



Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore, arrives at the television press conference following the announcement of the separation of Singapore from Malaysia, August 9, 1965

SINGAPORE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS

NEIGHBOURS

WHAT WOULD KYLIE HAVE MADE OF PRE-INDEPENDENCE POLITICAL BARTER?

DOCUMENTS ON AUSTRALIAN FOREIGN POLICY: AUSTRALIA AND THE FORMATION OF MALAYSIA 1961-1966

MOREEN DEE (Ed)

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THE MID-1960S WAS an animated period in Malaysian history. Nearest to home, four events held centre stage: the formation of Malaysia, the Indonesian Confrontation as well as the Philippine claim to Sabah, the federal elections, and the expulsion of Singapore from Malaysia. Some distance away, war broke out in Vietnam in 1965, appearing to lend credence to American President Eisenhower's 'Domino Theory'. Ironically, these problems surfaced almost immediately after the Malayan government had declared the Emergency, imposed in 1948, officially over.

For several years, these events captivated the attention of scholars, especially those in the field of international relations, and there have been many studies since. Still, few Malaysians today even talk about these events. Many of their leading protagonists have also passed on, but for Malaysians, the need to understand

what transpired during those nascent years in the making of Malaysia is critical, if only because some of the problems encountered then, in terms of Malaysia's external relations, can hardly be said to have lain dormant even if there has not been any serious conflict since.

Sabah (more than Sarawak) from time to time raises issues of its relationship with the federal government. Indonesia has long accepted the reality of Malaysia but bilateral ties have been coloured by problems posed by Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia, as well as boundary disputes. The Philippines has not officially ended its claim to Sabah where illegal immigrants (from Sulu) appear to be an insurmountable problem. And Malaysia-Singapore relations have been anything but uneventful.

THIS BOOK IS not specifically about those issues which have continued to dog Malaysia's relations with its immediate neighbours. Moreover, it is, strictly speaking, not a study of the formation of Malaysia; its main theme is Australia's role in the formation of Malaysia. The book has the added value of also providing a close perception of Britain's role in the making of Malaysia and independent Singapore.

Australia had been involved in the defence of Malaya since World War II. Its military role was even more important during the period of the Indonesian Confrontation. In more recent years, Australia has consistently viewed itself as very much a part of Southeast and East Asia. Trade apart, any major political change in the two regions would have major repercussions on Australia, more so now than before, if only because the country's own Southeast and East Asian populations have continued to grow. But it is equally true that Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia value their relationship with Australia which, although a small country population-wise, is economically and militarily more than a force to be reckoned with.

And so this book is quite unlike all those which have been published on the subject of Malaysia-Singapore-Indonesia relations, especially since, in this instance, the protagonist is actually Australia. The reader is granted a view of the tumultuous relations among the three countries, largely through the eyes of Australian diplomats.

Books of this nature are not common but they are ideal not merely for those interested in research but also for university scholars who want to develop the minds of their students – every reader has the opportunity to read for him/herself what the main actors said and wrote in the past. In many instances, Australian diplomats are quoted verbatim in their conversations with the leaders of Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia; occasionally, the Australian diplomats themselves offer their



Soldiers from the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australia Regiment, emerge from the jungle with infiltrators captured near the Sungei River, south of the Australian base at Terendak. The operation was the first engagement of Indonesian forces by Australian combat forces, October 29, 1964

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL



L to R: Tunku Abdul Rahman, Prime Minister of Malaya, Harold Macmillan, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Duncan Sandys, United Kingdom Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations and for the Colonies, and Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore, pose outside 10 Downing Street during final negotiations on the formation of the Federation of Malaysia in London, July 1963

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF MALAYSIA



President Sukarno of Indonesia was a charismatic orator. He used his annual Merdeka Day speeches of August 17 to foreshadow Indonesian policy for the coming year



K.C.O. 'Mick' Shann, Australia's Ambassador to Indonesia (L), with President Sukarno of Indonesia (R), and Madame Hartini Sukarno, at the Presidential Palace, Bogor, July 1964. Throughout Confrontation, Shann maintained a relationship with the President that ensured the Indonesian leader understood Australia's strong commitment to the defence of Malaysia against Indonesia



Tom Critchley, Australia's High Commissioner to Malaysia, (L) enjoys a lighter moment with Tunku Abdul Rahman, Prime Minister of Malaysia. Critchley was appointed Commissioner to Malaya in 1955 and High Commissioner to Malaya/Malaysia from 1957, leaving in late September 1965. His long stay in Kuala Lumpur coincided with many significant events in Malaya/Malaysia's history and allowed him to develop a close working relationship and friendship with the Tunku and other senior government members

T.K. CRITCHLEY

own comments on the reliability and veracity of what they had heard.

Indeed, through the correspondence published in this volume as well as such reports of conversations between Australian diplomats and the leaders of Malaysia-Indonesia-Singapore, it is even possible to obtain a fair perspective of the character of each of the Southeast Asian leaders involved in the political wrangles that occurred during that formative period. It is quite evident, for example, that of the three major leaders then – Sukarno, Tunku Abdul Rahman and Lee Kuan Yew – the Tunku was the least cantankerous.

The numerous documents here are published in chronological order, from the time Malaya's Prime Minister first put forward, in 1961, the proposal for the formation of Malaysia to August 1966 when the Confrontation officially ended. Most of the major political events are referred to but local events are glossed over (such as the ethnic riots in Singapore) or not included (such as the Malaysian federal elections of 1964).

Yet, these local events are extremely important as they help to provide a clearer perspective of each problem. The Singapore riots played a major part in influencing Malaysia's Prime Minister (Tunku Abdul Rahman) to expel Singapore from Malaysia

for fear that the disturbances might have direct repercussions on the Peninsula. The federal elections of 1964 which the ruling party in Malaysia then – the BN precursor, the Alliance – won very comfortably, provided ample evidence of the reaction of the majority of Malaysians, irrespective of ethnic groups, towards the possibility of Indonesia taking hegemonic control of Malaysia.

One item which ought to be included in the book (mentioned in the index but not found on the page [133] referred to) is GANEFO (Games of the New Emerging Forces). Jakarta played host to GANEFO in late 1963 and it was meant to challenge the Asian Games after Sukarno had, in 1962, refused to allow Israel and Taiwan to participate in the Asian Games held in Jakarta, which led to a confrontation between Indonesia and the International Olympic Council. (After a second GANEFO, held at Phnom Penh in 1966, the Games fizzled out, indicating how weak the pro-Soviet Union forces were.)

But these few omissions do not detract from the fact that this book is an extremely valuable reference. Apart from the numerous primary documents, there is also a very comprehensive chronology of events covering the period 1961 to 1966, accompanied at the back of the book by the calendars for the same period. The documents are preceded by a survey of the

events which unfolded after Tunku's public announcement of the Malaysia proposal.

This book can be said to be another triumph for Western scholarship. Asian scholars have yet to play pioneering roles in the development of Asian studies and Asian governments seem unable to see the value of scholarship. Funding is therefore a problem because to those who can provide funding, scholarship is not seen as a possible means for the making of large profits. In Malaysia, much of the study of Southeast Asia over the past several decades has been made possible by the generosity of Japanese foundations, in particular the Toyota Foundation. Perhaps this book, published by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia, will inspire its counterparts in Malaysia to publish documents that can contribute towards greater awareness of Malaysia's foreign policies. ■