soft gentle approach to life. And they assure everybody if they win, there will be another election in which their popularity will be put to the test. But our communists make no such pretensions, they make no such concessions. They believe in the violent overthrow by use of guns of the government elected or otherwise and the establishment of a people's democracy like, by way of example, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia. I think you won't have the opportunity to ask what has happened to, say, Prince Souvanna Phouma, who is a very gentle, polished, educated Laotian. Nor would you be able to ask whoever is in charge in Cambodia what's happened to Prince Norodom Sinhanouk. I don't think we can do better than

what we have done. If these people would say: “I am against the use of violence, I do not support the Communist Party of Malaya”, fine!

MOORE: Outside this obviously illegal form of opposition in Singapore, what are the parameters of the political debate within Singapore? On what issues does the legitimate opposition differ with you? What sort of things do they differ?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, you must not forget that there was only one political opposition and that was us against the communists. They really were the first political party that got established. In 1923, the year that I was born, two members of the Comintern were sent from Shanghai and they set up the first underground cells. There were no other political parties. They spread into Peninsular Malaysia and with the War, the British provided them with weapons to fight the Japanese and they became the Malayan Resistance. At the end of the War, they nearly took over from the British and a lot of British, Fijians, Australians and New Zealanders died in order that they will not take over by force. And it was partly, well, luck, that the world boom was on our side, and partly the force of the argument that it didn't go communist.

MOORE: But Prime Minister, referring to what you said earlier, you are not suggesting in Singapore you are either PAP or you are communist?

PRIME MINISTER: No, what I am suggesting is that you need literally to have sufficient conviction to say, well, if I lose and I die, so be it, before you take on the communists. And therefore, there were very few like me who were prepared to do that. We did that. Fortunately, not without success, and in the process they became the minority, we became the majority. But our problem now is how to find successors -- young men in their 30s or early 40s who would carry on the work. And the bright ones they know what is in the pack of cards and many of them say: "Thank you, you are doing an excellent job and I would like to do my research or do my accountancy or my banking, my law or medicine, you carry on."

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MOORE: Could I just ask you one last thing and then I'll leave it for a while. In your own case, do you have at this stage -- not that presumably you'll be retiring from politics for a long while yet -- but do you have marked out a successor for yourself? Do you see someone coming up?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I don't believe that it is possible, not in the kind of world we live in. It hasn't worked out that way for Australia. If you remember, you cast your mind back in 1966, and I don't think it is going to work that way in Singapore. All you can do is to expose a fair number of able men with convictions to difficult situations and then let them contend amongst themselves.

KEN RANDALL: You are fairly relaxed about your attitude towards the demonstrators against you here, Prime Minister. But isn't it true that -- just going back to something else you said earlier -- that there are in fact no new

scholarship students out here, all the students that have come here since your raising of the issue two years ago are now effectively bonded to the Singapore Government and can be returned. Do you really think, in those circumstances, that it's such a breeding ground of Communists and subversives as you left for this visit?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I don't think I suggested that at all. I consider the Australian environment completely different from the kind of harsh dedication required of guerilla insurgents. I don't know what was published, but ...

RANDALL: Well let's take another point of it. It's most unusual, quite bizarre, in Australian experience, to see demonstrations of this sort which are really quite quiet moderate political demonstrations, where the people are masked because they claim that their family associations could be jeopardised at home.

PRIME MINISTER: (Laughter) Oh, come off it! Do you really believe that we -- I don't know, I read this in your papers -- do you really believe that we really waste our resources on trying to find out ...

RANDALL: But you obviously wasted or used, a great deal of resources this year, Sir, on the ballet dancer incident which was laughed out of court in Australia and yet it obviously had a big impact in Singapore.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I don't know whether Australians laughed at last, but that wasn't a laughing matter because that led to a little pattern of how things are done -- the recruitment of party's respectable people to support a terrorist

movement. And it was important that that should be exposed. But comic students who put on these Klu Klux Klan type of garment. I know of no returned student from Australia who has become an active dissident, let alone a terrorist. So I see no reason why they shouldn't continue to come to Australia. The communists would like to be able to develop, not just in Australia but in Europe and America, sympathisers, supporters who would peddle the line that they are very gentle, social, democratic reformers. But if they are going to win then they got to find hard tough men who will go with them to the jungle, fight, die, in order that others may win.

RANDALL: You don't think they're being produced out here?

PRIME MINISTER: No, no, not possible.

RANDALL: Have you actually taken up this sort of issue with the Australian Government on official level? This was raised several times during the incident we mentioned earlier. Why haven't there been an official complaint if you took it so seriously.

PRIME MINISTER: Not at all, not at all.

RANDALL: What is the point, then, of making such big issues of it if you didn't take it seriously?

PRIME MINISTER: No, no, we take it seriously as a demonstration of how the pattern works, of what they try and establish overseas -- involve ballet dancers and engineers, doctors to subscribe to their cause and give it respectability. But the cause will win or lose depending on how good their generals are, how good their tacticians are in fermenting unrest in spreading what are small guerilla groups right throughout the countryside until finally they become rampant and then they have a main strike force like the North Vietnamese Army -- 20 divisions -- and over went the South Vietnamese forces, just keeled over.

MOORE: Prime Minister, Singapore resigned from the Socialist International this year, under a degree of pressure, I suppose. Do you still regard yourself a socialist? What were the circumstances?

PRIME MINISTER: When a party in the Socialist International begins to raise the kind of issues you have done, you know, just reading out from student pamphlets, then I say to them, either you withdraw that or I don't think we are in

the right company. I mean you ought to be asking the people who published those pamphlets to be members of the International.

MOORE: Do you still regard yourself as a socialist, Prime Minister?

PRIME MINISTER: The word has many meanings now -- I mean, the Eastern bloc countries call themselves socialists. There's the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. So in that, I am not a socialist. If you ask me whether I am a believer in equal opportunities, that man should not be judged by his birth or property or religion, then I say, "yes". I believe that and I believe the economic system should provide equal opportunities to all to exercise their talents. To that extent, I am an old fashioned socialist -- like probably Gaitskell was, or the older generation -- British Labour Party types. But the new generation, so-called radical types, well, I am not completely in sympathy with them.

MOORE: Would you identify at all with the Australian Labour Party, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: That's coming a little bit near the bone. I don't think it's wise of you to ask me such difficult questions.

DR. MEDIANSKY: Prime Minister, you mentioned that the accusations and criticisms of your Government have been from disreputable organisations, and I have a quote in front of me from one of your own political scientists in the University of Singapore, who, in commenting about your political system which is described as a one-party. Parliament, he said that “the most significant development has been the steady and systematic depoliticization of political .. of a politically active and aggressive citizenry.” Now, this implies all sorts of things about the freedom and ability of alternative viewpoints to be put forward within your political system. Would you agree with this and if so what has this happened?

PRIME MINISTER: I profoundly disagree with this statement made. If whoever wrote that believes that a one-party Parliament that won all the seats in the last election in 1972, September, with 7 seats uncontested and 58 contested but won by us, the party in government, well if you believe that we are unpopular, or he believes, well set up a party. There are about 7 or 8 parties and I am quite sure they are going to contest the next elections and I have every reason to believe that the electorate would return us to Government and if they didn't, well, they will have their choice of the 7 or 8 parties.

MEDIANSKY: I have no doubts in my own mind that you would be returned at a subsequent election. The question is that ...

PRIME MINISTER: Well, thank you. You are making a statement based on, if I may say, so, hearsay, just as you made at first .. you repeated the first statement which was completely spurious, so you have repeated the statements by other political commentators who say that we will win the next election. I find this one of the less attractive features of the contemporary media men. The purveying of statements made by others regardless of whether they are sound or unsound and I think ...

RANDALL: But isn't that what the whole interplay of opinion is about, Prime Minister. I mean you did seem to have objected to it in Singapore.

PRIME MINISTER: No, no, I think the mindless repeating of statements ...

RANDALL: What makes them mindless? What's the judgement about that?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, because Dr. Mediansky has not taken the time to go through and say: "Is this so, why should it be so?"

MOORE: He was asking you.

MEDIANSKY: But sir, how can you say that? You've suggested in the first place that these are mindless media men. I'm not a media man, I quoted a Singapore academic and a political scientist.

PRIME MINISTER: No, let's not, let's not mix it up..

MEDIANSKY: ... but sir, this is the second time ...

PRIME MINISTER: ... I said ... you said, I have no doubts that you will win, other people have said so. Well ...

MEDIANSKY: No, I didn't add the last part, sorry.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, then how did you know that we would win?

MEDIANSKY: I said I've had little doubts that you would win, that was my own personal opinion of it. I was about to ask whether it was a normal situation in a pluralistic society in the past to have merely one political party

monopolising all the seats in the Parliament. This, to my notion of democratic procedure, seems a little unorthodox.

PRIME MINISTER: (Laughter) You mean to tell me that it is undemocratic and unorthodox for a people to choose one Party?

RANDALL: Well, it certainly restricts it on the interplay of viewpoints you were talking about.

PRIME MINISTER: Have you got a textbook on political science or political economy which says that this becomes undemocratic?

MEDIANSKY: It's highly unorthodox, as I put it.

PRIME MINISTER: No, it's highly un-Australian, un-British, un-Western, yes, but you know that doesn't mean that it's unorthodox. This is one of the assumptions that the West makes -- and I don't really mean so much the Australian as the Americans and the West Europeans who set these standards -- that the world must conform to their norms. Now, would you be happy if we scrapped the first-past-the-post system as our opponents would have us do and adopted the Australian system of transferred votes, or better still, copied the

Italian system and then end up with an ungovernment Parliament? Well, here is a system which allows a party, every 5 years, or within 5 years, to renew its mandate and its work, to migrate surprise, because I doubted at the very beginning whether it would work in the first place and in large parts of the world, and not just Africa, or Latin America, in large parts of Europe it looks as if it may not be working, and I mean Western Europe, physical Western Europe; in Portugal, they're having a difficult time; in Spain, it's doubtful whether it will work, in Italy ...

RANDALL: They've been a long time without the experience, Prime Minister, don't you think that one of the things that stands out in the way that Dr. Mediansky is talking about is that you do have a system with just about all the trappings of Westminster and yet you keep on denying the similarities.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I did not choose the system, the system was imposed on me. The British imposed the system and I had to make amendments to the system in order that it would suit local circumstances and work, and perhaps, if a group of men who take over from us do not constantly remember that we are not Britain, we are not Westminster nor are we Australia or Canberra, then the whole system will break down and I have not the slightest doubts that if

it does, it will be out of the window and you'll never go back to one-man, one-vote over again.

RANDALL: Could we just change tact a bit, and could I ask you something about recent experience in a slightly different field. You've probably had, in the last couple of years, the worst economic shock that you've had for quite a while and you seem to be pulling out of it now quite reasonably, judged on the figures of the last few months ...

PRIME MINISTER: That's kind.

MOORE: (Laughter) You can quote him on that.

RANDALL: Other people's figures of the last few months. How seriously did you regard the economic recession in political terms while it was at its peak when you had record unemployment and obvious signs of industrial unrest, was that a political threat?

PRIME MINISTER: No, you see ... may I be quite frank? It's a misstatement of fact.

RANDALL: Which?

PRIME MINISTER: First of all, we never had record unemployment because we had a buffer of what the Germans call “guest workers”. Secondly ...

RANDALL: Does that alter the fact that you had more people out of work than since you have been Prime Minister before?

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PRIME MINISTER: No, but we had ... no, on the contrary, when I took over office in 1959, unemployment was about 10%. At its worst in 1974, one year after the oil crisis, it went up from 4% to 5%, so we were better off, so that's a misstatement of fact.

Secondly, the worst recession ever. Yes, it was a recession, we were making 10%, 11%, 12% a year. In 1974 we made 7%. In 1975, we made 6% growth at constant prices. So, you see, you can't base all these questions on really unverified facts and it so happens in the case it's incorrect.

RANDALL: But Prime Minister, isn't the point that it was your party and your Government which adopted the policy of accelerated growth, industrial growth, manufacturing growth which led to an expansion of the workforce, which led to the vulnerability to the sort of recession that you had and to the sort of unrest that went with it in the end? My point was simply whether or not you dispute the figures; how did it affect the social fabric of Singapore and how you're coming out of it?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, if I may say so, Mr. Randall, I'll let you off the hook lightly. Please remember, don't make these statements which are not true. Yes, we did go for rapid growth; yes, we made it for about 10 years, and then it tailed down in 1974 to 7%, in 1975 to 4%, this year with some luck we will make 7%, but ...

MEDIANSKY: Sir, on ...

PRIME MINISTER: May I answer his question first. It did not end with social unrest or he wouldn't be reading what other political commentators, Dr. Mediansky's statement that he thinks I'll win the next election. We'll win the next election because we have done relatively well despite the world recession. I'm not very proud of it because it wasn't as good as it should have been, it could have been, but I think, by and large, I'm greatly relieved and so is the rest of Singapore.

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MEDIANSKY: Sir, on the question of your economic success story which is widely recognised, some of your critics...

PRIME MINISTER: Widely read you mean, by other ... written up by other media men and repeated.

MEDIANSKY: Sir, most of us rely for our information on the printed word. I must apologise for that. But there has been another element to this -- the notion that your economic success story has been based on certain degree of deprivation of some of the weaker elements of your labour force. In support of this charge, it has been argued that the labour laws in Singapore discriminate against women. There is an argument that even one-third of the labour force is composed of women and yet their wages compose about 15% of the total wage bill. Similar charges have been made about the ...

PRIME MINISTER: That is completely untrue. You see, I don't know why these untruths are pervaded. And I think someone who goes on the mass media like television has a responsibility to make sure that what is uttered does not add to the confusion. We are one of the few governments in the developing world, and indeed, I would say one of not very many governments in the world, that give our women completely equal rewards plus maternity benefits.

MEDIANSKY: Are the figures wrong, Sir?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't know where you got those figures from. But I will tell you that first, the public sector. No woman is paid less than a man -- all

on the same salary scales, promotions, the lot, plus maternity benefits. The private sector I would imagine is fairly flexible. But I would imagine in the upper reaches, there might be some prejudice about sending a woman for advanced training and then she may give up her career half-way and so on. But I can't answer for that. I would dispute strenuously your claim that they comprise 30% of the work force and got 15% of the wage bill. That is something I find completely absurd.

MOORE: Could I move on, if we may for a while, please, to economic relations between Singapore and Australia, which is obviously of considerable interest to all sides. You have recently -- you have been quoted -- as saying, understandably, that you would like a lowering of tariffs, Australian tariffs, against goods that your country produces along with other countries.

PRIME MINISTER: If I remember rightly, the question that was put to me was trade between the countries of ASEAN, or the South East Asian Association of countries and Australia and I said yes, the Association wants it, but being a realist, knowing that Australia is going through a difficult time with employment, and inflation, it's not on, so I'm not raising the matter, but you see a journalist comes along and puts the question. I have to respond just as I respond to you,

and then it's quoted back to me as saying I am asking for it at a most difficult time in Australian economic history.

MOORE: Ah, that wasn't to be my question. My question was going to acknowledge that, but then go on to ask you what are going to be the long-term political consequences, in the long-term ...

PRIME MINISTER: What of?

MOORE: ... of Australia maintaining its present tariff level against goods produced by the ASEAN countries. I'm asking you to project, if you wouldn't mind. I don't know, 10, 20 years from now, when hopefully economic conditions are changed within Australia.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, you will have a higher cost of living and you are going to have neighbours who feel that here is a wealthy enclave all fenced in and not only that, when their ships go there, a whole lot of very caring conscionable Australian seamen tie up the ships because either the ships are not repaired in Australia or the seamen are not paid wages which Australian seamen feel are humane and you are going to have resentment.

MOORE: Are you speaking of Singapore specifically at this stage?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I'm speaking of the ASEAN countries because there was a meeting of the Secretariat recently to respond to a request for a dialogue on trade and the possibility of some trade contract or agreement and it was almost laughed out of court because each one of the members have gone through this process..

MOORE: I'm sorry, my point was a new one. Speaking now specifically of Singapore, are you in a position to offer Australian businessmen concessions such as would encourage them to take their resources and capital from Australia and set up again in Singapore?

PRIME MINISTER: You are inciting me now on this television programme to say something which will enrage your unions and cause a great deal of flurry

...

MOORE: No, I'm asking you a fair question.

PRIME MINISTER: Just as I am beginning a visit, a friendly one which I hope will leave friendship in the nook of mercy and friendliness all round, but you are asking me now to say yes, indeed, I'll give Australian industrialists all these benefits, they will move their capital, they will manufacture in Singapore and send it back, all the finished products in Australia and I will have the unions right down my throat.

MOORE: But what is the answer?

RANDALL: This is one case where we don't have to quote another journalist. Just reading your statutes it's obvious that you do offer very great incentives to foreign investors, including Australians. What sort of corporate citizens do you find Australian companies to be in Singapore? Could I just put one thing to you that's been reported occasionally, that occasionally, Australian companies complain that they have run into difficulties with your public authorities for being over-generous on their payment of wage rates, for example.

PRIME MINISTER: Are they?

RANDALL: Over generous in the payment of wage rates. Getting above the general level of ...

PRIME MINISTER: I complain that my voters are getting more than they ought to get?

RANDALL: So we're told.

PRIME MINISTER: I'd be delighted. You know, I am really amazed that here I have three supposedly intellectual T.V. types with, you know, well read backgrounds and in depth study, and I am getting thrown back at me a lot of spurious stuff, some of which I find too ludicrous for comment.

RANDALL: Well, we are telling you things that are said about your country in this country and some businessmen who operate in Singapore have said that the public authorities there have told them it is not in the public interests of Singapore to get ahead of the general level of wage increase.

PRIME MINISTER: Oh no! And I stop him from paying his workers more?

RANDALL: I don't know that anybody's going to be stopped.

PRIME MINISTER: You know, I am all in favour of wage restraints and so on in a time of crisis or inflation, but anybody who wants to give his wealth away is welcome to do so.

MOORE: Prime Minister, what is the attitude of your country now towards East Timor? Is that a settled issue as far as you are concerned or what? I mean, as you well know, it's a topic of some debate in Australia at present and I wondered what your view was.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, our view was expressed I think very eloquently by a colleague of mine at the United Nations, and I would hate to paraphrase him -- if you had given me notice, I would have brought a piece of paper along like you have. When I read it at the time I thought, "well, how very diplomatically and tactfully put, but if I try and do a paraphrase and I put the wrong word in, you know, Chinese proverb says, (Mr. Lee speaks in Chinese), one word goes out, four horses can't pull it back." So I am not going to put one wrong word out, if I may, on East Timor or for that matter on any other subject.

MEDIANSKY: Sir, on Timor, let me give my paraphrased version of what I understand your policy to be.

PRIME MINISTER: Thank you. I knew that you would have something up your sleeve.

MEDIANSKY: Well, thank you Sir, I keep cards there. I understand that of the ASEAN group of countries, your policy on Timor is the most similar to that of Australia. Have your relations, as a result of that policy, I, like the Prime Minister of this country, will not attempt to articulate your policy -- have your relations with Indonesia been affected by this issue, by the Timor issue at all?

PRIME MINISTER: I wouldn't think so at all. First of all, let me -- before all this leads to cables flying back and forth to Singapore and elsewhere in Southeast Asia -- let me explain that I don't know whether it is similar or dissimilar. We have a stand and we have defended that stand. It is not as

welcome and forthcoming as the Indonesian Government would wish us to be, but in the circumstances of the case, it is understood, not with great warmth of -- or rather, not the way they think we should have understood it, but it has been accepted and is a position which we take, which we think, in the circumstances, is not only honest to ourselves but honest to them and to the world. And I think that it is very difficult to maintain a long-term relationship of friendship and understanding if we begin to misunderstand each other,

particularly if we begin to think that we can expect unquestioning support when that support has not been sought beforehand.

MOORE: Could I ask you, Prime Minister, what -- I suppose I am asking you to ponder a little bit here -- what does the current shuffle in the higher reaches of the hierarchy in China mean, if anything, to Singapore, the region, Australia? I am asking you to obviously to chance your arm a little there, but do you have any thoughts on that?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I am chancing my arm much less now than say two weeks ago. I would think a lot of people in Southeast Asia would have sighed with considerable relief that there are men in charge who would be continuing this policy of good government-government relations and relatively muted ideological and other party-to-party support, from communist party to communist parties in Southeast Asia, and we hope that this would continue to the advantage of peace in the region.

MOORE: And what about the new government in Thailand? Is that a pointer in the same direction or quite unconnected or what?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I think that is a completely unconnected issue ...

MOORE: I don't mean casually connected, but I mean, you know, does it suggest a movement in the same direction of a presumably less ...

PRIME MINISTER: No, no, my goodness me, I mean that is an entirely different proposition altogether. This is after the event. Nobody in Southeast Asia expected the kind of civilian representative government that went before it to last, but I must say that whilst we all wish it a more effective Government, we also hope -- or I hope -- that effective Government does not necessarily have to be accompanied by a show of effectiveness, that once it has established itself then the more traditional Thai characteristics of gentleness will reappear.

RANDALL: Prime Minister, given what has happened in Thailand, given the Timor problem in Indonesia, President Marcos' current referendum on the affirmation of his own present form of government there, what sort of prospects would you give ASEAN at the moment as an effective co-ordinating force in any field, but particularly, I suppose the economic one for its member countries in Southeast Asia?

PRIME MINISTER: First, I don't see the nexus between the three events you have related -- the new Government in Thailand, the position in East Timor

and President Marcos' referendum, I think they are three unrelated facts. That having been said, I would go on to say that never before -- and I speak as one who has been sceptical of ASEAN for a long while because it didn't get moving, there was a lot of talk, but there were very few decisions, hard decisions, but I must say that in Bali, earlier this year, in February, some hard decisions were taken -- small steps -- and maybe it was because every Government knew, after April 1975, both Cambodia and South Vietnam, and Laos, subsequently, that we are on our own, nobody's going to fight any battles for us other than ourselves. If we believe that it is worth fighting for, then we start doing things now and the will is there -- never been there in the same manner before. The problem now is whether the organisational capacity to translate decisions into policies, into facts, into factories, into living preferential trading arrangements which is what they have called the system which we have agreed as the initial steps towards economic co-operation, will be implemented fast enough and this is the problem.

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RANDALL: Why do you think that, as put it a few minutes ago, that the rather diffuse approach that Australia made earlier this year for some form of association, it really didn't get beyond that, was laughed out of court. Do you think that the new one, which apparently had been launched now as a result of President Soeharto and Mr. Fraser's talks, will get any further. Is there any room for it to go any further?

PRIME MINISTER: I am not so sure. I think if ASEAN governments are convinced that Australians are prepared to be serious about it and not just make token concessions, then it will be seriously looked at. It is a question of good faith and ...

RANDALL: That's not there at the moment?

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PRIME MINISTER: Well, it's not so much not there. I mean from past experience, trade has been extremely difficult. There was a brief moment, before the oil crisis and inflation and unemployment when your former Prime Minister, Mr. Whitlam, brought the fences down and for 9 to 12 months trade blossomed. Then came the recession and up went the barriers.

MEDIANSKY: Sir, another question on ASEAN from a different point of view. When you were in Peking last May, you said in part in your major speech that "the solidarity of ASEAN countries will increase our ability to avoid external pressure or manipulation." What were you trying to convey to the Chinese Government with that statement?

PRIME MINISTER: I wasn't trying to convey anything to the Chinese Government other than the simple words of that statement, that I believe if there is more co-operation and co-ordination between the ASEAN countries, it is less likely that anybody can play the ASEAN countries one at a time to the disadvantage of the others. And I would have thought that that statement was self-evident.

RANDALL: You probably noticed, also in April, last before you went to Peking, the argument published by the Asian Defence Journal suggesting the case for a combined defence force of the ASEAN countries. Do you think that's...?

PRIME MINISTER: Which Defence Journal?

RANDALL: The ASEAN Defence Journal.

PRIME MINISTER: Where was it published? You mean the one by the Institute of Strategic Studies in...sorry, I mustn't put it to you, I am trying to pull you out of your little...

RANDALL: Well, let's ignore the source. The suggestion has been put in more than one place that one of the manifestations of ASEAN solidarity in the sense that your quote in Peking could have been construed as was in a combined defence force for whatever defined purpose.

PRIME MINISTER: No, I think before we go to the combined defence force, we've got to get first into some kind of economic harmonization. You don't get into NATO without first some agreement about trade between the West Europeans and between the West Europeans and the Americans. You've got to

get your....what is defence in aid of, in aid of your freedom, of your liberty, of your physical well-being and your material well-being. Well, we've got to put that first. When that comes about, the next step in political coordination so that you identify common political problems to the region, common threats to the stability and security of the region. Only after that do you come to a common defence position or a security position. I think first the economics, then the foreign affairs side, then the defence side.

MOORE: Prime Minister, could I ask you then, in this thinking -- I know it's a naive question but it's a well meant one -- where does Australia come into this thinking then? From your point of view? Do you see...

PRIME MINISTER: I don't think Australia comes into the ASEAN concept at all. As Australia, like Japan or other countries who would wish ASEAN well, could help in several fields: one, in getting the economic side going by, for instance, when your recession is over and your unemployment is resolved and your inflation has been beaten, by loosening up on trade and allowing ASEAN products to come in. Then some political consultation and identifying common political problems and on the security side, perhaps if you manufacture missiles, you know, defensive weapons like surface-to-air missiles and so on, well, you might to be able to supply the countries of Southeast Asia with the wherewithal

to defend their independence and sovereignty with weapons which are not prohibitive to...

MOORE: But there is no specific strategic or defence policy that if Australia only had would fit in very nicely, to put it mildly, with the ASEAN grouping?

PRIME MINISTER: I would thought that the very fact that there were five non-communist countries in Southeast Asia -- not as democratic as the Australians would wish Australians to be, but not democratic in the People's Democracy sense of the word, that in itself would be a very great security plus to you, wouldn't it?

RANDALL: I thought Bob was getting at the existing arrangements, for example, is the Five Power Defence Agreement based on Malaysia and Singapore any sort of bar to your own Government and Malaysia advancing the sort of ideas you've talked about with ASEAN?

PRIME MINISTER: I think we are anticipating too many things. It will take us several years to get to that stage and discussing it public in this way will only retard that process.

RANDALL: Well, perhaps, in broader terms, do you think that the assessment of the Australian Prime Minister in June this year and his foreign policy statement that unreasonable people could reasonably conclude that the Soviet Union still sought to expand its influence throughout the world in order to achieve what he called, "Soviet primacy", is a view that you would share or that your colleagues in ASEAN would share?

PRIME MINISTER: I didn't read that very carefully and I wouldn't like to put it in that way. My colleagues and I, and I think the ASEAN countries, the governments of the ASEAN countries, from our experience of the Soviet Union, we find them very unlike the Americans. The Americans are apologetic, a little bit hesitant, explaining things away why the Secretary of State had promised this, but Congress had done the other, and dealing with the Soviet Union and their Ministers and their Ambassadors, it is a vast difference because here is a power that's completely self-confident. It has been slightly the underdog in the early years after 1945, it's now accepted as an equal superpower with equivalents or rough equivalents in missiles, in everything, and it's now forging ahead and it is completely self-confident, not apologetic, and if one could choose an emotively neutral word, quite determined that the Soviet Union should be respected and should have its views heard and properly considered in all parts of the globe.

RANDALL: And properly you would think within their world role?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, proper or improper is .. you know, I don't think you should ask me that, I mean if Mr. Brezhnev or Mr. Gromyko, if you ever get to meet him at the United Nations and if he ever condescends to answer your question, I think you may find that he would be able to put in some very friendly words why it is that what the Americans did is every reason why any other power should do likewise.

MOORE: Prime Minister, thank you very much indeed for joining us on "MONDAY CONFERENCE". We do appreciate the time you have given to us. Ken Randall, Fedor Mediansky, thank you both as well.

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