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SPEECH BY MR PHUA BAH LEE, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (DEFENCE), AT THE INAUGURAL PROJECT OF THE SAFRA CURRENT AFFAIRS GROUP FORUM 'KUMPUCHEA - THE NEXT OFFENSIVE' AT SAFRA BUKIT MERAH ON FRIDAY, 25 OCTOBER 1985 AT 7.00 PM

A famous general once said:

'The history of failure in war can be summed up in two words: Too late. Too late in comprehending the deadly purpose of a potential enemy: too late in realizing the mortal danger: too late in preparedness'.

Nations succeed or fail depending, to a large extent, on the way they respond to the crisis they face. These crisis could be internal or external; they could arise gradually or suddenly. But when they do arise are the nations prepared for them or would it be another case of merely reacting to them, another case of being too late?

Singapore has succeeded and prospered because we have always been prepared for the worst while we planned and worked towards the best. We are fortunate to have a people prepared to make sacrifices, to plan ahead and to face the challenges and crisis ahead. We have reservists trained to be effective soldiers. They keep themselves physically fit. They jog, play games, swim and keep fit as a way of life. They undergo annual in-camp training to update themselves with the latest military knowledge and skills in order to become better soldiers.

Reservists also find time to participate in the various sporting and social activities organised by SAFRA or their units.

Reservists must be outward looking. They should learn to keep tab with changes in the geo-political scene. They should cultivate a deep interest in analysing potential threats and implications in the region as well as in Singapore. This would enable them to have a broader perspective of things, appreciate the importance of defence, of preparedness to face any eventualities. They can then become more conscious of and committed towards the role they play as citizen soldiers.

The idea of forming the SAFRA Current Affairs Group was mooted by some very enthusiastic reservists about a year ago. The aims are to promote amongst reservists a greater awareness of the socio-political situation; to update reservists on reserve policies and developments in the military; and to foster esprit de corps. I understand the committee has drawn up plans to get renowned and celebrated speakers, like those we are having for the forum this evening, who are specialists in their own fields to share their knowledge.

Such healthy discussions will open up the minds and eyes of our reservists to the changing scenes of the world in general and those of South East Asia in particular. Scenes which show how countries have become crucibles of power manoeuvre; how others through foresight, fortitude, and will-power stood fast.

In short, a better informed reservist is a more effective soldier.

As for the topic of this forum, 'Kampuchea - The Next Offensive', it is a timely and appropriate one. We would be able to appreciate the subject with more realism since Kampuchea is but, figuratively, a stone's throw away. Besides, the scene is set for yet another offensive be it military or political.

I hope these talks will stimulate interest in our reservists who will eventually stand up and say: we are prepared and we are never too late.

On this note, may I wish the Committee of the SAFRA Current Affairs Group success in all its future endeavours.

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