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SPEECH BY DR. YEOH GHIM SENG, ACTING PRESIDENT, AT  
THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY OF S.A.F. OFFICERS ON  
29TH NOVEMBER, 1971, AT THE ISTANA AT 5.30 P.M.

No.

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Minister of Defence, Minister for Communications, Officers of the  
Singapore Armed Forces, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Once again, we gather to witness another batch of officers receiving their commission. This time, we have representation not only from the various arms of the Army, such as the Artillery, Armour, Signals, Engineers, and so on, but also from the other two services of the SAF, the Air Force and the Navy. In a small way, this serves to show what a complex organisation our defence force adds up to. It is easy to fall into the habit of routine in matters which repeat themselves with some regularity, such as commissioning ceremonies. Yet it will be a mistake to do so. To the officers who are receiving their first commissions, this must be a moment of significance. To the parents and relatives who will be joining us at the dinner later, this must also be a proud occasion. It is befitting that the commissioning of officers should take place in the Istana grounds. This underlines the importance which the Republic attaches to the role of SAF officers; it also signifies the trust imposed on them that they will fulfil this role with credit.

On an occasion like this, it will never be amiss to stress that the whole purpose of our defence build-up is to ensure that the Republic can continue to enjoy peace and tranquility. It is hardly necessary to remind anyone that by virtue of our size and our dependence on world trade, Singapore is the last nation in the world that can resort to, or even think of, militaristic adventures.

Our young men put in much arduous work and undergo severe and rigorous training to acquire military knowledge. They do this because it is necessary that we have sufficient capacity to ensure our security. And we all know without security, the economic growth of recent years would not have been possible.

While we will welcome any contribution from friendly countries which would help to maintain stability in a troublesome part of the world, we should remember that the prime responsibility rests with the national governments themselves. The days are gone when we can expect other countries to protect us and with no effort on our part.

South East Asia is entering a period of uncertainty which will last for some years. With the reduction of the military presence of Western powers and with the growing threat of Communist insurgency in several countries in the region, countries in the area will go through a difficult period. They have to achieve at one and the same time solutions of pressing problems of economic stagnation to maintain stability of the political systems and to improve their defence capability. All these objectives, nations of South East Asia will have to achieve during a time when the Western world is becoming more introspective and less willing to assist developing nations. Against this background, we in Singapore should continue our efforts to consolidate our defence capability, without at the same time endangering economic progress. In this way, we may be able to make a positive contribution, should it become necessary, to the progress and stability of the region.

Viewed from this wider perspective, the role of SAF officers assumes even greater importance. While as junior commanders, they may be absorbed in military routine within their units, they should not forget that what they do has a much broader significance than activities going on within the perimeter of their battalion camps.

I conclude on this note and it remains for me to congratulate those officers on the award of their commissions and to wish them success in their future military commands.

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