

SPEECH BY MR. LEE KUAN YEW IN REPLY TO THE
YANG DI-PERTUAN AGONG'S ADDRESS IN PARLIAMENT ON 21ST
MAY, 1964.

Stage set for next five years

Mr. Speaker, sir, with this ceremonial opening of the second Parliament of Malaysia, the curtain rises on a new chapter in the history of Malaysia. Up till now it has been a struggle to establish Malaysia. From May 1961 when the Prime Minister first mooted Malaysia till the 25th April this year, the Communists and other groups who for diverse reasons went along with the Communists in their opposition to Malaysia could always pretend that the people did not want it, that it was a British conspiracy foisted upon the people by a stooge government. Whatever else the votes on the morning of 26th April did or did not prove, they nailed forever the lie that Malaysia did not enjoy the support of the people. One by one, Sabah, then Sarawak, then Singapore, and now the 11 States of Malaya have endorsed the new nation.

It gives me great satisfaction to see around us in this House all those who took a leading part in the formation of Malaysia. It gives me equal satisfaction to see that many of those who obstructed and opposed Malaysia are no longer with

us. We shall not miss the false prophets in the Socialist Front who did their vicious best to wreck Malaysia. Even the P.M.I.P. have now to find new leaders in this House.

Least we forget realities on the ground

But we would do well to remember that whilst this Parliament has muted the voices of those who would seek to destroy the nation, the real ground opposition outside is not as reassuring as their representation in this Chamber. There are only two representatives from the Socialist Front which combined with three from Singapore's Barisan Sosialis and three from Sarawak's S.U.P.P. adds up to very little, and there are only nine P.M.I.P. members where there used to be twelve. But let us never forget that all that is required is a shift of about 15 per cent of the electorate from the Alliance Government and its comfortable majority will be lost in fragmentised chamber.

I hope I will be forgiven if I sound a note of caution in the midst of the renewed self-confidence and euphoria on the Government side. The new lease of life they have been given for another five years could well be frittered and squandered away if they interpret the results as a blanket approval for carrying on in the same old way. Malpractices, inefficiency and ineptitude unless

eradicated will lead to a very different situation in the next five years. Some time within the next five years, the immediate pressures of Indonesian confrontation will slacken and people's minds will begin to dwell on their economic and social conditions. If life is not made better for the mass of the people, then the mandate may not be so easy to come by the next time.

The dividing line between parties

We share these opposition benches with some parties whose differences between them and us are more abiding than the difference between us and the government. The chasm that divides an open-front organisation of the M.C.P. like the S.F., B.S. and S.U.P.P. from the P.A.P. is unbridgeable as the chasm that divides us from the P.M.I.P. Whatever the party rivalries between the Alliance and the P.A.P., I hope we shall never forget that the differences between the Government and us fade into insignificance when we face a common threat from the Communists as represented by the S.F. and from religious racism as in the P.M.I.P.

The fundamental distinction between us and two other opposition parties, the P.M.I.P. and the S.F., is that we want Malaysia and the democratic system to succeed, even though it means credit is reflected thereby on the Prime Minister

and his colleagues. We are a loyal opposition, loyal to Malaysia and the democratic system of government that obtains in Malaysia. Our criticism will therefore be directed to pointing out the dangers of policies that will lead to failure and to checking the lapses of political leaders and administrators that could lead to a breakdown of the whole system. But a loyal opposition does not mean that a subservient opposition. Criticisms, however unwelcome, will have to be made, seriously and in good faith. We hope they will be taken equally seriously and in good faith.

On all external matters, on foreign policy, on confrontation, on questions of national integrity and survival, there is no difference in either objectives or attitudes between us and the government. We may differ on what is the most effective way of securing our integrity and survival, but we are at one in achieving the same goal.

Even on domestic issues, there is a large measure of common agreement on the tolerant approach to cultural, racial and linguistic problems. Our differences will arise over questions of economic and social policies, over issues of taxation to provide the amenities of a modern civilized community - education, health, housing, welfare benefits, and so on, and how it is to be paid for. How acute this conflict will be, depends on how the Finance Minister and his

colleagues are able to bring themselves to view the world not from the point of view of a rubber estate owner or a holder of stocks and shares, but also from that of the labour tapper and the workers in companies who provide profits for the stockholders and shareholders.

We consider it our duty to help open up windows for the winds of change to blow through. We are not pessimistic. We believe that criticism and example can set off a change. Free secondary education in Singapore has brought a rejoinder in nine years of free education in Malaya. Low-cost housing in Singapore has stimulated the creation of a Ministry of Local Government and Housing. The process of change is relentless.

It is inevitable that the newly independent nations of Asia and Africa must move towards a more egalitarian society. For having stimulated men's minds for more equal opportunities and mobilised men's energies and loyalties to be rid of the inequities of the colonial system, there is no stopping the process after independence. This is a tide of history. It would be foolish to stop it. We deem it our duty to ease the way forward towards a more just and equal society.

Consolidation of Malaysia

Now the stage is set for the next five years. The composition of this Parliament does not lend itself to exploitation by those who would like to undermine the nation. This Parliament could become a valuable vehicle through which we can crystallise the thinking and feeling within Malaysia and help in its consolidation.

This consolidation must take place at two levels. First, the three new States -- Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah -- must be made more and more to think and to feel a part of the new Federation. This is a two-way process. The leaders of the Central Government set the pace and the leaders of the State Governments can help to quicken or dampen this pace by the manner of their response. If we think and feel as Malaysians, then we will talk in the same language. This in turn will imbue our people with the same values and objectives. Within these five years we should strive to make the three new States regard themselves and be regarded by the eleven old States as a part of Malaysia and as closely integrated as the old eleven.

On another level, we should bring the various communities in Malaysia closer to each other. With Malaysia, some new communities have joined us -- the Dayaks, Melanaus, Muruts, Dusuns, Kadazans and a host of other indigenous peoples in the Borneo territories. To succeed in the long run, we must make

sense out of Malaysia, build a national identity, and inspire our people with the spirit and will to be one nation. Unless the new Federation becomes a living unit, we will always have to depend upon outside pressures to generate unity.

Indonesian threats to our existence have acted as a catalyst in bringing us closer together. But unless we create the positive aspects of being a nation, feeling, thinking and acting as one people, when these threats are temporarily removed, we could so easily drift apart into so many disparate communal forces. We cannot go on forever with the game of communal checks and balances. Unless new values are instilled into the generation that is now growing up in our schools the long term chances of survival will not be high.

Nation-building as three mainsprings undergoing renaissance

We are trying to forge a nation out of three major groups, whose racial, cultural and linguistic inspirations spring from three bigger countries around us. The Malays cannot be unaware of Indonesia and what happens there. The Chinese are conscious of China and her growing power. And the Indians are proud of their ancient civilization which is the largest living democracy in the world, striving to make its way to the industrial age by consent and not by coercion.

At a time when these three mainsprings of cultural and linguistic heritage are themselves undergoing a renaissance and are stimulating cultural pride, admiration and even chauvinism in the respective communities within Malaysia, drawing them closer in feeling and thinking to the countries of their origin, we have to pull our various communities together away from their origins in order to build our new nation. Fortunately, life in Malaysia today is better than what Indonesia or China or India can offer her own people. So whatever the racial, cultural and linguistic loyalties, Malaysia commands the material loyalties of her people because it offers a better life to all. How long we shall occupy this pre-eminent position in Asia no one can tell. Let us hope that we shall always be able to sustain a better life and a better way of life for our people.

But the possibility that one or two or even all three countries may ultimately outstrip us in material success must be taken into account in our prognosis of the future. If it is only cupboard love which holds the loyalty of our people to Malaysia, a loyalty dependent on only their material well-being, then the ability to stick together as a people and be a nation will be slowly undermined. If, for example, a strong coherent leadership were to emerge in Indonesia and a few years later through discipline, dedication, and an efficient administration, restore order and increase production in Indonesia, then the consequences upon us will be very grave, unless we have before then inculcated new values in our Malaya population. At present no one feels proud of Indonesia

and many of Indonesian descent are secretly ashamed of it. But we shall be in grave trouble if a new ruling elite emerges in Indonesia that can make the Malay people here as proud of Indonesia as some Chinese were of China when it looked like succeeding rapidly a few years ago before the trials and tribulations of the "Great Leap". And if all three countries -- Indonesia, China and India -- provide a better life for their people than Malaysia, then are lost, unless we have created that national spirit and identity that can withstand the blandishments of identification with a higher culture and civilization which may by then also provide a higher standard of living.

We have no time to lose

No one knows how much time we have got. For on one can foresee the pace or direction in which Indonesia will progress, nor are we certain that the present prophets are right when they say that China may require another 40 or 50 years to catch up with modern industrial powers like American and Russia, or how long India will take to emerge as a modern industrial state. But that these things will happen, on one can seriously doubt. Let us ensure that before it happens, we have welded nation out of the three component communities and we have cut all sentimental, cultural or chauvinistic ties with the main springs of our three communities. Only in this way can we guarantee our survival as a coherent

nation in South East Asia. If we do not set out to do these things, then all we are doing is to live day by day, year by year, from hand to mouth as a nation, to disintegrate as soon as the external pulls by Indonesia, China and India become stronger and stronger and the internal attractions of a better life become less and less in comparison.

But whatever the temporary changes in line or policy from Indonesia, whether confrontation is switched on or off, her ambitions to absorb us and complete her hegemony of the whole of this Archipelago in South-East Asia will always remain, a constant threat to our separate existence. Every time an Indonesian nationalist looks at the map of Nusantara as they call this Archipelago, Malaysia with the peninsula running parallel with Sumatra and sticking southwards towards Java with another bit cutting of the northern segment of Kalimantan, must appear an affront to his sense of symmetry and completeness. Only a strong and united Malaysia can dampen the temptation to round off their control of this region

Urban and Rural

The Member for Pontian Selatan has made play of my distinction between the urban and rural population. He said that by "urban" I mean "Chinese" and by

"rural" I mean "Malay". That by saying the urban population is more sophisticated politically than the rural population, I am in fact saying that Malays are less sophisticated, and therefore I had insulted the Malays.

It is true that the majority of the population in the urban areas are Chinese and that the majority of the population in the rural areas are Malays. But when I say that the people in the towns are more sophisticated than those in the country, I am stating a truth of universal application, a proposition valid regardless of the racial composition of the people in the towns and in the country.

For instance, in Great Britain and Australia, the towns contain the workers who are more politically sophisticated and regularly vote for the Labour Party of Britain and Australia. It is the rural areas who consistently vote for the Conservative Party of Britain and the Liberal and Country Party of Australia. And in both Britain and Australia the same race reside in the towns as in the country. So too with Japan where the governing Conservative party is sustained by their rural vote.

One of the interesting facets of the election results is that the smaller the town and the nearer it is to a rural area, the higher the percentage of non-Malay votes the MCA candidates were able to get. And the bigger the town, the smaller

the MCA percentage of non-Malay votes. Our calculations based on the election results show that in places like K.L., Seremban, Ipoh, Penang and even Malacca, the non-Malay votes that went to the MCA were ranged between 10% at its lowest point and 20% at its highest. But in the smaller towns like Taiping, they were able to get as much as 40% of the non-Malay votes. I quote this as an illustration of the general principle that the more urbanised the population, the more politically sophisticated it becomes and the less its support for right-wing parties.

As a corollary, the more urbanised Malays are, the less solidly did they vote for UMNO, or the other parties of the Alliance. The only pity is that it was still solid enough for the Alliance candidates to win with an additional 15% to 20% of the non-Malay votes.

MPs can be classified as "urban" or "rural"

One interesting feature of the course of debate over these two days is that members can be divided into two groups, one representing the urban base, the other representing the rural base. UMNO and their Alliance parties, together with PMIP constitute the rural base, and the issues they raise reflect this awareness. The other parties from the UDP of Penang to the PPP of Perak, to the

SF and PAP in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore represent the urban base. The issues they have raised reflect their awareness of this.

Equally interesting are the issues that have generated the greatest heat on both sides. A non-Chinese member representing the urban base of Ipoh speaks of multi-lingualism, Nanyang University and equal rights. The Member for Pontian Selatan raises the question of Malay rights and refers to the Geylang Serai scheme in Singapore and stresses the need for more special rights for Malays in Singapore.

This is a new phase in the political development of the various States of Malaysia. For as long as we were sectionalised into the old Federation, Singapore and the Borneo States, burning issues which were in fact the common problem of all these territories, found expression in only parts of it.

Multilingualism, Nanyang University and Chinese education were fought fiercely in Singapore whilst a silence was maintained on these issues in the old House of Parliament before Malaysia. Demands for Malay rights for special treatment, for jobs in the Government, for allocation of stalls were muted in Singapore whilst they were the burning issues in Kuala Lumpur.

Now all these issues have been together thrown into one political arena. We would be well advised if we all take some time to let things settle on and find a new equilibrium. Just as it is no longer possible for people in the peninsular to pretend that Nanyang University is not their problem even when 60% of the students come from it, similarly it may become difficult in Singapore, although the constitutional guarantees are different, to meet the problems caused by an imbalance of economic and educational development between the Chinese and Indians on the one hand and the Malays on the other by solutions different from those of the peninsular.

Differences of treatment of these problems will continue for some time. But eventually there must be a narrowing of the differences of approach to what are basically a common problem.

Vote given strength to Tunku

The verdict on the 25th of April has given strength to the Prime Minister and his colleagues to face the rigours of confrontation. Already in the last few weeks one senses the renewed confidence with which the Prime Minister is standing up to the stresses and strains of a prolonged period of tension. The

paramount problem is how to resolve confrontation without undermining the security and integrity of Malaysia.

Let us never deceive ourselves. Indonesia's geo-political ambition to engulf us and absorb us in an abiding one. We have to learn to live with this. But, if we show the resolution to be a nation, if we exhibit strength and stamina in combating their pressures, then we will make it worth their while to find some way of withdrawing temporarily from the aggressive activities that they have euphemistically called "confrontation".

We have gone through 9 months of these pressures. Militarily and politically we are stronger today than we were on the 16th of September last year. Economically the collapse of Singapore and Penang that Indonesia expected, has not happened. On the contrary, we are learning to live nearly as well without the entrepot trade with Indonesia.

The same thing cannot be said of Indonesia, that she in the last 9 months has grown stronger either militarily, politically or economically. It means that with every passing month our position must improve as compared with Indonesia's. If we are able to continue to rally world support and sympathy, in

particular, then support and sympathy of the non-aligned groups of Afro-Asians, then a satisfactory solution to confrontation will come.

PAP's role as loyal opposition

The role of the PAP in this Parliament is to speak for those in Malaysia who are against the bigotry of the Communists, and of religious obscurantism, and against communal chauvinism of any community. We represent the desire that there should be an intelligent and rational solution to the special problems of a multi-racial society. We are here to help create a harmonious, non-communal society where prosperity is more equally shared amongst all regardless of race, religion and culture.

The diverse origins of the people of Malaysia bringing together into 130,000 sq. miles so many languages and cultures, social habits, traditions, customs and modes make tolerance a prerequisite quality for success. British colonial domination brought these differing groups together and over-riding British strength ensured that conflicts and contradictions between them were never allowed to lead to anarchy. The position is vastly different today.

The easy solutions of an authoritarian colonial government whose will is backed by overwhelming force are not open to us. Nor will they provide a permanent solution of our social, cultural and linguistic problems. Ours is the more difficult task of persuading and reconciling competing loyalties to different task of persuading and reconciling competing loyalties to different cultural and social values into rational and harmonious national whole. From out of this Chamber must come the first Malaysians. If the Malaysians constitute the majority in this Chamber at the end of five years we would not have failed.

But if at the end of our term, we are thinking, feeling and reacting not as Malaysians as so many Malays, or Chinese or Indians, or equally bad as so many Malayans, Singaporeans, Sarawakians, or Sabahans, then our future will be in jeopardy. We must not fail our own people.

We had vested interest in Malaysia's success

One of the reasons why Western style parliamentary democracy has failed to take roots in the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa is that the government in power does not contemplate with equanimity the passing of power to the opposition, and also because the opposition opposes merely to bring the Government down regardless of the harm inflicted upon the country.

We in the PAP have played the role both of opposition and as Government party in Singapore. We bring to our duties as the opposition in Parliament an understanding of the difficult and delicate problems which the Government party faces in administering this new Federation. We want Malaysia to succeed. It will give us little consolation if our party prospects heighten as the nation goes down. For what could be worse than that the prospect of sharing responsibility for the running of a Government when both the economy and the administration have sagged? The more prosperous the country's economy and the more efficient and honest the administration, the better are the nation's chances of success.

The Prime Minister has never been in a personally stronger position. He is even stronger now than he was in 1955 when on the issue of Merdeka 50 out of 51 Alliance candidates were returned. I say he is even stronger now because he has got this present mandate after nine years of office with everybody knowing what he stands for. From his position of strength, he can demand higher standards of his colleagues in the Government and of the officials in the administration. If he does so, the country will be that much the healthier and eventually the happier for it. From us he will get no carping criticism for the sake of scoring points. We have a vested interest to see that he succeeds in creating a healthier economy and more honest effective administration.

Our criticisms will be directed to this end. For if he fails, it does not mean that we shall succeed. The chances are that we will all fail together, as the country changes from the system of representative government to one of authoritarian government, first probably of the extreme right, and then to a dictatorship of the extreme left. It will give the S.F. little consolation for if and when that happens, it will be a P.K.I. influenced or controlled left that will emerge. We have a vested interest in the survival and success of representative government in Malaysia and we intend to make our contribution towards this end.

21st May, 1964.