

REMARKS BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF
MALAYSIA, AT THE OFFICIAL BANQUET
GIVEN IN HIS HONOUR BY THE PRIME
MINISTER OF SINGAPORE AT ISTANA
NEGARA SINGAPORE ON 14TH NOVEMBER,
1973

Mr Prime Minister,¹ Mrs Lee,² Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should like, first of all, Mr Prime Minister, to say how much I appreciate the way in which you, your colleagues and your officials have welcomed us and look after us since our arrival yesterday afternoon.

It has been some time since I visited Singapore. Indeed, my last visit here in an official capacity was some four years ago on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Founding of Singapore. It was a privilege for me to be present at that celebration—and my personal attendance on that historic occasion was in itself a testimony to the close and intimate ties between our two countries. In the same way, the presence of Dr Goh Keng Swee³ in Kuala Lumpur last August on the occasion of our national sorrow—the death of the late Tun Dr Ismail—a presence which we in Malaysia deeply appreciated—equally reflected those close and intimate ties.

Last year, Mr Prime Minister, you paid your first official visit to Malaysia. It was an extremely fruitful journey for both our countries and our discussions then set the tone and tempo for the relations between our two countries ever since. I am therefore very happy now to renew and refresh the direct personal links between us and between our two governments so that we may co-operate even more closely and sincerely for the betterment and welfare of our respective peoples.

Mr Prime Minister, my visit here is brief and the arrangements for my stay are informal and business-like. These have also been characteristic of my recent visits to two other close neighbours of

¹ Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

² Wife of Prime Minister of Singapore (Mr Lee Kuan Yew).

³ Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of Singapore.

ours—Indonesia and Thailand. I firmly believe that visits among friends should be as far as possible informal like this. Our primary purpose of having these meetings is to open up frankly to each other, to acquaint each other with the way we see things and the problems we face, to exchange views on developments around us in this region as well as elsewhere in the world which would affect our security and our stability, so that as a result of our discussions, we may be better able to take into account each other's views and perspectives in formulating our own respective policies.

I do hope, Mr Prime Minister, that you and I and some of our colleagues, may continue to meet more frequently together, not because there are any special issues to resolve, but to continuously keep in touch, as it were, so that we may be fully aware of each other's views and policies. We in Malaysia are very conscious—and I know, Mr Prime Minister, that your Government is equally so—that any happening that affects the stability and prosperity of one country has its repercussions on the other. No transient difficulties or differences between us can obscure the essential facts of the close and binding mutuality and inter-reaction of our interests.

Mr Prime Minister, our close relations are founded on a much firmer foundation than slogans such as “special relations” or “indivisibility”—words which may be appealing but, on the other hand, do tend to give rise to unnecessary emotion, expectations and misunderstanding. Our two peoples continue to retain intimate bonds of friendship and family ties and continue to share common values and common aspirations. Our two countries are willy-nilly bound together by the facts of our geography, our history and our economy. We are both equally committed to creating modern, multi-racial and cohesive societies. The practical links between us cover almost the entire gamut of activities, both official and non-official, that can exist between two sovereign countries. Despite this though, perhaps, because of this—people tend sometimes to make too much fuss whenever we act independently of each other. I am aware that the numerous occasions when we co-operate together do not often make headlines. But when we do act independently, I think more can be done to put across the idea that each country has to act within the impulse and logic of its own situation and its own interest.

However, Mr Prime Minister, in recent years, we have made real progress in understanding one another and in working closely together and there have been much less public emotion than in the past. I have no doubt that, given mutual goodwill and a genuine friendship, such occasions when we do differ, will not impair the deep and abiding links which unite us on some of the more important and vital questions. If there are differences between us, let there be the minimum of fuss and the maximum of understanding because what unites us are far more fundamental than matters on which we may occasionally differ.

Mr Prime Minister, I do not regard this pleasant and elegant evening which you have arranged for us to be an occasion for much speech-making. Indeed it is basic to my own thinking about the nature of our relations that we do not need such occasions.

It has been for me a rewarding as well as an enjoyable stay during this brief visit to this Island Republic. We have had a very useful, frank and sincere exchange of views earlier this afternoon. However, the most important of our achievements is the almost casual and relaxed manner in which our two peoples have accepted this visit, regarding it as indeed they should, as a matter of course. This is a good augury for the future.

Mr Prime Minister, as I leave for home tomorrow, I carry with me not only pleasant recollections of my stay here but also the convictions that we can continue to co-operate even more firmly and fruitfully in the future. Whatever differences there may be on certain issues, the important thing is that we both agree and are determined to march forward in step together in the interest of our two countries and our two peoples.

Once again, Mr Prime Minister, I thank you and Mrs Lee and members of your Government for your kindness and your hospitality and for this pleasant and enjoyable evening.

Ladies and Gentlement, I would like now to invite all guests present to join me in a toast to the good health of the Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, and Mrs Lee and to the Government and people of Singapore.