



# SPEECH

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## **Speech by Major-General Lim Chuan Poh, Chief of Defence Force, for the Opening Ceremony of the Air Force Museum**

22 Mar 2001

Thirty-three years ago, in 1968, MAJ Charles Chew, an Army officer, was given a cubicle in the overcrowded Ministry of the Interior and Defence and told to start an Air Force. To ensure that he would succeed, it was placed at his disposal the unlimited use of an officer and a clerk. And succeed he did, for by Sep 1968, the Singapore Air Defence Command was formed. There were no fighter aircraft, no helicopters, no air defence systems, just one borrowed Cessna civilian trainer aircraft.

Three decades later, today, the RSAF is hailed as a premier institution; dynamic, forward looking and widely recognised as a First Class Airforce, operating a wide range of sophisticated aircraft and equipped with an array of advanced weapon systems. What has made possible this quantum leap in fighting capabilities within such a short span of time? The answer lies in the MAN, MACHINE and METHODS.

In building a credible Air Force over the past decades, the RSAF has striven to be at the forefront of technology to enhance its operational capabilities. Our operational concepts and doctrines, tailored to meet our specific needs, have also played a significant role in accelerating the RSAF's developments. However, these alone do not make the RSAF a first-class air force. Most importantly, it is the exemplary leadership from our commanders at all levels, coupled with the dedication and commitment of our airmen that has driven and will continue to spur the RSAF to greater heights in the 21st century. The Air Force museum theme of MAN, MACHINE and METHODS most adequately characterises the pillars of the RSAF's success.

It is indeed a great honour to be with you today for the opening ceremony of our Air Force Museum. I was told that you will be amazed by the dynamic ambience of the exhibits and overwhelmed by the unparalleled collection of historical artefacts preserved in their original glory. This is indeed testimony to the high level of professionalism and quality of our people. The Air Force Museum shall be a tribute to all the airmen, past and present who have

contributed immensely to the security and defence of our nation.

The Air Force Museum also acknowledges the key role that our allies have played in our operational developments. Our rapid advancement could not have been possible without the help and advice from foreign forces such as the Royal Air Force, the Royal Australian Air Force and the Royal New Zealand Air Force amongst others. In recognition of the contribution of our overseas partners, the museum has a gallery entitled Pre-Singapore Air Defence Command Years, depicting the role of the Royal Air Force from the 1950s up to the early 1970s in the defence of Singapore, as well as historical events that led to the formation of the Singapore Air Defence Command. Foreign forces were also instrumental during the Singapore Air Defence Command period. During those developmental years, instructor pilots from various Air Forces such as the Royal Air Force, Royal Australian Air Force and the Indian Air Force staffed our flying school. Foreign officers also commanded key units in the Singapore Air Defence Command. Foreign forces played a crucial role in the early years and will continue to play an important role in the operational development of the RSAF. For the RSAF to improve, we must continue to participate actively in bilateral and multilateral exercises with countries world-wide, so as to share and learn from our overseas counterparts.

Besides being a corporate showpiece for the RSAF, the new Air Force museum will serve as an information resource centre for the research and study into the RSAF's history. Important milestones and events have been comprehensively documented and preserved as a reminder of our past experiences and achievements. They trace the evolution of the RSAF from the pioneering years in the 70s, through the developmental stage in the 80s and finally to the consolidating period in the 90s.

A special feature of the museum is the assimilation and extensive utilisation of information technology. The Air Force Museum uniquely harnesses multimedia to enhance the exhibition methods, so that the visitors will have a more fulfilling and thorough experience. A unique highlight of the museum is the History of Aviation gallery, which showcases the development of aviation from the Wright Brothers era to the present day. The exhibits also offer visitors a glimpse of the possible directions of aviation in the future.

The 2000 m<sup>2</sup> museum will be a source of pride for our airmen. It reminds us of the challenges and limitations that we have overcome to achieve the high standards today. It shall be a reflection of our heritage to cultivate the organisation's values and to raise the esprit de corps amongst RSAF servicemen. The indomitable spirit of the pioneering years shall be a source of inspiration for our servicemen to face the challenges of the future. The museum also showcases the integrated nature of the SAF operations and highlights the crucial role that each service plays in fulfilment of the SAF mission. With our tri-service culture, servicemen from the other 2 services can also take pride in the achievements of the RSAF.

The new Air Force Museum is only a stone's throw away from the Air Force School. This makes it accessible to our young Air Force officers, warrant officers as well as specialist. The Air Force Museum can complement the Air Force School in its role to produce RSAF servicemen imbued with the Air Force Core Values and Ethos. It offers them an opportunity to time-travel to the early years to have a clear and firm understanding of the teething

problems faced, so that they can appreciate the circumstances and rationale for important decisions made. The lessons learnt from their predecessors will better equip them with the problem-solving and decision-making principles.

The Air Force museum will not only be open to our servicemen but also to the public. Its new location in the heart of Singapore will be more accessible to the public. It will be an effective tool to inspire and raise the confidence of our fellow Singaporeans in the RSAF's ability to defend the nation. It will also educate and promote interest especially amongst our young Singaporeans in military science and technology.

The Paya Lebar Air Base Officer's Mess is located at the third level of the museum. This makes the Air Force Museum an excellent site for the hosting of special functions for the Air Force officers in the future. It will also be a meaningful venue for the RSAF to entertain foreign guest and dignitaries. The museum provides an excellent platform for the RSAF and her foreign friends to share their unique heritage and origins, and develop greater mutual understanding. Despite the differences between the air forces of different nations, they all share the same desire of dominating the skies.

In conclusion, the Air Force Museum is not merely a repository for historical documents, but is also an important centre of information to better understand the past, appreciate the present and to have a vision for a successful future. It is a place for inspiration and learning. With that, I wish all of you a pleasant and enlightening visit.

Thank you.

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