

Chapter 8 History Notes (Part 1: Merger)

Reasons for merger between Singapore and Malaya

Reasons	Problems faced by Singapore	Reasons for Merging with Malaya
Economic	- Singapore lacked natural resources like rubber and tin, and a hinterland. It experienced a rapidly growing population that would need sufficient job opportunities eventually. - It also faced problems like a declining entrepot trade and growing unemployment. - The Malayan government imposed trade tariffs on goods exchanged between the two countries. - The trade tariffs reduced profits earned by companies and businesses because part of the revenue collected from the trade activities is used to pay taxes.	- Malaya was rich in natural resources, so Singapore would be able to access these vital resources and produce goods, thus it would benefit its economy if the merger were to take place. - Singapore needed Malayan hinterland to provide a bigger common market for its industries, which could be set up through the merger. The merger would also allow Singapore to not lose out on more entrepot trade. - In the common market, goods would be able to be sold and bought freely, without the tariff being imposed on them and prevent them from being taxed. This would help increase trade, expand industries and create more job opportunities for the people in Singapore, thus resolving the problem of the growing unemployment.
Political	- The British were worried about the communists and feared that they would take over Singapore, so they would most likely not grant Singapore full independence in order to protect their interests.	- The Singapore government understood that the British would only let Singapore to gain political independence if it merged with Malaya. - The British believed that when a new federation, which consists of Singapore, Malaya, North Borneo (Sabah), Sarawak and Brunei was formed, there would be greater political stability in those territories to prevent the spread of communism and safeguard their interests.

Reasons why Malaya refused to merge with Singapore before 1961

- The Malayan Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, was worried that the predominantly Chinese community in Singapore would be less keen to accept a Malay Sultan as their Head of State, use Malay as their national language or accept Islam as their national religion.
- Malaya was not keen to merge with Singapore because it would disrupt the racial balance, since if Singapore were to merge with Malaya, the number of Chinese would be more than the number of Malays in the new federation.
- Tunku Abdul Rahman was also worried about the spread of communism to Malaya. The pro-communist Chinese in Singapore might influence the Chinese in Malaya and disrupt the security in Malaya.

Reasons for Malaya wanting to merge with Singapore after 1961

Reason 1:

- Malaya had a representative on Singapore's Internal Security Council.
- Tunku Abdul Rahman was worried that if Singapore was not part of the federation when it became an independent state, Malaya would lose its reputation in the council to have a say over security matters in Singapore.
- The absence of both the colonial government and the Malayan representative would not be able to contain the threats in Singapore easily.

Reason 2:

- Tunku Abdul Rahman did not want the PAP to be controlled by the members who were influenced by communism as those members might be less willing to consider a merger on terms acceptable to Malaya.

Reason 3:

- If Singapore became a part of Malaysia, it would be easy for the government in Malaysia to deal with the communist elements in Singapore. If Singapore became an independent country with a communist government, it would also influence other countries, especially neighbouring countries, to consider this type of government as well.

Hong Lim by-election

- Ong Eng Guan was a PAP member who served as Mayor of Singapore's City Council and represented the Hong Lim area.
- He won a seat in the Legislative Assembly in the 1959 election and became Minister for National Development.
- By 1960, he started to have conflict with the PAP. He disagreed with the PAP's views and left the PAP after that. When he openly challenged the PAP leadership in one of the party's conferences in June 1960, he was suspended as Minister and expelled from the party.
- He was then asked to resign his seat in the Legislative Assembly, which then gave rise to the Hong Lim by-election.
- On 19 April 1961, after being expelled from the PAP, Ong Eng Guan contested as an independent candidate in the Hong Lim by-election. He defeated the PAP candidate successfully by winning a large majority of the votes.
- This development in Singapore made Tunku Abdul Rahman worried as he feared that the split within the PAP would weaken the moderates and allow the pro-communist members to control the party. The pro-communist members would then take over the PAP and forcefully turn Singapore into a communist government. If this happened, the communists would use Singapore as a base to spread communism to Malaya.

Agreement on proposed merger

- On 27 May 1961, Tunku Abdul Rahman made a speech to suggest the possibility of a merger between Malaya and Singapore.
- To solve the pro-communist imbalance when merging with Singapore, the creation of the new federation would include other British colonies such as North Borneo (Sabah), Sarawak and Brunei. With the inclusion of other British colonies, the Tunku would ensure that the Chinese would not be the dominant ethnic group in the new federation.
- Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew supported the Tunku's suggestion. They discussed the terms that allowed the formation of the Federation of Malaysia to take place.
- However, the pro-communists within the PAP opposed the merger as they did not want the federal government in Malaysia to eliminate them once Singapore became independent through the merger. As a result, they sabotaged the PAP by

influencing the voters and helped the opposition party to win the Anson by-election successfully in 1961. This event further increased the Tunku's commitment to form Malaysia.

- The broad terms agreed by Tunku Abdul Rahman and Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew on 24 August 1961:
 1. Singapore would have its own Head of State
 2. Singapore citizens are 'federal nationals' instead of 'federal citizens'
 3. Singapore could hold its own elections to choose its own state government; Singapore citizens would only be able to vote in Singapore elections
 4. Singapore would collect its own revenue and pay Kuala Lumpur (KL, the capital of the federation) an agreed-upon sum
 5. Singapore would have control over its own education and labour matters, and its own civil service
 6. The federal government in Kuala Lumpur would oversee Singapore's defence, internal security and foreign affairs

The battle for merger

Opposition from Barisan Sosialis

- There were some PAP members who opposed the proposed merger, such as Lim Chin Seng and Fong Swee Suan, as they felt that the terms were not in favour of the people in Singapore.
- Reasons why they thought it wasn't favourable:
 - Singaporeans weren't 'federal citizens', but 'federal nationals', which meant that Singaporeans did not have citizenship rights or privileges.
 - This meant that Singaporeans could not freely enter or leave the Federation without restriction;
 - Workers might be discriminated upon when applying for jobs;
 - And businessmen might be discriminated upon.
 - Singapore would also have only 15 seats, while North Borneo (Sabah) and Sarawak were given more seats despite smaller populations. (The lesser the seats = lesser say = lesser ability to influence policy)
- These members were then expelled from the PAP after they challenged Lee Kuan Yew's leadership unsuccessfully. They then formed a new political party named the Barisan Sosialis Singapura (Socialist Front of Singapore).
- In Barisan Sosialis, Dr. Lee Siew Choh became the Chairman and Lim Chin Song became the Secretary-General.

- Barisan Sosialis started a campaign in September 1961 to oppose the merger. They also declared the merger issue in radio forums and organised student demonstrations and labour strikes.

The PAP campaign

- The PAP counteracted the opposition from the Barisan Sosialis by carrying out a year-long campaign.
- Campaign 1:
 - Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew gave a series of radio talks called “The Battle for Merger” from September 1961 to October 1961 that reached the people living in Singapore, Brunei, Malaya, North Borneo and Sarawak.
 - The radio talks were aired on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays in three main languages, Mandarin, English and Malay, in different time slots – Mandarin at 645pm; English at 730pm and Malay at 9pm. The talks were then re-broadcast in Tamil, Hokkien and Cantonese.
- Campaign 2:
 - The PAP organised exhibitions to highlight the benefits of a merger.
 - For example, the governments of Singapore and other territories that were to form the new federation jointly organised the Malaysia Exhibition, which was part of Malaysia Week in early 1962, at the Victoria Memorial Hall (present-day Victoria Concert Hall), to show the lives and cultures, as well as trade and commerce of the territories. This exhibition helped the visitors to understand the close cultural and social ties among these territories, convincing Singaporeans that the merger was beneficial to them, making them vote for merger and support the PAP.

Referendum

- The PAP conducted a referendum on 1 September 1962 at the end of its campaign. A referendum is a direct vote by the people on a specific issue.
 - The people were given 3 different options to vote for the type of merger they wanted.
- The PAP’s preferred option was A; which allowed Singapore to have its own control in labour, education and other agreed matters as well as converted Singapore citizens into citizens of Malaysia automatically.
- The Barisan Sosialis opposed all of the options and urged voters to cast blank votes.

- However, 70.8% of Singaporeans voted for option A. This showed that the majority of the people supported the government's position and didn't agree with Barisan Sosialis to sabotage the referendum.

Weakening of the Barisan Sosialis

- On 2 February 1963, the Internal Security Council launched an operation, known as Operation Coldstore, to arrest those who were suspected of being under communist influence.
- More than 100 people were arrested including key Barisan Sosialis leaders and some members of the trade unions such as Lim Chin Siong and Fong Swee Suan. They were accused of trying to sabotage the formation of Malaysia and planning to stage an uprising in Singapore. Their arrest weakened the Barisan Sosialis.
- Since Barisan Sosialis leaders were arrested, the party suffered defeat in the subsequent 1963 elections, winning only 13 out of 51 seats, while PAP won 37.

Reactions to the formation of Malaysia outside of Singapore and Malaya

- The Cobbold Commission, led by Lord Cobbold, was made up of 3 British officials and 2 Malay representatives from North Borneo and Sarawak.
 - It was set up by the Malayan and British governments in January 1962 to find out if Sabah and Sarawak wanted to merge with Malaysia. The findings showed that more than two-thirds of the people favoured merger.
 - To corroborate the findings of the Cobbold Commission, Tunku Abdul Rahman allowed a United Nations Commission to visit North Borneo and Sarawak to find out about their views about the merger issue. After completing their findings in September 1963, it was clear that 70% of the population in both places favoured merger.
- Philippines did not recognise Malaysia, insisting that it had a rightful claim to North Borneo, and broke off relations with Malaysia in 1963.
- Brunei decided against joining Malaysia, due to disagreements over economic issues, and eventually gained independence in 1984.
- Indonesia opposed the merger as it felt that it would give the British continued control over the territories in the new federation. It also felt that North Borneo and Sarawak should be under its control instead of Malaysia. It then broke off relations with Malaysia in 1963 and the protesters who opposed the merger

launched a policy of Konfrontasi (Confrontation) on 20 January 1963 to create disorder in North Borneo, Sarawak and Singapore by bombing places.

The formation of Malaysia

- On 9 July 1963, Britain, Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo and Sarawak formally signed the Malaysia Agreement in London.
- On 16 September 1963, Singapore, North Borneo and Sarawak joined the Federation of Malaysia. Hence, Malaysia was made up of 14 states.
- Singapore also then transferred its foreign affairs and defence to Malaysia.
- Some of the initial terms stayed the same, such as Singaporean citizens not having all the same rights as Malaysian citizens.
- Other terms were modified, such as Singapore citizens would automatically become citizens of the Federation of Malaysia and the establishment of a common market in stages.