

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Speech by Dr Goh Keng Swee, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, at the SAF Reservists Association Christmass Carnival at SAFRA premises, Toa Payoh on 19 December 1975 at 7.30 p.m.

It is fitting that SAFRA celebrates Christmas this year in a more elaborate way than before, organising a carnival over five days. We have left behind us two rather unpleasant years when we had to contend with inflation, recession, the collapse of Vietnam and troubles of one kind or another in the neighbourhood.

This does not mean that the future will be completely trouble-free as our GNP rises from one record level to another. Life is never so simple and doubtless there will be problems ahead. But we shall be in better shape to meet them. When we compare our position now with that ten years ago - when we first sailed into the uncharted seas of independence - we find cause for satisfaction.

Ten years ago, our security was totally in the hands of others. Singapore was then an important British military outpost and as a by-product of this, we enjoyed the security of British protection for free. It was too good to last, as we then knew. We lost little time in building up a defence capability and these preparations had to be accelerated in 1968 when the inevitable was announced.

By April next year the last British soldier in the rear party would have left. The Australian ground forces had long departed, and in 18 months, the stout-hearted New Zealanders would also have left for home.

These are not occasions for regret, much less for recrimination. Indeed we should thank our Commonwealth friends for they have given us valuable time, ten years, in which to make our own defence preparations.

Being at first totally inexperienced in these matters, we naturally made many mistakes. But on the whole, the effort has proved adequate. An indication that this is so could be noticed when the announcements of recent withdrawals of military forces were made. These passed by almost unnoticed. There was no loss of business confidence in the Republic. That, after all, is what all this is all about. We need business confidence so that our industries can expand, and young men and women looking for jobs will find them.

Members of SAFRA have the satisfaction of knowing that they personally have made a real contribution to this climate of confidence by their past exertions in national service as well as their annual refresher training courses when their units are called up for in-camp training.

You will agree that however tiring, vexatious or inconvenient these may be, they are necessary and they serve a clear purpose. Perhaps when you were doing your NSF, the purpose might not have been clear to you, as it is not clear to the less perceptive NSF soldiers today. Now you are older and more experienced; some have raised families. You understand that the security of the state is not an abstract concept. It is something real and closely affects your work and the well-being of yourselves and your families.

It is a sad commentary on the state of the world that one has to talk about security matters at the approach of the festive season which stands for peace on earth and goodwill among men. But we must take the world for what it is and not what we would like it to be.