SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW
AT THE WELCOMING BANQUET FOR
DATO SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD AND
DATIN SERI SITI HASMAH ON THURSDAY,
17 DECEMBER 1981, AT THE ISTANA

Mr Prime Minister,

My wife and I take great pleasure in welcoming you and your wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah, on this your first visit to Singapore as Prime Minister. I had little doubt that I would one day greet you as the Prime Minister of Malaysia. I had seen in you that sense of mission : a quiet determination to raise the standards of performance of your Government and your people and to make more equitable the living standard of your people.

May I express my enormous respect for your predecessor, Tun Hussein Onn. Few leaders in the world would have had the decisiveness and the selflessness to hand over power in the way he did. Most would have been tempted to stay on for several more years. That he should have taken care to see that power was handed over in an orderly manner, is a tribute to his great qualities. His concern for the welfare of the people, and the need for continuity of good government, overrode personal considerations. Malaysia has been the beneficiary. Right from the start of his term of office, in early 1976, he decided upon you as Deputy Prime Minister. Now, he has handed over his

National Archives of Singapore

responsibilities to someone with considerable grassroots experience and support. And he stayed long enough to allow free play in UMNO's leadership selection processes to elect Datuk Musa Hitam as your Deputy Prime Minister, truly a political tour de force.

You are the fourth Prime Minister in Malaysia since independence. This is the third time power has been handed over in a peaceful and a constitutional manner. It demonstrates the stability of the Malaysian political system. Singapore, so close a neighbour, cannot but benefit from this continuity in stable government.

So much of our past was intertwined with each other. It has been difficult for my generation to consider ourselves completely different. Our President was born in Malacca and was a Malaysian. Our High Commissioner to Malaysia was born in Kedah and was a Malaysian. So were many of my colleagues in the Cabinet. However, over the 16 years since separation, we have gone through totally different experiences. Singapore was faced with a completely different cluster of problems arising from our different circumstances. So we have developed a philosophy of life and methods of solving problems which are very different from Malaysia's.

National Archives of Singapore

Singaporeans are a young and aspiring people in a densely-populated island. It is a unitary city state. The majority of Singaporeans are descendants of those who came in search of fortune. They transmitted their values and ambitions to their descendants. Hence, this restless and unending search for economic advancement by the people is reflected in and shared by their government.

Conditions in Malaysia are quite different : It is federal nation with a much bigger population living two different kinds of life, the first in a big capital city and several large towns, and the second spread over the kampong dotting the countryside, plantations and rice fields. You have the delicate and difficult task of balancing the interests of the different groups, and of synchronizing development both in the urban and rural areas. Further, you have to ensure that the fruits of development are seen to be enjoyed more equally by all. This is no easy task when World Bank experience has shown that economic development is faster in urban than in rural areas.

National Archives of Singapore

It took about 10 years, from the trauma of 1965, before Malaysia and Singapore were able to establish an equable and less emotional approach to each other. I believe we have now reached a better understanding of each other. We understand you, what you want to achieve, and by what means. We hope you

understand why we are different, indeed, why we have to be different to survive. However, these differences are manageable and may even bring mutual benefits if we know how to use the comparative advantage we enjoy in our different fields to complement the other's economic development. Thus we shall increase the total well-being of both people.

I wish you success in the mission you have set yourself: to infuse into your government the determination and dedication you have within you to work towards the betterment of your people. It is a noble objective. Under your leadership, this objective can be achieved. Such a government in Malaysia will enhance the investment climate and accelerate the economic development of the region.

In ASEAN, we have added a new dimension to our cooperation. ASEAN has given us a larger framework for cooperation, not just with each other, but also with our other partners - Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand. It can ensure a wider area of stability and growth. It is no coincidence that all ASEAN countries have made high growth rates, ranging between 6% and 10% per annum, despite the oil crisis in 1973. Within ASEAN, we can evolve a common approach to development to make this region more prosperous and with

National Archives of Singapore

continuing high rates of growth. All realise that the progress and prosperity of their neighbours provide spin-off benefits to their own economies.

The next few years will be secure and optimistic ones for ASEAN. In the intermediate term, by the late 1980's or early 1990's, however, it is possible that there could be outside forces eager and capable of exploiting any differences that may arise between us. Such outside forces can create difficulties for all of us. Hence, it behoves us to use these intervening years to strengthen our cooperation and solidarity.

The past has made us what we are. How we use the present in anticipating probable future problems will determine how much we can consolidate the gains that we have made, gains in living standards, in education standards, in the individual freedoms our peoples enjoy in their choice of work and their choice of religion. The way of life and the standards of living our peoples enjoy are not to be found in large sections of Asia, especially in the communist countries of Indo-China, China, and North Korea. Our peoples tend to take their fortunate condition for granted. In order that our children can continue to enjoy these freedoms, we must institutionalise our cooperation and to be better prepared to meet sudden emergencies that may arise in the intermediate future.

National Archives of Singapore

Malaysia has in you a leader with that broader vision of the future, a future that the region as a whole will share. I wish you and your Government success, and wish the people of Malaysia continuing progress and prosperity.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, may I ask you to join me in a toast to His Majesty the Yang di-Pertuan Agong of Malaysia.

***

National Archives of Singapore