



The Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew.

MALAYSIA - AGE OF REVOLUTION

by

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SOUTH-EAST ASIA IN TURMOIL

The most significant thing about the last few decades, since the end of the second World War is the emergence of national identities, some of which never existed before both in Asia and in Africa. Some of them like India, represented a re-emergence of old, ancient civilizations. So with Burma, and perhaps to a lesser extent with Indonesia. In 1945 none of these territories had any self-expression, nor did they realise how quickly events were to move once the process of de-colonization began, when India and Pakistan became independent in 1947.

First Phase

The 1945 to 1965 era can be broadly divided into two. The first period represented the thrills, the sensation of independence, as young nations began to flex their muscles. It ended with Bandung, when Afro-Asia decided in a collective way to assert themselves on the world scene. Bandung marked the end of the first phase. Then independence and anti-colonialism dominated political thoughts and movements throughout all the dependent territories of the world. But after independence, having acquired political control over their own destinies, could they satisfy the other urges which drive people towards independence — a better life, higher standards of life which they saw in their European overlords, which they assumed would automatically come by the assumption of power? All those were questions which, whilst from time to time a few leaders may have reflected upon, the mass of the people just assumed. All one had to do was to rally and mount massive agitation and if that did not work, then one had to resort to violent

revolution; the European power and domination would collapse because firstly, the will to assert military dominance was lost, and secondly, a tide of history was in motion.

Second Phase

But 1955 to 1965 marks the second phase, when slowly dependent peoples, who had acquired independence, began to realise that perhaps some of the leaders who led them to freedom, who were good orators, who mobilised mass emotions and mass sentiments, were not necessarily good administrators or nation-builders. Consequently, a period of gradual disillusionment set in although power had already been transferred. A few of the political elite and some of the middle-class of the old colonial societies were able to move up to almost European standards of life but the mass of the people did not profit by this change or transfer of political power. This is now the most important single motivating force in Asian politics. Hence, for a variety of reasons political leaderships which are unable to provide physical and material satisfaction to the people they led to freedom, have got to find other devices to keep their loyalties and to be able to remain in ascendancy.

Two Types of Leadership

Political leaders in Afro-Asia broadly fall into two classes: those who tried to achieve social and economic progress like Nehru in India, or Nasser in Egypt, and were able to hold the loyalties and affection and their following in the people; and those who could not.

Those who could not inevitably get replaced as new forms of leadership and new styles are experimented with. Of course amongst those who were unable to satisfy the material urges of their followers, there were quite a number who by sheer histrionic skill and other qualities of leadership, and the capacity to mesmerise their own people, were able to remain in the ascendancy, partly by their own personalities and the image they projected and created for themselves and projected to the nation, and a skilful balancing of internal forces within the country.