



SPEECH

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Speech by Minister for Education (Schools) and Second Minister for Transport Mr Ng Chee Meng, at the Launching Ceremony of the Sixth Littoral Mission Vessel

24 Mar 2018

Chief of Navy, Rear-Admiral Lew Chuen Hong
President and CEO of ST Engineering, Mr Vincent Chong
Chairman ST Marine, Mr Lim Ah Doo
Dear former Navy chiefs
Friends from MINDEF
And friends from the Navy

Michelle and I are delighted and honoured to be here with all of you this morning, on this time-honoured naval tradition to launch the sixth *Independence*-class Littoral Mission Vessel, *Fortitude*.

In 1986, I joined the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) as a fresh recruit -- 17 December 1986. I had the privilege to be recruited into the Navy for a few months as a midshipman. I remember the early days where I stepped onboard the *RSS Panglima*, so when I say that I am delighted to be here, I mean it. Our country has grown. *RSS Panglima*, for our students sitting on the left-hand side, is a wooden vessel, with the semblance of a gun at the front, and that was our Navy patrol craft. Nevertheless, you have seen the journey of our country and the journey of our Navy, what is encapsulated in *Fortitude* is a journey that our country has

undertaken. So today I am very proud to be part of this ceremony. Thank you for honouring Michelle and I with the honour of launching the ship.

Singapore a Maritime Nation

As we all know, Singapore has always been a maritime nation and a gateway between the East and West. Trade has been, and will always be the lifeblood of our maritime nation.

Today, maritime trade remains as vital for modern Singapore, contributing 7% to our GDP each year. Each year it gives us about 170,000 jobs to Singaporeans and Singapore's lack of natural resources means that almost everything we need in Singapore is imported, from our food, to our energy, to our building materials. And it is a fact (that) our survival and prosperity depend on being connected with the rest of the world.

In this regard, the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) has a vital role to play to secure our sea lines of communication (SLOCs), and our continued right to move freely as set out in international law.

Some Singaporeans take this for granted, but all of you in MINDEF and in the security arena know that this access cannot be taken for granted. For our dear students on the left, if you have not known, simply look at Qatar, a country in the Middle-East, what happened last year, and you will understand the importance of our Navy to secure our SLOCs, to ensure that the access to trade and other possibilities, not just in the immediate vicinity but in the wider arena as well. Since there are students here, I should explain a little about Qatar. In the middle of last year, some countries around Qatar decided to blockade Qatar, both in the air and in the sea dimensions. Overnight, Qatar went into a scramble to ensure there is access to energy and even people coming home to the country had problems (in) the first couple of weeks. And if you look at the geography of Singapore -- if you had not studied it, take a look -- Singapore and our immediate neighbourhood, can be easily be subjected to such threats as well. That is why we invest in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), and that is why the boys serve National Service.

Threats to the maritime space can also take the form of unconventional threats that can harm our security and destabilise our economy. To combat these transnational threats, regional cooperation, coordinated action and information-sharing are crucial.

Not too long ago in 2005, there was increased piracy in the Strait of Malacca. The Strait actually became labelled as a "war-risk zone" by the insurance market. Only proactive coordinated patrols, in partnership with our friends in Indonesia and Malaysia, stabilised the situation.

But today, terrorism presents a more serious threat to our safety. The Singapore's coastline, as we all know, is very open and our busy waterways provide opportunities for terrorists to infiltrate our shores and attack us. The Mumbai attack in 2008 is a poignant example. The attack, while some distance away now -- almost ten years -- but equally pertinent now, especially with ISIS fighters having lost in the Middle-East, returning to Southeast Asia to bring the fight to another plain.

To keep our territorial and regional waterways safe, we therefore, have conducted coordinated patrols and share information with our neighbours as part of the Malacca Straits Patrol. The RSN's Maritime Security Task Force and the Information Fusion Centre allow Singapore to better combat maritime terrorism through inter-agency cooperation and info-sharing. Singapore also stands ready to participate in the Trilateral Coordinated Patrols in the Sulu Sea. This is worthwhile effort to prevent terrorist networks from smuggling of weapons, drugs, and even humans within the region.

Our LMVs Position the RSN for the Future

In all these efforts, our RSN's *Fortitude* and her sister ships are key.

The LMVs are capable ships, with the ability to carry out different mission modules. Each module allows the LMVs to carry out specialised missions, including mine countermeasure operations, employing unmanned systems for surveillance, providing medical support, and even supporting aviation operations.

The LMVs are also designed for lean manning. This allows the Navy to optimise manpower while delivering enhanced capabilities. With newer digital technologies, each LMV requires at least 10 percent less manpower as compared to the patrol vessels they are meant to replace. And with the newer digital technologies, it also welcomes our younger students to transit into the Navy more smoothly.

Success of the LMVs in Rapid Operationalisation

As I said, I am especially proud today. From my journey in the SAF and during my time as Chief of Defence Force, I had the honour to lay the keel of *RSS Sovereignty*, our second LMV. Since then, the programme has progressed at an impressive pace -- on time and on budget. The first two LMVs, *RSS Independence* and *Sovereignty*, also participated in the RSN's Golden Jubilee celebrations. They have also gone on different missions and exercises and I am especially proud to know that *RSS Sovereignty* responded well last December in a real-time mission, when she went on a Search-And-Rescue mission in aid of a capsized vessel off Singapore's waters.

The LMVs' rapid operationalisation is an impressive achievement. I would like to acknowledge the work of our friends from Defence Science and Technology Agency, ST Marine and all our partners in the defence industry for working together to make this uniquely Singaporean project a roaring success.

Conclusion

Let me conclude. When I was invited for this ceremony, the first thing I wanted to know was what the name of the ship was. I like the name *Fortitude*.

Singapore has come a long way since our beginnings. *Fortitude* captures the essence, attributes and ideals of our founding generation who overcame many obstacles and succeeded. It is a timeless reminder to all of us, to our Navy and future generations, that we must have the gumption and perseverance to pursue a better tomorrow, regardless of the challenges that we may face ahead.

In 2019, *Fortitude* will become operational and will play that important role to keep our country safe.

In undertaking this mission, I wish all the crew fair winds and following seas. Thank you very much.

News Release:

- Singapore Navy Launches Sixth Littoral Mission Vessel, Fortitude (MINDEF_20180324001.pdf)