

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE COMMISSIONING
CEREMONY OF OFFICER CADETS INTO THE ARMED FORCES
AT ISTANA ON TUESDAY, 18TH JULY, 1967.

Today 114 officer cadets, the first graduates of SAFTI, have been commissioned into our armed forces. It takes place at a time when we have just received formal notice of the changes that will be necessary in the structure of the security and defence of our part of the world.

Today in London the British Government has stated that by the middle-70's they will want to leave their bases in Singapore and Malaysia. So we must build, together with such friends and allies as have an interest in the security and future of the Singapore-Malaysia area, sufficient forces for our security. And the defence assistance we can expect in the long run from Britain may be in the nature of mobile forces, both aircraft and naval vessels.

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There are five years to go before 1973, the earliest of the middle-70's, or ten years to go before 1977, the latest part of the middle-70's. The British Government says that the precise time will depend upon the circumstances. In this time we have to build all the sinews we can so that we will not just be passengers in any defence alliance. The more self-reliant and effective we

become, the more desirable and reliable a partner we make in any defence arrangement.

What we lack in numbers we will make up for in quality: in the standards of discipline, training, dedication and leadership. There is no reason why we should not, by the middle-70's, achieve an equally secure arrangement against external aggression. For we can safely assume that we need make provision against the possibility of only a middling, not a big, power attack.

Those of you who were in Singapore in 1942 when the Japanese Imperial Army swept into Singapore will know that there were vast differences between the capacity and quality of the different soldiers we saw. The Japanese Imperial Guards were accompanied by Koreans and Formosans. The British had Australians, Indians and Gurkhas on their side.

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Everybody knew that one Japanese soldier was worth more than one of the others in tenacity and doggedness. Everybody also knew that some of the British contingents were made of sterner stuff, and they were not related to the physical size of the soldiers of the various Commonwealth contingents.

War correspondents in Korea in the 50's and in Vietnam in the 60's know that armies vary in the discipline, grit and stamina of its soldiers and the quality of their officers. For example, the Vietcong have a healthier respect for some than for others of the soldiers on the American side. And they do not flee with the same alacrity when pursued by some of the Asian contingents as when pursued by the South Koreans.

Recently, the Institute of Strategic Studies in London sent me a book about the defence and security of Southern Asia. In the appendix was set out the strength in numbers and the equipment of the various armed forces of Asia. Some have armies that run into millions of regulars and militia. Some have jets, tanks and naval ships. But there was one component which was missing. And without this data it was impossible to compare the capacity of these various armed forces. And the data was: What is the conversion rate between the various armed forces?

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In other words, how many Koreans and Formosans in the last war equalled one Japanese soldier. Or to bring the example more up to date, how many South Vietnamese soldiers equal one Viet-Minh soldier from the north, or vice-versa?

Those of you who remember the years of confrontation can amuse yourself with this exercise in mental arithmetic: How many of the parachutists trained in Indonesia dropped down over Labis in 1964 equalled one Australian or one New Zealander? For it was they who eventually helped to round them up.

Upon your performance in the years ahead, people will assess if one Singaporean equals one Gurkha as foot soldiers. But that is not good enough, for, unlike the British officered Gurkhas, we must forge our own officer cadre. As we go up the scale in sophisticated weaponry, the Singaporeans must match themselves against the best in the world. For only then will our survival rate be high and secure.

Remember, if knowledgeable people, like military attaches in foreign embassies, trained to observe and report on these matters, regard us as unequal in the discipline or perseverance and, under adverse conditions to be wanting in courage, or that we lack in intelligence to develop the skills which can come only after intense application to sophisticated weapons, then it will not be long before others pick up this contempt for our capacity to stand up for ourselves. This is one of the surest ways to invite an attack to subjugate us and turn us into economic serfs, or worker ants, for the welfare and well-being of others.

We in Singapore have established our reputation as a resourceful and ingenious community of merchants, manufacturers, workers and technicians. We have ample time up till the middle '70s for you and those who will follow you in SAFTI to establish a reputation of us as a hardy and well organised people. We must transform a rootless society of migrant stock into a closely knit community determined to dig our toes in into our own corner of Asia.

You were not bred and drilled to be a parade army. Yours is a much sombre assignment. I wish you good fortune in your careers. May the trust which the people of Singapore have placed in you be jealously guarded. May our people's honour and freedom never be in jeopardy in your young but competent hands.

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