INTERVIEW WITH PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW

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Question : We are interested in your idea of preparing the second-generation leadership. How significant is it to Singapore? What are the problems you foresee to ensure smooth succession?

Prime Minister : Newly independent countries have no tradition and few precedents to help them transfer power to successor governments. Unless the present government in Singapore addresses this problem, continuity may become erratic. In Singapore's history, the communists were the dominant opposition force, and they were fierce and ruthless. So able young men have been happy to leave politics to the old guards who fought the communists and survived. My problem is to convince them that unless they are prepared to sacrifice the comfort and privacy of successful careers in business

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and in the professions, the future of Singapore will be in jeopardy and their quiet lives will be upset.

Question : Here you say that old guards have fought the communists and survived, whereas the new generation don't experience such thing. Do you think there is any difference in the style of leadership?

Prime Minister : They will have a different style of leadership not only because they have not undergone a vicious struggle with the communists, but also because our people are better educated and the issues are different. The big issues of thirty years ago: national unity, merdeka from the British, freedom from colonial exploitation, education for the people, opportunities for the people, these issues are over. We have got our merdeka, the young are educated, people have got jobs. The issues now are how to improve the quality of education, and how to increase the skill content of their jobs. The threats to the security and stability of ASEAN will come from outside pressures, from the instabilities around ASEAN, compounding the insurgencies, separatists and other rebellious groups within each ASEAN country.

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The style of government has to be different because they are different personalities, with different experiences, addressing themselves to a different generation. When we addressed our first mass rallies, 25 years ago, most people came bare-footed, in singlets and shorts. Now, few go to mass rallies. They prefer to watch meetings through television. It is a more homogeneous generation of Singaporeans, having gone through a common education, and with higher aspirations in life. There is greater national solidarity and unity because people realise that because the government has not allowed racial, religious, linguistic and cultural differences to divide them, everyone has benefitted in the struggle for a better life.

Question : Do you think the future generation leadership will be equally energetic and dynamic?

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Prime Minister : They have the ability, they have the drive, they have a grasp of political and economic realities, they have the commitment. What no one knows is how they will respond in a severe crisis. We will only know for certain when they are under great pressure.

Question : Until they are tested, we don't know ...

Prime Minister : From what I have seen, I believe they will not easily take fright, nor be put to flight.

Question : What will be the likely crises in the future? The nation is going to be increasingly affluent, there will be no shortages.

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Prime Minister : Nobody can be sure that we shall be increasingly affluent. The world economy is precarious: low growth, high inflation, high unemployment, high oil prices. The IMF report last week was most pessimistic. There will be surprises in store for everybody, including Singapore. We live in troubled times.

Question : Some quarters believe that it is high time for Singapore to become a donor nation. What do you think of it?

Prime Minister : We have had this argument out with the World Bank and the IMF in 1978. By the per capita GNP, the IMF classified us together with Greece and Portugal as developed. We disputed this. After investigating our statistics, IMF officials were satisfied that 18% of our GDP, our Gross Domestic Product, was due to returns from foreign investment, salaries paid to foreign nationals - engineers, managers, other experts here - and that if this foreign contribution were removed, we would be below the $30,000 US per capita per annum, below Greece and Portugal. The IMF conceded that we were not yet developed.

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Question : There are some concerns that since the young Singaporeans are not interested in politics, there will be (there are) difficulties in preparing them for political leadership. How would you overcome them?

Prime Minister : With the passage of time, new issues and new preoccupations will arise. Open discussion of these issues is making for a people more politically aware. The young are literate. They read Singapore and foreign newspapers and weeklies. The changes in the world's economic, political and security situation are gathering speed. Singapore and ASEAN will be affected by these changes in the international climate. The crux of the matter is how to get the most dedicated and best to take up the challenge of leadership.

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Question : The PAP has been recruiting cadres. What kind of problems the PAP encounters in recruiting them?

Prime Minister : Primarily, two. First, most good men we would like to have prefer quiet lives. Second the commitment of our new cadres has not been tested as when we were fighting the communists. To stand up and fight against the communists is to have courage and convictions. Now we do not have this automatic selector. Again we shall know when we run into a major crisis.

Question : Being a nation which is still in the making, Singapore is yet to be understood, especially by her neighbours. What are the ideal characteristics you long for your nation?

Prime Minister : The characteristics of Singaporeans have been determined by our history, both of that of our ancestors from China, India, Malaysia, and Indonesia, plus the experience of their children and grandchildren born and bred in Singapore. We can only try and improve on what endowments history has bequeathed us, for example, to make Singaporeans rugged, resourceful, tolerant, adaptable and practical.

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Question : Does Singapore find it difficult to get along with fellow ASEAN members? What sort of difficulties, if any, you encounter?

Prime Minister : No more difficult than our ASEAN partners must have found Singapore difficult. It is due to our different temperaments: Singaporeans tend to be impatient and brisk. We have learnt that the way to get things done in ASEAN is to be patient, to adjust to different styles of work, and whilst being business-like during business sessions, we have discovered that more business sometimes get done during the times we relax and talk.

Question : Is ASEAN shaping up fast enough as you had expected? Do you find it necessary for ASEAN to make itself a military alliance as well?

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Prime Minister : Compared to what I hoped for in February 1976 after the Bali Summit, developments have been slow. By the second Summit in Kuala Lumpur in August 1977, I had a more objective perspective of what can be achieved. Events are shaping up fast as I thought they would after the Kuala Lumpur Summit.

I was not alone in considering it was not necessary for ASEAN to have military understandings at both Summit meetings in 1976 or 1977. After recent developments, I have an open mind on the subject.

Question : How do you read the continued military presence of Vietnam in Kampuchea? Will it eventually be a potential threat to the security of ASEAN? Or is it just a threat to Thailand, a member of ASEAN? Vietnam, as Hanoi's Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach said in Jakarta recently, will not cross over the Thai border. Can we take his words?

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Prime Minister : As long as the Vietnamese military forces remain in occupation of Kampuchea, there will be a threat to the security of Thailand and of ASEAN. Vietnam can stay in occupation of Kampuchea only as long as she is supplied with Soviet arms and economic aid. The immediate danger is to Thailand because she has to bear the brunt of the repercussions of Vietnamese forces on her borders. The longer term danger is a Vietnam equipped with more and more Soviet aircraft and naval vessels, posing a threat to the whole region. Between the time you sent me your question, whether Hanoi's Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach's words can be taken, and the time I have to answer it, the Vietnamese troops have answered it.

Question : Vietnam claims the Kampuchean problem is related to China, and is willing to pull out of Kampuchea provided China keeps its hands off. Do you think ASEAN members jointly or separately should start putting pressures on China in this respect?

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Prime Minister : The Kampuchean problem is not related to China alone. It concerns Vietnam and Kampuchea, Vietnam and China, Vietnam and the Soviet Union, and, most important of all, it concerns the Soviet Union and China. ASEAN members should jointly and separately urge all three - China, Vietnam, and the Soviet Union - to leave the Kampuchean people alone so that they can resolve their problems themselves. ASEAN sponsored the United Nations' resolution of November 1979 which required Vietnamese forces to withdraw from Kampuchea to allow the Kampucheans to form their own government.

Question : Some people in Jakarta get the impression that Singapore fears the Soviet Union more than any other superpowers. Why? Do you consider other ASEAN members equally share Singapore's fear of the Russian influence?

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Prime Minister : There are only two superpowers as the term is generally understood: the United States and the Soviet Union. Singapore does not fear the United States. It is not seeking to dominate Singapore or ASEAN. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, is out to be the strongest power in the world with the greatest influence in all the strategic parts of the world, including the Straits of Malacca. The Soviet Union has not got the economic resources, trade, investments and transfers of technology, which the Americans have, to influence third world countries. The Soviets build up more and more military power.

I have compared my impressions of the Soviet Union with ASEAN leaders who have also visited the Soviet Union. I must not speak for my ASEAN colleagues.

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If by your question you had intended to include China as a "superpower", let me add that I consider China's capacity to make mischief in the ASEAN region to be much less than that of the Soviet Union. China is very far behind the Soviet Union and the United States, both economically and military, and will stay that

behind for the next 20 years at least. China's capacity for stirring up trouble, at least for the next 10 years, is confined to the instigation and support of communist guerilla insurgents, and the mischievous nuisances of appealing direct to ethnic Chinese, regardless of whether or not they are citizens of different independent nations of ASEAN. She needs the help of these overseas Chinese, especially their remittance and investments, to help her in her modernisation.

Question : Brunei is to gain its independence by 1983. Do you see any possible friction among ASEAN countries ensuing its merdeka status? Do you expect any competition to influence Brunei, notably from the part of ASEAN members?

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Prime Minister : Singapore does not intend to compete with any other ASEAN member for influence in Brunei. I do not anticipate friction amongst ASEAN countries arising out of Brunei's independence. President Soeharto asked me when I met him in June 1978, to tell the Sultan of Brunei that ASEAN would welcome Brunei as a member. I conveyed President Soeharto's views to the Sultan when I met him

in March last year, 1979. The Sultan thanked me for the message. I believe he was attracted by the proposal.

Question : Since you will meet with President Soeharto in Jogjakarta next week, would you care to tell us some major points you hope to bring up in your coming talks? Bilaterally? Regionally?

Prime Minister : The advantage of my four-eye meetings with President Soeharto is that our discussions are frank and direct. Most of our present preoccupations are regional. After the meeting, it may be appropriate for me to tell the press about some of them.

Question : How do you assess the present Singapore-Indonesia relations compared to ten or five years ago?

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Prime Minister : Relations between Indonesia and Singapore twenty years ago were friendly and cordial when I visited the late President Sukarno in Jakarta in January 1960. By 1963, there was confrontasi against Malaysia, which then included Singapore. By 1966, confrontasi was resolved. One of the residual problems of confrontasi led to strained relations with the new government of President Soeharto in 1968. Gradually relations improved as we had better perceptions of each other's objectives. I visited President Soeharto in Jakarta in May 1973. We got to know each other. I believe we understand each other's thinking, problems, and approach to problems. After the Bali Summit in February 1976, our relations have become close bilaterally and in ASEAN.

Question : Singapore has said it would first wait for Indonesia to normalize relations with China before any official ties are established with Beijing. Are you going to keep it that way indefinitely?

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Prime Minister : I make things simple by saying what I mean, and doing what I say. There will be no diplomatic relations with China until Indonesia has normalised her diplomatic relations with China. Because China understood this, in March 1979, Chinese Foreign Trade Minister Li Qiang, during a visit to Singapore, proposed a trade agreement. We made several amendments to their draft. They made counter amendments. In December 1979, our Finance Minister Hon Sui Sen signed a trade agreement with Foreign Trade Minister Li Qiang in Beijing. In February, a Chinese team of officials came to Singapore to settle the details but matters were not settled. In June our team of officials went to Beijing and finally reached agreement on the details for two Commercial Representative Offices - one in Singapore for China, and one in Beijing for Singapore. They do not amount to diplomatic relations, and China understands this distinction. When Indonesia has normalised her relations with China, Singapore will have diplomatic relations also. There are several consequential changes with diplomatic relations which will have to be observed in several areas.

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Question : What about China - you have already answered here. We would like to know why you have to wait for Indonesia to first establish diplomatic relations?

Prime Minister : We have given this matter careful consideration. It is in our national interest that we should be the last to have diplomatic relations in ASEAN. We have our own separate identity as Singaporeans. But there is always that lurking doubt, suspicion, uncertainty in the minds of ASEAN members that because Singapore is 75% ethnic Chinese, therefore Singapore can be easily manipulated by China, and will side with China. By taking this stand of being the last, we demonstrate to our ASEAN partners, and to China, that we are ourselves, Singaporeans. China cannot go over the decision of the Singapore government to our ethnic-Chinese Singaporeans to get them to pressure the Singapore government to reverse its position. We are demonstrating that our people, especially the younger generation born and bred in Singapore, are not susceptible to such pressures and persuasion. They think as Singaporeans, like the government. It is a point worth registering.

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