



SPEECH

Visit <http://www.mindef.gov.sg> for more news and information about MINDEF and the SAF

Speech by Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen, at the Commissioning Ceremony of RSS Archer

02 Dec 2011

Chief of Defence Force,
Permanent Secretary (Defence Development)
Chief of Navy,
Swedish Ambassador to Singapore Ingemar Dolfe,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good Morning.

I want to welcome you to this bright but not quite sunny morning. This is another event that entrenches the perception that whenever the Navy is in charge, you get showers of blessings. Southeast Asia, with littoral states bordering the South China Sea and Strait of Malacca, is where major sea trade routes converge. Each year, about 50% of the world's shipping by tonnage as well as 50% of global oil tanker traffic pass through these critical sea lines of communication. This translates to roughly 50,000 vessels yearly. Correspondingly, the presence of military vessels operating between the Pacific and Indian Oceans has increased. An average of 300 foreign navy vessels now call at the Changi Naval Base alone every year. Given the strategic importance of the region's sea lanes for global trade and commerce, the continued safe and secure passage through these waters will be of concern to all.

With the shift in global trade to the Pacific from a rising Asia, we can also expect a *pari passu* development of naval capabilities in this region, as countries seek to protect their interests. Further, trans-boundary maritime threats like piracy and maritime terrorism will also add to the drive for countries in this region to modernise their maritime capabilities. Already reported are a number of new submarine and frigate programmes from Southeast Asia member states scheduled to commence within the next five years. For Singapore, we will keep pace with these developments. The Republic of Singapore Navy will steadily build a

modern naval force with strong capabilities in surface and anti-air warfare. The strengthening of our submarine capability is in line with this overall development plan to allow the RSN to better exploit the underwater dimension in maritime operations.

In building our submarine capability, our strong collaboration with Sweden has enabled the transfer of knowledge, skills and technology in submarine operations and logistics support. Since the acquisition of our first submarines - the Challenger-class - in 1995, the RSN has developed strong expertise in submarine operating know-how and deepened our knowledge of the local operating environment. This has helped us to better determine the capability requirements of our Archer-class submarines. Over the years, we have also established a comprehensive training system for our submariners, which has allowed us to conduct our own submarine training in Singapore. At the same time, the RSN has built up a robust submarine rescue capability to enable us to deal effectively with contingencies.

While submarines' key capability rests on stealth, this has not prevented their use in cooperative efforts with other countries in this region. Indeed, Singapore intends to use our submarines to build confidence with other militaries. Since their operationalisation, the Challenger-Class submarines have participated in over 20 bilateral and multilateral exercises. More recently, in October this year, RSS Chieftain participated in a series of rigorous two-sided anti-submarine warfare exercises as part of Exercise Bersama Lima, a major Five Power Defence Arrangements Exercise.

As more countries acquire or enhance their submarine capability in the region, it is also vital that we build and maintain a strong network for multilateral submarine rescue collaboration. In this regard, we have hosted the multinational submarine rescue exercise codenamed Pacific Reach twice, including last year which saw the participation of the RSN's submarine rescue vessel, MV Swift Rescue and its DSAR 6 submarine rescue vehicle. The exercise also saw the involvement of navies of Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea and the US, as well as military observers from 13 countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam. This has helped to develop a regional Submarine Escape and Rescue capability and promote higher levels of underwater safety among the submarine operating countries in the region.

As the lead boat of her class of submarines for the RSN, RSS Archer significantly enhances the RSN's submarine capability and will strengthen Singapore's ability to contribute to the peace and stability of our region. Indeed, the Archer programme has made good progress since its inception six years ago. Previously part of the Royal Swedish Navy's Vaastergotland-class submarine fleet, the Archer-class submarines have been comprehensively upgraded, refurbished and tropicalised to ensure their suitability for operations in and around this region. RSS Archer has also been fitted with advanced sonar, torpedo and periscope systems, as well as an Air Independent Propulsion module. It is therefore stealthier, has longer endurance and extended reach, and possesses expanded operational capabilities.

Together, these improvements represent a significant step-up for our submarine capabilities. RSS Archer has been undergoing intensive sea trials since its return to Singapore in August this year. It has completed her series of dive tests, mated with the DSAR 6 submarine rescue vessel and completed a heavyweight torpedo firing in local waters. Those within the submarine community will attest that these achievements are significant and even more so within that short time frame. I am therefore delighted to be here, together with wife and SPS Maliki, to witness yet another step forward in the commissioning of RSS Archer as it marks its successful operationalisation that will enable the RSN to undertake more complex and sophisticated maritime operations. It is therefore most appropriate too to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of our friends and partners to the success of the Archer programme. The excellent training and sharing of operational experience by the Royal Swedish Navy have been a major factor in the operationalisation of Archer. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Royal Swedish Navy and KOCKUMS for their invaluable support and assistance. Through my visits, I have been told many times that among many instructors and engineers from the Royal Swedish Navy and KOCKUMS, that they have become familiar faces from the Challenger programme, and strong bonds of friendship have since been forged between Sweden and Singapore.

To the Commanding Officer, LTC Nyeo Chew Kian, and the crew of RSS Archer, my congratulations. Today, I am reminded of my visit to Sweden just over a year ago, where my wife and I met many of you. Then, my wife launched the Archer's sister vessel, Swordsman, and we had the opportunity to sail into the Baltic Sea on board Archer. I was impressed by both the crew and vessel, then and now.

I know that many of you embarked on the Archer training programme in Sweden back in 2007. Four years is a long time to spend training away from home, and this involves commitment and sacrifice, not only from our submariners, but also from their families. Thank you for your dedication and devotion to duty. I am confident that today you stand ready with the rest of the RSN and the SAF to undertake the tasks and missions that our nation demands of you. As you continue to build up your capability, it is important to always strive for higher standards, set new operational benchmarks, and develop new skills to work well with our foreign counterparts. Do your best, and we look forward to the Archer's contribution to the defence of Singapore.

Thank you.