



SPEECH

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Speech by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong at the Opening Ceremony of Changi Naval Base

21 May 2004

The opening of Changi Naval Base is a major milestone in the development of the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN).

Changi Naval Base is a key operational facility for the RSN. With state-of-the-art features and technology, it has comprehensive facilities to support the Navy's wide range of operational, logistical and training requirements. Changi Naval Base also has provisions for the future. The facilities here will not only support new frigates coming into service from 2007 but also other platforms and systems which the RSN may acquire in future.

Changi Naval Base is built entirely on reclaimed land. In fact, when I opened the Tuas Naval Base 10 years ago, work on reclaiming land for this base had already begun. This shows how the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) always plans for the long term, even as it safeguards Singapore's security today.

Long-term planning gives the SAF a strategic edge. It is vital to the SAF's ability to present an effective deterrence and deal with the full range of security threats.

Every country needs peace and stability to prosper. Singapore is no exception. In fact, given our geographical size and vulnerabilities, the capability to defend ourselves is an essential condition for our economic development. Without this capability, our people will always feel vulnerable and our foreign investors that they are hostages to fortune.

Looking ahead, our security environment has become more complex and uncertain. There will be unexpected threats and crises. These can range from low-intensity threats like rampant piracy which disrupts our shipping lifeline to asymmetrical warfare like terrorism, where non-conventional means are used to inflict maximum damage. The SAF must be

operationally ready to deal with these threats, not just for today but also in the future.

This new security environment calls for two simultaneous approaches. First, the SAF must invest not only in force modernisation but force transformation as well. Second, the SAF must work closely with regional armed forces to enhance regional security.

Transformation means the development of new concepts of operations as well as the enhancement of the SAF's capabilities through exploitation of new technologies. This is a strategic imperative because the battlefield of the future will be vastly different. For instance, the new military concepts will allow small, dispersed units to use precise firepower to achieve the desired effects; in the past, this would have required massive forces and equipment. Transformation will allow us to capitalise on the strengths of our technologically-savvy people to create a lean but effective SAF.

Transformation is not about hardware and military concepts alone. More importantly, it involves the transformation of people on which the strength and effectiveness of the SAF most depends. I am glad to know that the SAF is focusing on the development of our servicemen and servicewomen, and preparing them to function at the highest level in the 3rd Generation SAF.

Countering terrorism and the threat of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction requires the SAF to collaborate with other armed forces. Terrorist groups with links to the Al-Qaeda network remain active both regionally and globally. They operate across borders. They cannot be tackled effectively by countries acting alone. To fight this cross-border security threat, a concerted global response is required.

In this context, Changi Naval Base plays an important role. The base is not for the exclusive use of RSN alone but is also open to the navies of other friendly countries. Changi Naval Base facilitates the RSN's collaboration with other navies to fight common threats. Last year, close to 100 ships from 11 navies called here. These include navies from ASEAN countries like Malaysia and Indonesia; navies under the Five Power Defence Arrangements like the UK, Australia and New Zealand; as well as those from the US, France, China, Japan and India. Last month alone, the base played host to 17 visiting navies and their ships which participated in the regional Mine Countermeasure and Diving Exercises.

Changi Naval Base is strategically located along vital sea lanes connecting the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea. It is an important link in the regional security network. The ability of the base to support large-scale exercises and operations is invaluable to multilateral initiatives to enhance regional maritime security. We believe that Changi Naval Base can contribute to regional peace and stability.

It leaves me now to congratulate the Ministry of Defence, the Republic of Singapore Navy and the Defence Science and Technology Agency for the successful completion of Changi

Naval Base.

Thank you.

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