
AVERAGE DAILY CERTIFIED SALE EXCEEDS 180,000

The Straits Times

WHACKED! Barisan-led-don't-put-X-on-your-ballot-paper group

MERGER 'YES'

Only 25 p.c. heed blank votes call: 397,000 back Alternative A

How they voted

Alternative A: 397,626

Tengku: Just as I predicted

MERGER

Tan Tai Yong

Picture: SPH Media Limited

Independence for Singapore came overnight, unexpectedly. There had been no hint of the Malaysian and Singapore governments' decision to go their separate ways, and when the news broke on 9 August 1965, it was greeted with shock and disbelief. A strongly worded editorial on the front page of *The Straits Times* on 10 August 1965 declared: "Separation was the last thing the public expected." Singapore had joined the Federation of Malaysia only two years earlier in September 1963, and the ferocity of the high-stakes contest over the political merger was still fresh in public memory.

It had been obvious between 1961 and 1963 that the challenge of making Malaysia work was to be preferred over the problems of each going its separate way, the paper wrote, adding: "The dangers of separation have not vanished. The economic advantages of integration have not grown less. It is a thousand pities that the clock has been thus set back."[1] As the main English-language newspaper in Singapore, *The Straits Times* was reflecting the prevailing view that Singapore's survival depended on it staying in the Federation, and the decision to leave was thus a serious existential threat to the island's future.

What led to this momentous decision? The Albatross file — newly declassified and published for the first time in this book — chronicles the circumstances surrounding Separation, the negotiations that paved the way to it and the considerations of the key players in the saga. But the Albatross file — and the road to Separation — can be understood only in the context of the earlier journey towards Merger.

Self-government and the Merger Question

The push for a union between Singapore and the Federation of Malaya had started in the post-war years, amid political and social convulsions arising from the Cold War and a rising tide of anti-colonial nationalism. Anxious about its diminished status in the new world order and determined to protect its interests, Britain sought to control and influence the handover of power as it dismantled its vast empire.

In Southeast Asia, the objective was to consolidate former British colonies into a large federation with Malaya as the anchor. This idea, later known as the "Grand Design", grew more salient as Southeast Asia became a hotbed of Cold War tensions and great power rivalry following the emergence of communist China in 1949. Political problems in Burma, Vietnam and Indonesia reinforced the belief that Southeast Asia was in danger of turning communist.

By the 1950s, the British government had decided that a merger between Singapore and Malaya, followed by the incorporation of its Borneo Territories of Sarawak, Brunei and North Borneo (which would be renamed Sabah in 1963), to form a "Greater Malaysia", would constitute the "ultimate aim of British policy in Southeast Asia".[2] Not only would the viability of these colonies be enhanced by their amalgamation into a more stable federation, Britain's interests and commitments in the region (denoted "East of Suez" by policymakers) would also not be jeopardised by its decolonisation amid growing Cold War hostilities. Britain would be able to create a friendly Commonwealth bloc in the region.

After Malaya was given independence in 1957, British attention turned to Singapore. The island-colony was on course towards self-government following constitutional talks in London in 1956 and 1957. However, the future of British bases on the island remained an unresolved issue. Singapore's command of vital sea lanes linking the Indian Ocean, South China Sea and the Southern Pacific had long made it the linchpin of Britain's security considerations and defence obligations in the region.[3]

The British were naturally anxious for Singapore to be handed over to a pro-British government that would ensure the security and accessibility of British bases there. But Singapore was not immune to the growing left-wing radicalisation that had infiltrated Malayan politics in the late 1940s. Having suffered losses in its armed revolt in Malaya, the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) turned to Singapore in the mid-1950s to rebuild its base by infiltrating organisations such as trade unions, student unions and cultural organisations.

The British believed that if anti-colonial left-wing political parties were to gain control of Singapore, their prized strategic asset in Southeast Asia would likely be lost. The security and political implications of an independent, politically unstable Singapore were clearly major concerns for London. Although the British were bound by an agreement to carry out a

constitutional review four years after Singapore was granted self-government in 1959, they were prepared to withhold further constitutional concessions if the political conditions were deemed unfavourable to British interests.

Given the circumstances, Malaya was the key factor in the "Grand Design": it was now an independent country governed by the conservative, anti-communist Alliance government, a Commonwealth member, and a trusted British ally. Singapore's future, as envisioned by the British, hinged on the island-colony being successfully incorporated into a larger Malayan federation. If all went to plan, the thorny issue of internal security in Singapore would no longer be a British concern.

The British had earlier in 1946 attempted to bring about political integration through the Malayan Union, but this fell through in the face of protests by Malay nationalists who saw Singapore's predominantly Chinese population as a threat to the standing of Malays in Malaya. As Singapore moved towards self-government in the 1950s, the issue of merger once again came to the fore. Ever since Singapore's separation from Malaya in 1946, all shades of political opinion in Singapore believed the island-colony would eventually find its way back into the fold of its natural hinterland — the Malayan peninsula. The idea that Singapore could survive as an independent state outside the Federation of Malaya was never regarded as realistic: the question that local politicians grappled with was not whether Singapore would re-join Malaya but when and how.

In 1955, elections were held in Singapore to form the first government under the Rendel Constitution. Merger was a prominent electoral issue. The leaders of the Labour Front party, David Marshall and Lim Yew Hock, spoke confidently about achieving a union between Singapore and Malaya. Both men, who became chief ministers in the Labour Front coalition government, with Lim succeeding Marshall, made repeated overtures to the Malayan leader, Tunku Abdul Rahman. They saw merger as the only way in which Singapore could convince the British to concede independence to the colony. The Tunku, however, was not convinced that the conditions were right for bringing Singapore into the Federation and showed no interest in such a move.

The next election in 1959[4] ushered in self-government for Singapore, with the People's Action Party (PAP) winning 43 of the 51 seats and garnering 53.4 per cent of the overall votes. When the PAP was formed in November 1954, it had positioned itself as a left-wing, anti-colonial socialist party. At its core were Lee Kuan Yew, a young lawyer newly returned from his studies in England, and his "band of democratic socialists": S Rajaratnam, a journalist; Toh Chin Chye, a university lecturer in physiology; and Goh Keng Swee and KM Byrne, both civil servants.[5]

The PAP won over the ground with the promise of an "honest and efficient government" that would prioritise problems of employment, housing and education — issues which resonated with the newly enfranchised working class. Another PAP campaign pledge was its commitment to bring Singapore into a united Malaya. Since its inception in 1954, the PAP had declared as one of its objectives the ending of colonialism in Singapore through the establishment of "an

independent [and non-communist] national state of Malaya comprising ... the Federation of Malaya and the Colony of Singapore".[6]

Following constitutional talks in London in 1957, Lee Kuan Yew, who was the PAP's Secretary-General, maintained that independence was not possible until Singapore's merger with the Federation of Malaya was achieved. In the lead-up to the 1959 election campaign, Lee obtained an undertaking of full support for merger from his party, particularly from its extreme left-wing trade unionists, then in detention, whom he knew were ambivalent about his non-communist wing of the party.[7]

Lee believed the PAP, having won the 1959 elections convincingly, had the popular mandate to push vigorously for merger and he promised this would be achieved within the PAP's first term of office. The cause of independence through merger had found a staunch and articulate champion in the person of Singapore's founding prime minister.

Yet several "battles" had to be fought first. Not only did Lee have to convince the Tunku, who up to mid-1961 showed little interest in merger, he also had to deal with local political opposition.

Lee's belief in the necessity of merger was born out of his hard-nosed assessment of the economic problems Singapore faced. As far as he was concerned, separate independence for Singapore was a dangerous illusion, and the island state would be "committing national suicide if [it] refused to merge [with] Malaysia".[8] Throughout the 1950s, Singapore had been under mounting economic pressure. Its exports to the region had fallen owing to protectionist import restrictions put in place by many of its neighbours. Entrepôt trade, the mainstay of Singapore's economy, was threatened by a rise in direct trading between countries. There was also the problem of ensuring job growth at a pace that matched Singapore's rapid population growth. If Singapore were to create enough jobs as well as cut its dependence on entrepôt trade, it would have to embark on rapid industrialisation. For this to work, integration with the Federation's economy and larger market was crucial.[9] As Singapore's Minister for Finance Goh Keng Swee noted: "Major changes in our economy are only possible if Singapore and the Federation are integrated as one economy."[10]

While the economic reasons were compelling, there was also a political aspect behind the PAP's urgent push for a union with Malaya. From the outset, the PAP was "divided between two ideologically diverse factions with incompatible ends and means", Singapore historians noted.[11] While Lee and a number of his English-educated colleagues — the "moderates" as they were called — were committed to achieving an independent and socialist Singapore through constitutional negotiations with the British, there was a rival faction within the party which had similar ends but whose ideology and methods were different. This group was regarded as the "radical left", as the colonial authorities believed them to be communists or at least sympathetic to the Communist International's (Comintern's) ideology of revolutionary anti-colonialism. Driven by common intent and also for reasons of mutual political expediency, the two factions had forged a united front in the first few years of the PAP's existence. The communist elements regarded the PAP as a legitimate anti-colonial socialist party and a convenient as well as legal

political vehicle from which they could carry out their open front activities, gradually subverting Singapore and ultimately using the island as a base to foment revolution in Malaya. This alliance of ideologically opposed forces within the PAP was fraught with uncertainty and tension. Both Lee's group as well as the radical left knew that once the British pulled out of Singapore, the two factions would have to fight it out between themselves.

By 1960, while Lee and his allies still controlled the PAP through the Central Executive Committee, there were signs that the more militant section of the party was gaining influence. Chinese chauvinism, stoked by economic woes and anti-imperialist sentiments, fuelled the popularity of left-wing politics. Lee was aware his position would be increasingly undermined as long as any colonial presence remained. The PAP had pledged to end Singapore's status as a colony, but without merger, it was unlikely the British would concede independence. Unless the PAP government could make some progress on either political merger or a common market with Malaya, and thus pave the way to independence with a degree of certainty, the radical left would continue to gain political mileage at the expense of the moderates.[12]

Lee was clearly in a fix. Without showing a stern hand in dealing with the militants, he was not likely to win the Tunku's support for a merger. Yet, without clear prospects of a merger, Lee was in no position to politically defeat the radical left faction that was gearing up to challenge him for control of the party and government. For the embattled Lee, the survival of his government and the future viability and stability of Singapore without a merger was looking bleak. The longer the Malayans held out, the weaker Lee's position was.

Despite his best efforts, Lee failed to make any headway with the Tunku.[13] The Malayan leader consistently rejected the idea that merger was possible under the existing circumstances and stressed that Malaya had first to settle its own racial problems. At that stage, the Tunku was, to all intents and purposes, impervious to any suggestion of merger with Singapore.[14] Not wishing to give hope to the Singapore Government, and also to avoid drawing flak from the right wing in the Federation, the Alliance government steered clear of proposals that might be interpreted as the first steps towards a political merger with Singapore.

Even as the door across the causeway remained shut for the moment, Lee knew it was not enough to rely on rhetorical overtures and that the PAP had to continue creating tangible conditions that would make the Tunku more favourably disposed to merger once the timing was right.[15] The PAP realised early on that it had to "resolve the … fears which make the Malay majority in the Federation not want the Chinese majority in Singapore".[16]

Following its inception in 1954, the party had created a Malay Affairs Bureau, which was placed under the charge of Othman Wok, a Malay journalist who later became a cabinet minister. While on the opposition benches between 1955 and 1959, Lee had demonstrated his willingness to co-operate with the Federation Government by taking the controversial decision to support the formation of an Internal Security Council (ISC), which would control security in Singapore following self-government. The move to back the retention of extra-judicial powers, as well as give Kuala Lumpur the decisive vote in case of disagreement between self-governing Singapore and the British, was viewed with deep suspicion by left-wing PAP members, who saw

it as an affront to democracy as well as a potential threat to them. But Lee had argued that as the PAP's ultimate aim was to effect merger between Singapore and Malaya, "it was logical to recognise that the Federation would have a decisive voice in the affairs of Singapore, including its security".[17]

After becoming Prime Minister of Singapore in 1959, Lee had also taken steps to encourage a pan-Malayan outlook in Singapore in the hope of creating, in his own words, a "Malayanised Singapore man who would talk, think and act like the exemplary Malayans of the Federation".[18] In an attempt to facilitate the social integration of Singapore's predominantly Chinese population into the Malayan hinterland, and impress the United Malays National Organisation (Umno) leadership in Kuala Lumpur, Malay was made the national language of Singapore and a Malay Head of State (Yang di-Pertuan Negara) was installed. A Malay Education Advisory Committee was set up in 1959, and a Malayan school syllabus was introduced.

Despite the PAP's gestures of goodwill, the Tunku remained cool to the idea of merger. The PAP government grew increasingly worried about its ability to hold on indefinitely to the promise of independence through merger without any sight of concrete achievements. In the meantime, the government's position was further undermined by an open quarrel with one of its members in the Legislative Assembly, the former mayor, Ong Eng Guan. Following a failed challenge to the PAP leadership in June 1960, Ong was expelled from the Assembly. However, he recaptured his Hong Lim seat as an independent candidate in the April 1961 by-election. Disheartened by the defeat, Lee and his ministers offered to resign, believing that the economic and social problems that had alienated their voter base in Hong Lim could not be resolved unless there was merger or the establishment of a common market with Malaya.[19] The talk of resignation drew protests from the party's left-wing faction, which was quick to promise its support for the PAP government. Lee was convinced that they did so out of the fear that the PAP would be replaced by a more resolutely anti-communist government.[20]

With its position weakened by the Hong Lim defeat, the PAP government faced increasing pressure from left-wing hardliners to adopt the position being advocated then by Marshall and never expressly abandoned by Lim Yew Hock: separate independence for Singapore, or independence before merger. It was almost certain that this would have led to the postponement of merger indefinitely. Lee Kuan Yew, naturally, did not want this and believed that an independent Singapore would rapidly be engulfed by pro-communist elements. The line had to be drawn. Lee announced that the PAP would, at the upcoming Constitutional Review Talks in 1963, demand independence through merger with the Federation or merger in a larger Federation. Lee then confided in the British that the party would stand or fall by this.[21]

The PAP's poor performance at the Hong Lim by-election proved fortuitous for Lee. The Tunku, who had been following the election with great interest, realised that unless he did something to bolster Lee's position, the government was in danger of being taken over by the radical left.[22] In April 1961, Lee and Goh Keng Swee were invited to Kuala Lumpur to meet the Tunku and his deputy, Abdul Razak. According to Lee, the Tunku made it clear that he was still strongly opposed to a direct merger between Singapore and the Federation, but was open

to bringing in the Borneo Territories first if Singapore had to be incorporated at a later stage.[23]

Lee had been offered a way out of the political impasse. As the PAP's aim of independence through merger with the Federation was "vulnerable to destructive criticism from his political opponents because the Federation's attitude was so unforthcoming", Lee had, for some months, been pushing for merger through a wider political association that would include the Borneo Territories, Selkirk, United Kingdom Commissioner for Singapore, noted.[24] This appealed to the Tunku's interest in establishing a grand federation of Malaya and the British colonies in North Borneo, an idea that had been mooted even before Malaya's independence and which the Tunku had raised publicly on many occasions.

By 9 May 1961, Lee had produced a paper on the "Grand Design", following the Tunku's request for a proposal on the inclusion of the Borneo Territories.[25] In his paper, which was sent to the British and Malayans for consideration, Lee outlined two alternatives for the future of the British territories in Southeast Asia. The first was for the territories to be given independence each on their own and thereafter function as separate political units. This meant that merger between Singapore and the Federation of Malaya would be abandoned as a political objective, and, as a consequence, "power in Singapore would pass to a China-minded group with strong cultural and economic links with Communist China". A pro-communist government would emerge and eventually achieve independence for Singapore with the help of communist China. Lee warned that this would threaten British interests and security in Southeast Asia.

The other alternative was a larger federation comprising the territories of Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo Territories. This, Lee wrote, was the most satisfactory solution for all concerned; it was also one which the British could quite easily accede to. Under this scheme, the Malaya-based Federation Government would serve as the anchor for the whole region. Each of the states would be free to elect its own government based on existing state arrangements, with the government of the Federation of Malaya controlling the government of the larger federation.

The thrust of Lee's paper was clear: separate independence for Singapore was too much of a political risk for both the Malayans and the British. Merger with the Federation not only promised long-term economic viability for the small island-state, but more fundamentally, its survival in the face of the communist threat.

As the PAP's political situation became increasingly precarious, Lee appealed to Malaya's self-interest. He highlighted the threat that Singapore would pose for Malayan security should the Tunku persist in keeping Singapore out of the Federation. Hoping that the British government would prevail on the Tunku, he had told a group of British security officials in June 1960 that the Singapore problem was an integral part of the wider Malayan problem and that "it was easier if [the Tunku] were to include [Singapore] in his overall calculations …than if he were to try to pass the problem child to the British".[26] Gradually, as Lee explained later, "the unpleasant facts were placed before the Federation Government. … What had been publicly known was that Malaya was vital to Singapore. But what we did not emphasise … was that Singapore was vital to their survival".[27]

The challenges to Lee's leadership ultimately served to reverse his declining political fortunes.

Lee's rapidly weakening grip on power forced the Tunku to reassess his stance on keeping Singapore outside the Federation. The political cost of bringing Singapore into the Federation continued to weigh heavily on the Malayan leader's deliberations: The addition of 1.3 million Chinese would upset the racial balance in the Federation and expose the Tunku domestically to attack from right-wing nationalists. He was, however, aware that a communist-controlled independent Singapore would give him no end of trouble. The only way he could control the situation was to bring Singapore into the Federation and then deal with the perceived communist threat on the island as an internal security issue, directly from Kuala Lumpur.

On 27 May 1961, during a luncheon held in Singapore by the Foreign Correspondents' Association, the Tunku raised the possibility of bringing the territories of Singapore, North Borneo (Sabah), Brunei and Sarawak and the Federation of Malaya "closer together in political and economic co-operation".[28] His remarks caught everyone off guard,[29] given his firm opposition to earlier proposals of merger between Singapore and Malaya. Nonetheless, the Tunku was adamant that two conditions be satisfied before further talks: First, before committing to bringing Singapore into the Federation, he wanted to be absolutely certain that he could incorporate the three Borneo territories, with their predominantly non-Chinese population, to form a wider Malaysian Federation; second, the Singapore Government would have to agree to a smaller representation in the federal parliament than it would otherwise be entitled to on the basis of Singapore's population.[30] In return, the Tunku was prepared to let Singapore retain much wider local powers than the other member states of the Federation.

The Tunku's announcement precipitated the political crisis that had been brewing within the PAP. While the growing strength of Lee's political opponents made the securing of a merger agreement a matter of great importance for his government, it was, ironically, the very same question of merger that caused the seething tension between the PAP's radical left and moderate factions to erupt into open conflict.[31] Left-leaning party members had always been in favour of merger — theoretically — but not with the Tunku and the Alliance in charge of Malaya. For them, and more fundamentally, the CPM, merger in these circumstances would mean internal security being placed in the hands of a rabidly anti-communist government in Kuala Lumpur.

Shortly after the PAP's defeat in Hong Lim, the party lost another by-election — this time to David Marshall, then the chairman of the Workers' Party, in the Anson constituency in July 1961. Lee's left-wing opponents, led by Lim Chin Siong, had earlier pressured him to first seek genuine self-government for Singapore and the abolition of the Internal Security Council in constitutional talks scheduled for 1963. Lee's rejection of these demands led to the left's withdrawal of support for the PAP candidate in Anson, resulting in his defeat. The irreconcilable differences between the two factions came to the fore. The stakes were high as "a period of relatively open political competition was coming to a close [and] politics was increasingly seen as a zero-sum game", British historian TN Harper observed.[32]

Two days before polling day on 15 July 1961, eight PAP assemblymen, led by Lee Siew Choh, pledged their support to Lim Chin Siong and his radical left colleagues in the Singapore Trades Union Congress (STUC) secretariat. Lim was widely regarded as the leader of the

radical left faction within the PAP. Lee Kuan Yew responded the following day, on the eve of the by-election, by publicly calling for the resignation of Lim, Fong Swee Suan and S Woodhull, who were then serving as political secretaries in the government.[33] These developments threw the PAP and its election campaign into disarray.

To stem more defections and expose the radical left, Lee called for a vote of confidence in the Legislative Assembly on 20 July 1961. The 13 PAP assemblymen who abstained were expelled from the party. The PAP had split. Lim and his allies went on to form the Barisan Sosialis (or Socialist Front), registering it in August 1961. The STUC also split, with the unions supporting the Barisan forming the Singapore Association of Trade Unions (SATU), and the PAP-affiliated unions forming the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC). The PAP lost "possibly 60 to 70 per cent"[34] of its membership to the newly formed Barisan; 19 out of 23 organising secretaries left the PAP; and most of the unions joined the SATU. Coming on the heels of the PAP's defeat in two by-elections in a row — Hong Lim and then Anson — these developments "struck an almost fatal blow to the PAP", Harper noted.[35]

The issue of merger took on even greater significance as the political situation in Singapore became increasingly volatile. Following his *volte-face* on merger, the Tunku appeared to have decided that the only possible association with Singapore would be based on a so-called "Ulster-type" merger. In a speech to the Malaysian Parliament on 16 October 1961, he indicated that he was prepared to consider Singapore joining the Federation of Malaysia on a partnership basis "like that which exists between the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland". As in the case of Northern Ireland's relations with the United Kingdom, Singapore would enjoy a measure of local self-government with powers to deal with local affairs. In other words, Singapore would, therefore, become part of the Federation and yet remain outside, a case of "partners in one identity", he said.[36] Under such an arrangement, Singapore would be given extensive local autonomy and some representation in the Federal Parliament in Kuala Lumpur.[37]

On 23 August 1961, the Tunku and Lee met to discuss for the first time the terms on which a merger between their two territories might be arranged. Lee explained that the situation in Singapore had become "extremely serious and urgent" in the face of an open challenge from his political opponents. He wanted to secure some form of progress on the issue from both the British and the Malayan governments. The possibility of holding a referendum in Singapore was also raised. Lee suggested that the Tunku offer Singapore a status similar to Penang's but with local autonomy over education and labour. Lee believed he would lose his support base should education and labour be controlled by the Federal Government. Both the English-educated and Chinese-educated in Singapore would have objected to Malay being adopted as the language of instruction in place of Chinese and English. Moreover, Malaya's tough policy on trade unions would not have gone down well with workers and trade union leaders in Singapore.[38] Lee knew the Tunku would be happy to let Singapore retain control of these local affairs.

By securing an "in-principle" agreement to the broad terms under which merger would be effected, Lee had achieved a considerable milestone. But Lee knew further progress would be possible only if the Tunku was satisfied that the "Grand Design" would include the Borneo

Territories, a provision that the British had yet to make a firm public commitment. If the British were unable to accommodate the Tunku on this issue, the entire merger enterprise would fall through. Determined to strike while the iron was hot, Lee announced his intention of publishing a White Paper that would lay out the details of merger between Singapore and the Federation. Once he could get the Tunku to agree to accept the White Paper as a document supported by both the Federation and Singapore governments, Lee would have the proposals debated in the Legislative Assembly, and at a later stage, the government would hold a plebiscite on the type of merger preferred: a 100 per cent merger or merger with Singapore retaining autonomy over education and labour.[39]

The "Battle" for Merger

Shortly after a joint communiqué on merger was issued by the Tunku and Lee in late August 1961, the Singapore Government invited all parties in the Legislative Assembly to give their views on the two basic points laid out in the agreement: (1) Kuala Lumpur would control defence, external affairs and internal security, while (2) Singapore would retain autonomy in the areas of education and labour.

Reacting swiftly, the Barisan Sosialis dismissed the merger proposal as "phoney" and a "sell-out". Its criticism focused on the handing over of internal security to Kuala Lumpur and the lack of proportionate representation for Singapore in the Federal Parliament. The proposed terms, the Barisan argued, meant that the Federation Government would further British interests in Singapore and that the citizens of Singapore would become second-class citizens. This line of argument resonated with many Singapore Chinese who would not want their civil liberties curtailed by Malays in Kuala Lumpur.

The Barisan's call for a "complete merger", or a confederal relationship that would see internal security retained in the hands of the Singapore Government, was seen as a tactic to present terms that would be totally unacceptable to the Tunku. Having proposed the impossible, they urged the third course: an anti-colonial struggle for genuine internal self-government for Singapore, including the abolition of the Internal Security Council.[40] Confident that it could defeat the PAP in a popular poll, the Barisan aimed to force Lee to resign and then hold a general election. The PAP had at that point only 26 out of 51 seats in the Legislative Assembly. A little nudge was all that was needed to bring the government down, the Barisan felt.[41]

Another reaction came from the Workers' Party chairman, David Marshall, who dismissed the PAP move as party propaganda and called for the immediate sitting of the Assembly to discuss merger. Marshall took issue with the evasive tone of the Tunku's and Lee's late August joint communiqué and called it "strip-tease politics".[42] He argued that the proposed merger was likely to give the Federation more control over Singapore than the British had at that point.[43]

Lee was prepared to counter the Barisan Sosialis position. He told the UK Commissioner that his response would be to ask the people of Singapore, via a referendum, which they preferred: (1) the PAP's proposal for a limited merger, with Singapore retaining local autonomy in matters

of vital importance to the Chinese and the trade unions, such as education, labour and voting rights; or (2) the Barisan's proposal for a complete merger, with no local autonomy and accepting federal citizenship laws which would significantly reduce the size of the electorate in Singapore.[44]

As the negotiations and debates intensified, Lee launched a campaign to win the electorate over with a series of 12 radio talks aired between 13 September and 9 October 1961. These broadcasts were the PAP's "opening salvo in the battle for merger",[45] as the party geared up for the referendum it planned to hold in a year's time. Each broadcast was delivered in English, Malay and Mandarin. At a time when television was still unavailable in Singapore, the radio talks offered Lee a channel through which he could directly address the people.[46] Lee argued that the Barisan Sosialis' demands were calculated to "prevent [the PAP] from settling fair terms and conditions for merger" with the Malayans.[47] If negotiations with the Federation should fail, the PAP's bid to win independence for Singapore through merger would suffer a serious setback. Lee insisted that the communists and their proxies would then "use a semi-colonial Singapore as a base to undermine the Federation".[48] The radio talks were Lee's way of underscoring the point that merger was more than just political debate — for it involved the "battle" for Singapore's future.

The White Paper Proposals

By 26 October 1961, a draft of the White Paper on merger had been completed. The proposals broadly reflected the earlier agreement that the two governments had arrived at: Singapore would be constituted as a state within the Federation but on special conditions, and it would have a larger measure of local autonomy than the other states forming the Federation.[49] Defence, external affairs and internal security would fall under the purview of the Federation, while education, labour and several relatively minor areas would be reserved as state subjects. All reference to other details had been omitted at the wish of the Federation. There was also no mention of how internal security would be directed from Kuala Lumpur. The draft White Paper further proposed that the merger should be implemented by June 1963.

There was particular emphasis on retaining local autonomy, especially in labour and education.[50] Lee wanted to assure the people in Singapore that their interests would not be jeopardised. If education came under the Federation Government, he would be under pressure to replace English — the main medium of instruction in Singapore — with Malay; and his support for the Chinese schools, so politically important for the PAP, would have to cease. Lee was also anxious to ensure that workers in Singapore would not be subject to Federation laws, which were tougher and thus less favourable to workers.[51]

Where representation was concerned, the draft White Paper proposed that Singapore should have 15 seats in the federal legislature. If Singapore were to join the Federation on the same terms as the existing member states, it would be entitled to 25 seats by virtue of the size of its electorate. The latter arrangement was clearly unacceptable to the Federal Government. Lee was prepared to agree to a smaller number in exchange for greater autonomy.

It was proposed that separate Singapore citizenship, then recognised in the British Nationality

Acts, should be retained after merger. Singapore citizens would enjoy the same national rights and have the same passport as federal citizens. A suggestion was made for the term "Federal Nationals" to encompass both categories of citizenship.

Singapore's White Paper was deliberated over by the Federal Government in November 1961, but it failed to achieve an outright endorsement. After further discussions with the Federal Government, the Singapore Government submitted a revised draft. The merger plan set out in the revised paper left very little to Singapore's control, except in the fields of education, labour and health services; and even in those areas, the extent of Singapore's local autonomy would depend upon financial relations between Singapore and the Federation, the details of which had yet to be worked out. The Federation would also be in charge of directing broad economic policies, subject only to the understanding that nothing would be done to affect the free port status of Singapore without the consent of the Singapore Government.[52]

Although the revised draft was a tighter document, it essentially left little room for further negotiation once merger was effected. Furthermore, details on several other crucial matters were either vague or absent. They would erupt as points of contention as discussions between the two governments intensified.

Few then denied that a Malayan hinterland was imperative for Singapore's political and economic survival, given the island's growing population, limited natural resources and stagnating economy. Unable to counter the PAP's argument that merger was an absolute necessity, the Barisan Sosialis took to arguing that the Tunku's merger scheme was a neo-colonialist plot devised by the British to help the Federation suppress radical anti-colonialists in Singapore and thus save the increasingly right-wing PAP government.[53] To support its claims, the Barisan pointed to the terms on citizenship as well as Singapore's legislative representation in the Federal Parliament. Both, they argued, were designed to isolate Singapore politically.

The disagreement between the PAP and the Barisan Sosialis centred not so much on whether there should or should not be merger, but rather the terms of merger. Among the terms the Barisan took issue with, what was potentially the most damaging for the PAP was the one on citizenship.

The Citizenship Controversy

While the Tunku was prepared to integrate the territories of Malaya and Singapore, he was less prepared to unite their peoples. He was concerned about the racial balance in the Federation and the political primacy of the Malays. He therefore preferred the politically safer course of adopting restrictive citizenship arrangements for Singapore. The PAP government was prepared to accept this in exchange for greater domestic autonomy.

It was spelt out in the White Paper that the citizens of Singapore would automatically retain their Singapore citizenship, and like citizens of the Federation of Malaya, would automatically become nationals of the new Federation with equal rights and responsibilities. In other words, while the White Paper provided for a common nationality, a differentiated citizenship would apply to the people of Singapore after merger.

The Barisan Sosialis and other opposition parties seized upon this as an inherently one-sided arrangement that would work against the interests of Singapore citizens. Barisan chairman Lee Siew Choh argued that nationality referred simply to an individual's international status in relation to his state whereas citizenship defined his rights within the state. During the Legislative Assembly debate, he launched an attack on the PAP's assurances that a federal nationality would guarantee Singapore citizens rights equal to those of their Federation counterparts. He highlighted the differences between the terms, "Malaysian nationals" and "Malaysian citizens", and stressed that whereas a Malaysian national would be entitled to only a Malaysian passport, a citizen could, among other things, enjoy the "right to influence people … throughout Malaysia; for example, the citizen could stand for elections in any constituency in the Federation".[54]

The citizenship issue had opened up a weak flank in the PAP government's merger campaign and the opposition was determined to make maximum political capital out of it. The PAP was criticised by the Barisan Sosialis for trying to "foist a phoney merger on the people"[55] and it was pointed out that the terms which Lee had secured would put Singapore at a serious political disadvantage, especially if Singapore citizens had only restricted rights within the Federation.[56]

The Barisan Sosialis also questioned if Singapore citizens would be allowed to enter directly into the Federation civil service as well as apply for other jobs, without any fear of discrimination.[57] Given that the White Paper was especially vague on citizenship rights, the Barisan warned that if merger were effected along the terms outlined in the White Paper, all Singapore citizens would get would "merely be a second-class citizenship status" in Malaysia.[58] The only option was for Singapore to enter Malaysia as the twelfth state of the Federation, or complete merger, as this was the only way for Singapore citizens to automatically assume federal citizenship and enjoy the same rights as citizens in the Federation's existing states, the party argued.[59] If full merger was not possible at that point in time, Singapore should be made an autonomous unit in a confederation with the Borneo Territories. Under this arrangement, Singapore would have full autonomy in all internal matters including security, while the Federation would control external affairs and defence. The Barisan argued that allowing the Federation to control Singapore's internal security was tantamount to a continuation of colonial rule except that power was now transferred to Kuala Lumpur.[60]

Other opposition members, including David Marshall, also voiced reservations. Marshall pledged to continue his opposition to merger unless "the Tunku [was] prepared to agree either to a common citizenship for Malaysia with the right to vote limited to the state in which a citizen was living, or that any alteration in the rights and privileges of Singapore citizens after merger would have to be confirmed by a vote in the Singapore Assembly".[61] He further stated that it was not good enough for assurances of fair treatment to be given verbally, and that any such undertaking had to be enshrined constitutionally.[62]

While the citizenship issue provided the opportunity for the Barisan Sosialis to attack the PAP, it also gave Lee the chance to challenge the viability of the Barisan position. At that stage of discussions, it was quite obvious that the Barisan demand for a full merger was simply unworkable — the Tunku would never agree to accept Singapore as a full state of the Federation

with the same status as Penang or Malacca (the two non-Malay states).

Ever since 1946, when the Malayan Union scheme fell through because of its liberal citizenship provisions, the Federation had consistently enforced stringent citizenship restrictions for non-Malays, with the intention of preserving Malay dominance. This was further reinforced during the Malayan Emergency, which saw significant Chinese involvement in the insurgency and heightened communal tensions between the Chinese and Malays. The Tunku was therefore extremely wary of the Chinese in Singapore, who, if given equal citizenship rights, would upset the political and racial equation in the Federation — or so he felt. This would threaten not only the political dominance of the Malays but also his own party, Umno. With Singapore and Malaya having undergone nearly 17 years of separate political development, the Tunku had reservations about whether Singapore's Chinese population would be able to accept key institutions and tenets of the Malayan state such as "Kingship and Sultanate, Malay as the national language, and Islam as the official religion of the nation".[63] If the Tunku were to accept all Singapore citizens as federal citizens, it would lead to the intensification of pressure from the Chinese community in Malaya — where acquisition of citizenship had been extremely restrictive[64] — to be granted federal citizenship on terms no more onerous than those on which the Singapore Chinese could obtain Singapore citizenship. The Malayan Government, therefore, made it a necessary condition of merger that Singapore citizens would not automatically be given federal citizenship.

More significantly for the PAP, the Barisan Sosialis' argument that full merger would mean automatic federal citizenship for Singapore citizens was also shown to be erroneous. Unlike the Federal Constitution, the Singapore Citizenship Ordinance (1957) was more liberal in awarding citizenship.[65] At a press conference on 15 October 1961, Lee explained that "while Singapore-born citizens would automatically become federal citizens under complete merger, others — some 327,000 of them, those born in China, India and even Malaya — would first have to meet federal residence qualifications and would also have to pass a language test in Malay before they could become federal citizens".[66] A significant number of people in Singapore would have difficulties qualifying because of the Malay language requirement.[67] A flaw in the Barisan argument had thus been exposed: with full merger, half of the voting population in Singapore would lose their citizenship and effectively be disenfranchised in Malaysia.

The Barisan Sosialis' stand on merger, the PAP government believed, was framed in such an unrealistic manner that it either reflected the political naivete of the party and its leaders, or it was a deliberate attempt to sabotage the plan by demanding terms which it knew the Federation would find unacceptable. Many within the Barisan were privately concerned that merger would place them at the mercy of an internal security machinery controlled by an anti-communist Federation Government. Lee Siew Choh later admitted that the Barisan's policy on merger was designed with the primary aim of attacking the PAP.[68]

While the PAP found it relatively easy to refute the logic behind the Barisan Sosialis' demand for automatic federal citizenship under a full merger, it was much harder to assuage Singapore citizens' anxiety about becoming second-class citizens. Although the White Paper had specified that differentiated citizenship was meant to restrict voting in their respective territories, it left

too many matters to the discretion of the Federal Government. The PAP's position was further in danger of being undermined when, during the third meeting of the Malaysia Solidarity Consultative Committee in January 1962, the Borneo Territories were coaxed into joining Malaysia with the promise that the people of Borneo would share the special position of Malays in the Federation and be made founder-citizens of Malaysia by operation of law. This, Lee acknowledged in his memoirs, only served to emphasise the superior status of "citizens" over "nationals".[69]

In April 1962, Lee, sensing that a deal was being worked out between Kuala Lumpur and the Borneo Territories, indicated to the British that "if the Borneo Territories were offered 'a considerable degree of autonomy', separate citizenship would no longer be acceptable … and could no longer be justified as a corollary of [Singapore's] Ulster Status".[70] Indeed, it would be impossible to proceed with merger under such circumstances.

When the recommendations regarding citizenship for the Borneo Territories were published in the Cobbold Report in June 1962, Lee knew that he would be hard put to justify why the people of the Borneo Territories were entitled to federal citizenship with the right to vote anywhere in the Federation while the same rights were denied to Singapore.[71] The Cobbold Report further stated that the Borneo Territories had agreed to enter Malaysia on the condition that they were given a considerable degree of autonomy in the new state. This added an unpleasant twist to Lee's position. Like Singapore, the Borneo Territories would enjoy autonomy within Malaysia; but unlike Singapore, the inhabitants of the Borneo Territories could become Malaysian citizens without a separate Borneo citizenship. Singapore would be left with a "separate and diminished status" within the Federation.

The disparity in citizenship provisions for Singapore and the Borneo Territories reinforced the Barisan Sosialis' criticism of Lee's merger proposal. He had already come under attack from Lee Siew Choh, who warned that while the Borneo Territories would join the Federation as equal wives, Singapore was but a mistress and that "children of mistresses were going to be treated as illegitimate".[72] The Barisan continued to fire salvos at the PAP, stressing that whereas the Borneo Territories had been offered both federal citizenship and state autonomy in some matters, the PAP had sacrificed Singapore's rights for "illusory autonomy in labour and education".[73]

Lee had to respond. He announced that before Malaysia was implemented, he would make it clear in the constitution "that Singapore citizens would be equal to all others in the Federation". He reasoned that the problem would be obviated if the Tunku could be persuaded to drop the term "Malaysian nationals" and adopt the common term "Malaysian citizens" for all citizens of Malaysia, including Singapore, with assurances of similar rights and privileges other than where they voted.[74]

As Lee plotted his strategy, political pressure from the opposition continued to intensify. On 30 June 1962, the Workers' Party, Parti Rakyat, United Democratic Party, the Liberal Socialist Party and the Barisan Sosialis banded together to form the Council of Joint Action (CJA) to oppose the PAP's plans. The CJA drafted a memorandum protesting the PAP's proposed merger and submitted the document to the United Nations' 17-member Special Committee on Colonialism.[75]

Citizenship Re-negotiated

In July 1962, representatives of the Malayan government were invited to London for talks with their British counterparts to work out details of the proposed Malaysia Agreement. Lee joined them on 29 July, and it was then that the issue of citizenship was discussed. Lee faced an uphill task trying to secure from the Federation a form of citizenship agreement that would allay fears on the ground that Singapore citizens would become second-class citizens. Prior to Lee's arrival at the talks in London, the Tunku had told British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that he was content for the time being to maintain the citizenship agreement laid out in the White Paper of 1961.

The Chinese factor was clearly a serious impediment to the granting of common citizenship to Singapore. The Tunku's mistrust of the Chinese was further reinforced by fear of the perceived communist threat in Singapore. The Malayan leader made it clear in London that merger would not happen unless the "communists" were cleaned up beforehand.[76]

Despite the Malayans' intransigence, Lee was determined to persuade the Tunku to change his mind. Lee submitted an *aide-memoire* underlining his argument, stressing that "the terms under which the Borneo Territories [were] to come into the new Federation must be offered to Singapore as an alternative to the arrangements already agreed to between the Singapore Government and the Federation of Malaya Government as set out in Singapore Command 33 of 1961".[77] He also proposed that the term "Singapore Citizen (National of the new Federation)" be changed to "Citizen of the new Federation (Singapore)", as this would provide a "major psychological victory" against his opponents and allow his government to win the Chinese over.

As Lee saw it, this involved no more than a change in nomenclature since the restriction on voting rights remained. Goh Keng Swee, with whom Lee closely consulted during the merger negotiations, had assured his Federation counterparts that "the Federation would be giving nothing away by addressing Singapore citizens as Federation citizens since they could still control by other methods such as immigration, trade union activities and quota of Malays in the civil service".[78] The Tunku's deputy, Razak, was sceptical about Lee's proposal. He saw it as a "purely verbal device which people would in any case see through",[79] but it was a desperate gamble by Lee who knew that unless he could provide a common Malaysian citizenship for the people of Singapore, the entire Malaysia project might very well fall through.

The crisis was averted when the Malayan delegation, after negotiations with Lee and the Commonwealth Relations Office, agreed. On 30 July, the Malayan delegation in London issued a statement announcing that the governments of Singapore and the Federation had agreed that with merger, Singapore citizens would be citizens of Malaysia. The change was along the lines Lee had suggested: Singapore citizens would be known after merger as Federation citizens (Singapore). The Malayan representatives also agreed that Singapore citizens, as full citizens of Malaysia, would enjoy all rights of federal citizenship throughout Malaysia, except for voting, and in areas where the State of Singapore had been granted autonomous powers, namely labour and education.[80]

The London Agreement on Citizenship was a political compromise. The Tunku had acceded to Lee's appeal because he believed he was not conceding significant ground. Even if citizens of Singapore were called Malaysian citizens, their right to vote would still be restricted to within Singapore. The politics of the two territories would remain separate.[81]

Despite the change being merely cosmetic, it was significant enough to hand Lee the psychological advantage he was looking for. Having secured the concession from the Tunku in London, Lee returned to Singapore and announced in a radio broadcast on 14 August 1962 that "instead of common nationality there will be a common citizenship — citizenship of the new Federation of Malaysia. … All citizens of Singapore will automatically become citizens of Malaysia".[82] The following day, Lee was able to generate more political mileage by declaring: "My job is to get what my people want. And if they want citizenship, I get them citizenship."[83] Lee announced also that the referendum he had promised would be held on 1 September 1962.[84]

Initial reactions in Singapore were upbeat, and the newspapers generally agreed that the new agreement had helped allay fears.[85] Lee's announcement, which made citizenship terms more palatable politically, undermined the opposition's main argument against the PAP's merger proposals. They were left wondering how Lee managed to secure what he had once admitted as unrealistic and impractical. Not content to accept defeat, the Barisan Sosialis issued a press statement pointing out that all that had happened was a change in nomenclature. Common citizenship was given in name, not in fact, and the political status of Singapore citizens essentially remained unchanged from what was set out in the 1961 White Paper. The Barisan continued to denounce Lee's "trump card" as a fraud.[86]

In a 45-minute broadcast debate with David Marshall, Lee defended the need for a separate Singapore citizenship as opposed to Marshall's suggestion for Singapore to adopt the citizenship offer made to the Borneo Territories. Lee argued that Singapore citizens would continue to have special rights and privileges not accorded to any of the other states in Malaya, such as priority in housing, education, jobs in the Singapore civil service, social welfare, sickness benefits, etc.[87] Asked by Marshall if the citizenship agreement would pose any inherent disadvantages for the people of Singapore, Lee insisted that there were no disadvantages, potential or real, and that he had not made any secret deals with the Tunku.[88] Lee further made the assurance that, except for "gangsters and subversives", regular citizens should be free to move about in the Federation, work and own property there.[89] On the restriction of voting and election rights, Lee argued that there was reciprocity — "[Federation citizens] can't stand for elections in [Singapore] so long as they are on the Malayan electoral roll, and [Singapore citizens] can't stand for elections [in the Federation] as long as [they] are on the Singapore electoral roll". Marshall was evidently convinced following the radio debate, and agreed to support the PAP's merger proposals.

Despite the Singapore and Malayan governments' different interpretations of the extent of rights for Singapore citizens, Lee averted a major crisis and was determined to press ahead with the referendum.

The Battle for Merger Intensifies and the 1962 Referendum

Having secured the change in nomenclature, Lee believed the final obstacle to the PAP's proposed merger had been removed. He was confident that the time was ripe to execute the *coup de grace* and announced that a national referendum would be scheduled for 1 September 1962. The PAP would use this to gather the views of the people on the type of merger they wanted, and compel the opposition parties to make clear their stand on merger.

There were considerable risks involved as the PAP's perceived unpopularity, demonstrated by its defeats in the Hong Lim and Anson by-elections, could turn the referendum on merger into a vote for or against the PAP. Lee therefore decided to hold a referendum in which there would be no final defeat for him, whichever way the vote went. Given that all the political parties had openly stated that they wanted merger, there was no need for the government to put the question of merger *per se* to the people of Singapore. As far as the government was concerned, it was clear that everyone wanted merger; the question rather was how merger should be achieved.

Lee now faced the challenge of having to convince the people of Singapore that the PAP government had secured for them the best possible terms for a merger with the Federation. He, therefore, decided that the referendum should ask the people of Singapore whether they wanted merger on the terms that the PAP and the Tunku had agreed on, or a complete merger based on the model advocated by the Barisan Sosialis. Should the vote swing in favour of a complete merger, it would still be considered a vote for merger, and in that event, Lee would try to negotiate with the Tunku terms that the people would find more acceptable. Having covered all his bases in this way, there would be no question of Lee suffering an unexpected referendum result demanding the resignation of the PAP government.

As expected, the proposed referendum triggered a fierce contest between the PAP and the opposition. The opposition asked the government to allow a straightforward "Yes" or "No" question to the proposed merger. This was denied by the government which favoured a referendum on the merger alternatives.

In March 1962, the PAP, with the support of the Singapore People's Alliance (SPA)-Umno alliance in the Legislative Assembly, had managed to push through its Referendum Bill. During the referendum, the electorate would be asked to choose between three merger options proposed by the PAP government, the Barisan Sosialis and the SPA-Umno alliance respectively. The three alternatives presented were: (A) the White Paper proposals, (B) complete and unconditional merger for Singapore as a state on an equal basis with the other eleven states in accordance with the constitutional documents of the Federation of Malaya, and (C) merger on terms no less favourable than those given to the Borneo Territories.[90] The questions were crafted in such a manner that the PAP's alternative was the most attractive. The second alternative would lead to the disenfranchisement of half of Singapore's adult population and was one that the Tunku would never concede to, while the terms of the third were as yet unconfirmed. After the Barisan advised supporters to cast blank votes since the alternatives were not acceptable to them, the

PAP turned to the Select Committee to push through a clause in the Referendum Bill stipulating that blank or "uncertain" ballot papers would be regarded as accepting the vote of the Assembly, i.e. the PAP's proposals for merger.[91]

Because the referendum did not offer an option for a total rejection of merger, the Barisan Sosialis denounced the entire exercise as a "sham and farce",[92] and the Workers' Party's David Marshall decried it as a smokescreen: "We have before the people allegedly three questions for a referendum, when, in fact, there is but one, and that is not a question. Sir, because you are not allowed to give an answer yes or no … you must say yes."[93]

Lee defended his position by claiming that the Legislative Assembly had endorsed the proposed merger. Moreover, he argued, the PAP had been elected to office in the 1959 General Election with merger as one of the key election issues. The PAP's electoral victory, by that logic, suggested that the people of Singapore had accepted merger as a desired objective to be achieved as soon as possible. The British, concerned that Lee might discredit himself and his government by holding a referendum that was widely seen as "dishonest and phoney", tried to dissuade Lee from going ahead. Their exhortations fell on deaf ears. Lee was determined to push ahead with the referendum as he had no wish to be "labelled as the man who sold the Singapore Chinese to the Malays".[94]

The referendum presented the PAP with a firm victory. Out of an electorate of 624,000 voters, 397,626 voted for Alternative 'A'. Alternative 'B' for full merger garnered only 9,422 votes; and Alternative 'C', 7,911 votes.[95] A quarter of voters (144,077) chose to cast a blank vote, as the Barisan Sosialis had urged. This indicated that a significant portion of the population was still against the idea of merger with the Federation.[96] The Barisan refused to accept the result and alleged that the PAP's tactics of "threats and tricks" had influenced the outcome.[97]

Although the PAP had gained the upper hand on merger, the left's dominance in Singapore and the support it had among the electorate was still a cause for concern for Lee, the Tunku and the British. As it happened, a combination of external factors connected to the Greater Malaysia project would have a major impact on political developments in Singapore.

The Tunku had, from the outset, made it clear that he would allow Singapore into the Federation only if the Borneo Territories were brought in first. The Borneo Territories were eventually put in play, like a crucial piece in a jigsaw puzzle, to complete the Malaysia Plan. But their amalgamation into the Federation of Malaya and Singapore was not a straightforward affair. Not only were there concerns that disparities in social and political development would render any form of federation untenable, political resistance in Brunei to the Greater Malaysia project culminated in an armed rebellion led by AM Azahari, the leader of the Parti Rakyat Brunei (PRB). Although the Brunei Revolt, which broke out in December 1962, was short-lived, its repercussions were felt elsewhere: it precipitated a major crackdown on the radical left in Singapore and Malaya, where its growing influence had been a source of great concern to the establishment. The Tunku had also stipulated the arrest of the radical left in Singapore as one of the conditions for Singapore's entry into the Federation. British historian TN Harper has argued that "the detention of the left, and in particular Lim Chin Siong, was the price to pay for Singapore's independence within Malaysia, and played no small part in accelerating its achievement".[98]

Shortly before the Brunei Revolt, Lim had met up with the rebellion's leader, Azahari, although it was not clear for what purpose. This meeting, coupled with the Barisan Sosialis' subsequent expression of support for the revolt, was perceived by the PAP government as an act of "subversion and violence by Communists in aid of alien interventionists"[99] and therefore a threat to the security of Singapore. The Special Branch in Singapore obtained intelligence reports that Brunei revolutionaries had approached elements within the Barisan for cooperation and help with the sourcing of arms, and they had discussed plans to whip up support for the rebellion beyond Brunei.[100] This raised concerns that the left-wing forces in Singapore might resort to subversive activities, in concert with external elements, to sabotage the Malaysia plan.

The opportunity to make acceptable a crackdown on the left had presented itself: Lee, in concert with the Malayans and the British, could now argue that the action was a response to a security threat instead of a political one. In the early hours of 2 February 1963, a security swoop code-named "Operation Coldstore" was launched, following orders from the joint Internal Security Council of Singapore, Malaya and Britain.

The crackdown resulted in the detention of 113 people, including Lim Chin Siong. Among those arrested were political leaders, trade unionists and student leaders. Two months earlier, a similar operation had been carried out in Malaya where the Malayan Special Branch rounded up about 50 suspected communists. These actions were regarded by British and Malayan ministers as "crucial in securing Malayan acquiescence in the creation of [the] Malaysian Federation", historian Matthew Jones noted.[101] Operation Coldstore dealt a severe blow to the Barisan Sosialis, and crippled the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM)'s network in Singapore. CPM leader Chin Peng later admitted in his memoirs: "Operation Coldstore shattered our underground network throughout the island. Those who escaped the police net went into hiding. Many fled to Indonesia."[102] The Barisan, with several of its leaders arrested and left rudderless, was weakened. This eased the political tension for Lee and enabled him to see through the final stages of merger negotiations with the Federation.[103]

Although the PAP had won the domestic battle for merger following the referendum and Operation Coldstore, there were still battles ahead. The next step saw Lee and Goh — with senior civil servants playing supporting roles — entering tricky and sometimes acrimonious negotiations with their Malayan counterparts over the financial terms of merger and the common market. The Malayans drove a hard bargain for they were not prepared to accept Singapore unless the terms suited them. The PAP government often found itself with its back to the wall. Not only did Lee and his team face tough and intransigent negotiators from Kuala Lumpur, they had to also fend off their political rivals who were often quick to attack the government. Playing to packed galleries, both the Malayan and Singapore governments refused to relent in their demands and it was only at the eleventh hour that an agreement was brokered.

The Creation of Malaysia

On 9 July 1963, the agreement for the establishment of Malaysia was signed by the United Kingdom, Malaya, North Borneo, Sarawak and Singapore. Brunei declined to join. Malaysia was inaugurated amidst a number of challenges. Externally, it was exposed to the hostility of anti-Malaysia forces, most notably from Indonesia and various communist organisations that regarded the new state as an imperialistic legacy and the embodiment of twentieth-century neo-colonialism.

Yet, the more fundamental challenge was an internal one — would the new Malaysian state be able to "support the nation of the future", as historian AJ Stockwell put it?[104] The making of Malaysia was an ambitious project that entailed the amalgamation of four disparate territorial entities — in terms of historical, political and economic development, as well as ethnic make-up — into a single unified state. The component states "lacked an integrating, pre-colonial core" and the only common link they shared was the experience of British rule.[105] The differences which the new Malaysian state had to address within a short time posed serious challenges to aspirations to turn the Federation into an inclusive and cohesive entity.

Nonetheless, the British were determined to press ahead as the success of a merger between Singapore and Malaya hinged upon the incorporation of the Borneo Territories. Singapore, the Borneo Territories and Malaya were thus brought together through a hastily assembled constitutional arrangement. Ⓐ

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ENDNOTES

1 *The Straits Times*, "Page One Leader: Now look to the future", 10 August 1965.

2 Selkirk (UK Commissioner in Singapore) to Macleod (Secretary of State for the Colonies), 27 June 1961, PREM 11/3418.

3 Phillip Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947–1968* (London: Oxford University Press for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1973), p. 210.

4 Singapore attained internal self-government in June 1959. The new constitution provided for a legislative assembly with 51 elected members and a cabinet. While the local government assumed responsibility for domestic developments such as labour, education, culture, finance, health and national development, the key portfolios of defence, external affairs and some internal security responsibilities remained with the United Kingdom, overseen by its Commissioner in Singapore. An internal security council was set up and its members comprised the UK Commissioner and six other members — two appointed by the UK, three by the Prime Minister of Singapore and one by the Government of the Federation of Malaya.

5 Edwin Lee, *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), p. 94.

6 "An assessment of the present situation and the future outlook in Singapore", Department of External Affairs, Canberra, 20 August 1957, 'Singapore – Internal Affairs', A1838/318, no. 3024/1/7, Part 1, Australian National Archives, Canberra.

7 Han Fook Kwang, Warren Fernandez, Sumiko Tan, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Man and His Ideas* (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings and Times Editions, 1998), p. 70. For the statement issued by Lim Chin Siong, S Woodhull, Fong Swee Suan, CV Devan Nair and Chan Chiaw Thor on 4 June 1959, see "The Ends and Means of Socialism" in Lee Kuan Yew, *The Battle for Merger* (Singapore: National Archives of Singapore, Straits Times Press, 2014), Appendix 9, pp. 184–189.

8 Speech by Lee Kuan Yew at the luncheon of the Singapore National Union of Journalists, 24 May 1963.

9 Ibid.

10 Cited in CM Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819-1988* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 267.

11 Yeo Kim Wah and Albert Lau, "From Colonialism to Independence, 1945–1965", in *A History of Singapore*, ed. Ernest Chew and Edwin Lee (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 133.

12 The instability of Singapore had become of increasing concern to British officials by early 1961, leading Selkirk, the United Kingdom Commissioner for Singapore, to repeatedly press Secretary of State for the Colonies Iain Macleod to respond positively to the Singapore Prime Minister's overtures for merger with Malaya. See Selkirk to Macleod, 30 January 1961, CO 1030/978; and 2 May 1961, CO 1030/979.

13 Han, Fernandez and Tan, *Lee Kuan Yew*, p. 280.

14 In an analysis of why the Tunku eventually changed his mind, the British Deputy High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur then, MJ Moynihan, ascribed the Tunku's initial hostility to the idea of merger with Singapore to his belief that the PAP-led Singapore was "a power-house of Communist subversion from which Malaya had to insulate herself". In a despatch to then Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations Duncan Sandys, Moynihan wrote: "[Tunku] knew that hopes of merger encouraged the Chinese Socialists in Malaya to dream of their pan Malayan Socialist State, and he knew also that the prospect of merger struck terror into the hearts of his Malays. ... Merger between the Federation and Singapore by itself was obviously not to be thought of. This would result in a net addition of approximately a million Chinese of doubtful loyalty to the Chinese population of Malaya, i.e. nearly half of the existing total in the Federation, which already represented a serious headache to the Tunku. His Malays would regard a Federation-Singapore merger as the final surrender of Malay rights to the Chinese." See Moynihan to Sandys (Commonwealth Relations Office), 12 October 1961, CO 1030/984.

15 *Petir*, 4th Anniversary issue (Singapore, 1958).

16 People's Action Party, *Sixth Anniversary Celebrations Souvenir* (Singapore, 1960).

17 *Singapore Legislative Assembly Debates*, 8 October 1958, Col. 804.

18 Mohamed Noordin Sopiee, *From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation: Political Unification in the Malaysia Region, 1945–65* (Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya, 1974), p.116.

19 Yeo and Lau, "From Colonialism to Independence, 1945-65", p. 140.

20 Lee Kuan Yew, radio broadcast, 27 September 1961.

21 Lee was implicitly reminding the British that his weakening position in the absence of merger would be to the detriment of the United Kingdom. Informing Macleod of Lee's stance, Selkirk wrote: "If the PAP were ousted, it seems likely that the major political force in the State would be the extreme left group, led by the communist or near communist trade union leaders, who have recently urged the abolition, as a first step, of all existing British powers in relation to the internal government of Singapore." See Selkirk to Macleod, 27 June 1961, CO 1030/980.

22 During a press interview on 30 January 1961, the Tunku, while explaining that merger would have to wait for "some" time, said the Singapore Government was "as good a Malayan Government as mine is". British Ambassador to Malaysia, Geofroy Tory, later reported that when he asked the Tunku why he had been so forthcoming about Lee, the Tunku had said: "Poor man, he has so many troubles. I thought he needed a little assistance. These fellows are not so bad." See "The Origins and Formation of Malaysia", a memorandum prepared by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Research Department (FCO 51/154, 10 July 1970).

23 Lee had recounted to Selkirk that he had on 23 April 1961 discussed with the Tunku, for the first time, the idea of a "Grand Design". The Tunku had, at the end of their meeting, invited Lee to prepare a paper setting out his ideas on the way in which the Grand Design could be achieved. Goh, Razak and Ismail had also been present at the meeting in Kuala Lumpur. See record of conversation between Lee and Selkirk, 24 April 1961, DO 169/25; and "The Origins and Formation of Malaysia" (FCO 51/154, 10 July 1970).

24 Selkirk had reported in January 1961 that to overcome the Tunku's resistance and British hesitation, Lee had become keen to explore the idea of a route to independence through a wider political association which would include the Borneo Territories (Selkirk to Macleod, 30 January 1961, CO 1030/973).

25 Paper on the future of the Federation of Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo Territories by Lee, n.d., CO 1030/979. According to British records, Lee had shown the final version to Selkirk on 9 May 1961 before giving it to Ismail for transmission to the Tunku and Razak in Kuala Lumpur, without the Malayan leaders being aware that Selkirk had seen it first. Selkirk sent a copy of Lee's paper to London on 10 May 1961. Selkirk and his deputy, Philip Moore, were doubtful the plan would work, but reportedly encouraged Lee to write the paper because they "thought the exercise worthwhile if only to persuade Kuala Lumpur of Lee's honourable intentions". See AJ Stockwell, ed., *Malaysia*, British Documents on the End of Empire Series B, Vol 8 (London: TSO, 2004).

26 Note of a meeting between UK delegation and Singapore delegation on the Internal Security Council, which took place on Saturday, as enclosed in Acting UK Commissioner in Singapore to Secretary of State (Colonial Office), 28 June 1960, CO 1030/977.

27 *Singapore Legislative Assembly Debates*, 30 July 1963, Col. 301.

28 Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, *Looking Back: Monday Musings and Memories* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1977), p. 81.

29 The Tunku did, however, give the UK High Commissioner to the Federation of Malaya a day's advance notice, telling Geofroy Tory that he intended to include these lines in his speech: "Malaya cannot stand alone. Sooner or later she must have an understanding with the Territories of Singapore, North Borneo, Brunei and Sarawak. It is premature at this stage to say how this could be brought about but we have got to plan ahead now with this as our objective." See Tory to Sandys, 26 May 1961, PREM 11/3418.

30 Undated note on "Greater Malaysia" by Alexander Clutterbuck, Chairman of the Cabinet (Official) Committee on Greater Malaysia, set up by UK Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to "examine the proposals by the Prime Minister of the Federation of Malaya for the creation of a 'Greater Malaysia' incorporating the Federation of Malaya, Brunei, North Borneo, Sarawak and Singapore, and to make recommendations to Ministers". See also the memorandum discussed at the committee's first meeting on 27 September 1961: "Summary of Malayan proposals and issues to be considered by the British Government", 25 September 1961, CAB 134/1949.

31 Lee Kuan Yew, radio broadcast, 25 September 1961.

32 TN Harper, "Lim Chin Siong and the 'Singapore Story'", in *Comet in Our Sky: Lim Chin Siong in History*, ed. Tan Jing Quee and Jomo K S (Selangor: INSAN, 2001), p. 33.

33 See Edwin Lee, *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation*, pp. 182–185.

34 Albert Lau, "The Battle for Merger — The Historical Context" in Lee Kuan Yew, *The Battle for Merger*, p. xxi; See also Lee Ting Hui, *The Open United Front: The Communist Struggle in Singapore 1954–1966* (Singapore: South Seas Society, 1996).

35 Harper, "Lim Chin Siong", p. 35.

36 Tan Tai Yong, *Creating "Greater Malaysia": Decolonization and the Politics of Merger* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), p. 69.

37 Tory (UK Commissioner, Kuala Lumpur) to Sandys (Commonwealth Relations Office), 3 June 1961, PREM 11/3418. In his introduction to *Malaysia* in the British Documents on the End of Empire Series, historian AJ Stockwell notes: "Using the 'Ulster model', Singapore was allowed to keep its free-port status, control its labour and education policies, and retain a large proportion of its revenue to cover these functions. Enjoying greater autonomy than other states within the federation, it would have fewer seats in the federal parliament than its population warranted" (Stockwell, *Malaysia*, p. lxii).

38 Lee, *The Singapore Story*, p. 370.

39 Ibid, p. 67.

40 Telegram no. 363, Moore (UK Deputy Commissioner in Singapore) to Macleod (Secretary of State for Colonies), 1 September 1961, CO 1030/982.

41 *Singapore Legislative Assembly Debates*, 20 November 1961.

42 *The Straits Times*, "Barisan Hits Out", 30 August 1961.

43 Telegram no. 359, Moore to Macleod, 30 August 1961, CO 1030/982.

44 Telegram no. 363, Moore to Macleod, 1 September 1961, CO 1030/982.

45 Lee, *The Battle for Merger*, p. x.

46 The transcripts of Lee's radio talks were also printed in a booklet and made publicly available.

47 Lee, *The Battle for Merger*, p. 67.

48 Ibid, p. 79.

49 The Singapore White Paper, *Memorandum Setting Out the Heads of Agreement for a Merger Between the Federation of Malaya and Singapore* (Singapore Legislative Assembly Command 33), was the product of negotiations with Malayan leaders as Lee wished to issue it with the Tunku's agreement. It was published in November 1961 and adopted by the Singapore Legislative Assembly on 6 December 1961.

50 *Memorandum Setting Out the Heads of Agreement for a Merger Between the Federation of Malaya and Singapore* (Singapore: LK Heng, Government printer, 1961); Singapore Legislative Assembly Command 33 of 1961, Article 2 – "The Agreement in Principle".

51 Lee, *The Battle for Merger*, p. 78.

52 See commentary on revised draft of the Singapore Government's White Paper on merger, DO 169/247.

53 See *Far Eastern Economic Review* 37, no. 3 (1962), Hong Kong.

54 *Singapore Legislative Assembly Debates*, 20 November 1961.

55 *The Straits Times*, "The Barisan view of merger", 18 September 1961.

56 Notes of a meeting between Lee Kuan Yew and members of the Colonial Office, including John Martin, CG Eastwood, PR Noakes and CS Roberts, 16 May 1962, DO 169/250.

57 *Singapore Legislative Assembly Debates*, 20 November 1961.

58 *The Straits Times*, "Citizenship status after a merger: Barisan points to Federal Constitution", 23 September 1961.

59 For the Barisan Sosialis' stand on merger between Singapore and the Federation, see letter to the Secretary-General, United Nations, from Lee Siew Choh (Singapore: Barisan Sosialis, 1963).

60 For an account of the left's perspective on merger, see Thum Ping Tjin, "'The Fundamental Issue is Anti-Colonialism, Not Merger': Singapore's "Progressive Left", Operation Coldstore, and the Creation of Malaysia", Asia Research Institute, Working Paper Series No. 211, National University of Singapore, November 2013.

61 Telegram no. 262, Moore to Sandys, 17 May 1962, DO 169/250.

62 Ibid.

63 Malaysia, *Parliamentary Debates. Dewan Ra'ayat (House of Representatives) Official Report*, vol. 3, 16 October 1961, Col. 1592.

64 In the Federation, rights of citizenship were not automatically granted to those who were born in Malaya. A person who was born in the Federation before Merdeka Day, and who was not already a citizen of the Federation had to apply for registration as a citizen. The applicant would have had to reside in the Federation for five years out of the preceding seven years before his application, intend to reside in the Federation permanently, and possess an elementary knowledge of the Malay language. See Citizenship Provisions in the Federation of Malaya Agreement, 1948; the Federation Constitution of 1957; and the Constitution (Amendment) Act of 1962.

65 See Singapore Citizen Ordinance, 1957.

66 Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Federal Publications, 2000), p. 408.

67 Moore to Wallace (Assistant Secretary, Head of Far Eastern Department), 21 June 1962, DO 169/250.

68 See Sunny Tan, "Barisan Sosialis: Years at the Front Line, 1961–1966" (Unpublished Honours Thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 1997/98), p. 15.

69 Lee, *The Singapore Story*, p. 407.

70 "Citizenship Arrangements for Singapore Under Malaysia", n.d. DO 169/250.

71 Moore to Wallace, 15 May 1962, DO 169/250.

72 Lee, *The Singapore Story*, p. 407.

73 Selkirk to Sandys, 29 March 1962, CO 1030/988.

74 Moore to Wallace, 21 June 1962, DO 169/250.

75 On 19 July 1962, the UN Committee on Colonialism voted 10-2, with five abstentions, in favour of a proposal by the Committee chairman, Ambassador CS Jha of India, not to take cognisance of the CJA petition. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew had argued that the matter was not within the committee's jurisdiction, especially since it could not interfere in internal affairs (*The Straits Times*, "Lee's Triumph", 20 July 1962).

76 Harper (2001, p. 40) also cites a report: "Tunku himself was not happy about the idea of a merger. There was no reason why he should wish to take over all the other Territories were it not for the Communist danger. In his view, Singapore was bound to go Communist unless something was done soon."

77 Aide-Memoire on "Citizenship" by Lee Kuan Yew, n.d. DO 169/250.

78 Telegram no. 348, Moore to Selkirk, 14 July 1962, DO 169/250.

79 Telegram no. 427, Moynihan to Selkirk, 10 July 1962, CO 1030/1024.

80 Minutes of Fifth Meeting of Steering Committee on Malaysia, 30 July 1962, Commonwealth Relations Office, DO 169/250.

81 Telegram no. 526, Moynihan to Selkirk, 6 August 1962, DO 169/250. See also Cablegram no. 3759, Australian High Commissioner to Kuala Lumpur, 3 August 1962, A 1838/280.

82 Lee Kuan Yew's talk over the radio, 14 August 1962, PREM 11/3868.

83 Cited from transcript of a news conference at Radio Singapore on 15 August 1962.

84 John Drysdale, *Singapore: Struggle for Success* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1984), p. 308.

85 Telegram no. 404, Moore to Sandys, 16 August 1962, DO 169/250.

86 *The Straits Times*, "Mr Ko: Back Alternative 'A'", 16 August 1962.

87 Transcript of a recording of a radio dialogue between Lee and Marshall on the citizenship issue, 19 August 1962, DO 169/250.

88 Ibid.

89 *The Straits Times*, "Citizenship: Marshall Satisfied", 20 August 1962.

90 Moore to Wallace, 21 June 1962, CO 1030/998.

91 See *Select Committee on the Singapore National Referendum Bill: Official Report* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1962); and Singapore Legislative Assembly Debates, 5 July 1962.

92 Lee Siew Choh (Chairman, Barisan Sosialis Party), *Memorandum of the Barisan Sosialis Party of Singapore on "Malaysia"*, 11 March 1963, DO 169/248.

93 *State of Singapore Legislative Assembly Debates*, Vol. 19, Government Printer, 1963, column 391.

94 Moore to Wallace, 21 June 1962, CO 1030/998.

95 *Report of the Superintendent of the Singapore Referendum on the Results of the Referendum held on 1st September 1962* (Singapore: Government Printer, 1962) Cmd. 18.

96 Ibid.

97 Ibid.

98 Harper, "Lim Chin Siong", p. 41.

99 Harper, "Lim Chin Siong", p. 43.

100 At its meeting in Kuala Lumpur on 1 February 1962, the Internal Security Council approved the release of a public statement containing a paper titled "The communist conspiracy" to account for a security sweep code-named "Operation Coldstore" (CO 1030/1577). The paper, drafted by security and intelligence officers at Lee's request, noted clandestine meetings between Azahari and Barisan Sosialis leaders.

101 See Matthew Jones, "Creating Malaysia: Singapore Security, the Borneo Territories, and the Contours of British Policy, 1961–63", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 28 (2), 2000, pp. 85–109.

102 Chin Peng, *My Side of History* (Singapore: Media Masters, 2003), p. 439.

103 See Ooi Kee Beng, *The Reluctant Politician: Tun Dr Ismail and His Time* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006), p. 142; and Lee, *The Singapore Story*, pp. 472–483.

104 Anthony J Stockwell, "Forging Malaysia and Singapore: Colonialism, Decolonisation and Nation-building", in *Nation Building: Five Southeast Asian Histories*, ed. Wang Gungwu (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), p. 210.

105 Stockwell, "Forging Malaysia and Singapore", pp. 192–193.