Speech by Dr Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Manpower and Second Minister for Defence, for the Launching Ceremony of RSS Supreme

09 May 2006

Your Excellency, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to be here to launch RSS Supreme, the sixth and final ship of the RSN's frigate squadron. Since the signing of contract with DCN (Direction des Constructions Navales) in March 2000, the project has crossed many milestones. It's hard to believe that it was only two and a half years ago when the first frigate RSS Formidable was launched in France. Since then, her sister ships have been built and launched at six-monthly intervals here at ST-Marine - Intrepid, Steadfast, Tenacious, Stalwart and, in a few moments from now, Supreme. This is indeed a remarkable achievement for a project of this scale and sophistication, made possible through the good co-operation among many agencies, RSN, DSTA, DSO, and the DGA and DCN. Let me congratulate all stakeholders and others who have contributed. Congratulations.

As a small independent nation, Singapore needs a strong and credible defence force. What we lack in numbers, must be made up through the use of better technology and integrated systems that are maintained at a high level of operational readiness. Most importantly, our NS men must be more effective and committed. Indeed, our SAF has shown the level of our operational efficiency in humanitarian missions in Operation Flying Eagle.

We will continue to invest steadily and prudently to ensure the successful transformation of
the SAF into a Third Generation fighting force. We will maintain and build up our defence ecosystem so that our defence science agencies and industry can continue to undertake large scale and complex projects, such as this frigate programme.

For the RSN, the frigates and the naval helicopters represent a quantum leap in the Navy's fighting capability. As a key node in our integrated warfighting system, their capabilities will be multiplied. The ships will also carry out a wide spectrum of missions, ranging from the seaward defence of Singapore, participating in peace support operations, to securing our vital Sea Lines of Communications.

As always, the people who serve on them must be well trained so that they can fully exploit the superior technology built in the ships, and accomplish their assigned tasks competently. Although training is done in peacetime, it must be realistic and challenging, as if fighting in war. Towards this end, the frigates will have integrated simulators in their combat information centres or CICs, which can generate realistic tactical battle scenarios.

With our limited manpower, it is vital to make the best use of every person we have. Over the years, the RSN has implemented several initiatives to expand the job scope of its warrant officers and specialists (WOSRs). WOSRs have been deployed as Combat Technicians or CTs where they perform the dual roles of system operators and maintainers, and have also served as Combat Information Center Supervisors. I understand that the senior WOSRs in the frigates can henceforth take on the role of Warfare Cluster Supervisors, where they will play a greater part in tactical decision making and in the direction of their respective cluster of systems. These are excellent initiatives that will enlarge the contributions of our people at all levels and maximise our human capital. They will increase our overall capacity to meet the demands of modern warfare and the widened spectrum of operations today and in the future.

The launch of RSS Supreme today is a significant occasion for the RSN. With all six ships launched and at their various stages of outfitting, systems integration and testing, the RSN has reached yet another key milestone in its frigate programme. Let me congratulate everyone involved in the programme and I extend my best wishes to you as you continue to progress in this endeavour.

Thank you.