



SPEECH

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SPEECH BY MINISTER FOR DEFENCE DR NG ENG HEN, AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF INTERNATIONAL MARITIME DEFENCE EXHIBITION ASIA 2015, ON 19 MAY 15, 1000HRS, AT CHANGI EXHIBITION CENTRE

Minister of State for Defence, Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman

Permanent Secretaries

Chief of Defence Force

Service Chiefs

Organising Chairman

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, let me echo the warm greetings of Chairman of Experia Events Mr Tan Pheng Hock, and all of you, to Singapore. A very warm welcome to the 10th International Maritime Defence Exhibition, or IMDEX-Asia.

Introduction and Overview of 10th IMDEX-Asia

1. As Mr Tan has shared, through the statistics, IMDEX-Asia has certainly grown. It started in 1997 and in that first meeting there were only five navies that were participating with some ships. And today it has grown, I am told, to become the Asia-Pacific's largest maritime defence exhibition. More importantly, I think this is larger than just an exhibition. It provides a key platform for defence professionals, service chiefs from various navies and other organisations to exchange views and strengthen cooperation in the maritime domain.

2. We are delighted to host this 10th IMDEX-Asia with more than 180 exhibitors from over 50 navies and maritime enforcement agencies including 30 Chiefs and Vice Chiefs of navies and coast guards. For the first time, we will be hosting the Asia Pacific Submarine Conference (APSC).

Importance of Maritime Trade to Singapore and Asia

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3. We are also very glad to welcome you because this is a very special year for Singapore. It is our Jubilee year. After 50 years of independence and progress, the seas around Singapore still play a central role in our economic, social and security affairs. There is a saying, "Geography is destiny", and this holds true for Singapore, located at the apex of maritime routes of trade and commerce between Asia and the rest of the World.

4. For centuries, Indian, Arab and Chinese traders first, then followed by those from European maritime powers, plied these waters and with them brought influences from a succession of empires and cultures.

5. For modern Singapore today, maritime trade is still a significant sector for Singapore's growth and prosperity. Our ports at Tanjong Pagar and Jurong are significant investments. You may have heard that Tanjong Pagar will move to make way for new types of development. But even when Tanjong Pagar port moves, the new Tuas Port is projected to handle up to 65 million TEUs per annum when fully operational.

6. Maritime trade is equally important for the rest of Asia. Last year, Asia accounted for almost 80 percent of global container throughput handled by the world's top 30 ports. This share will continue to grow together with Asia's economic growth.

Maritime Security Challenges for the Region

7. Indeed, many experts and security analysts have commented that any disruption to maritime trade routes in this part of the World will affect not only Singapore but the global economy. All countries therefore share a collective interest to keep regional sea lines of communication open and secure. To do this effectively, we should make efforts to address three maritime security challenges that can be potentially disruptive.

8. First, maritime territorial disputes. As a non-claimant state, Singapore takes no sides in these disputes occurring in the South China Sea. But Singapore has expressed our concern that the risks of incidents and even conflicts have gone up. Indeed, incidents have already occurred. Last year, there were a number of reported collisions between Vietnamese naval ships and Chinese vessels that were setting up an oil rig in a disputed part of the South China Sea. Clashes between Chinese Coast Guard vessels and Filipino fishing vessels also occurred off Scarborough Shoal just last month. These increased tensions occur against the backdrop of rising defence spending and capability development. Military expenditure in Asia increased by 5 percent last year compared to the previous year, and by 62 percent a decade ago, because as countries around us are modernising their militaries as their economies grow.

9. Second, the threat of maritime terrorism. Over the past year, ISIS has been actively producing videos and using social media to spread its extremist ideology and promote the "lone-wolf" agenda. On top of this, with more than a thousand foreign fighters reported to join ISIS every month, the returning waves of these foreign fighters, exposed to the extremist ideology and armed training, will continue to threaten regional security. Apart from ISIS, the Al-Qaeda has recently renewed calls for maritime attacks in the region as part

of a broader “economic warfare strategy”. In its English magazine “*Resurgence*” published in October last year, specific mention was made of targeting tankers in the Strait of Malacca and US naval warships berthed here. The 2008 Mumbai attack shows that terrorist can inflict great harm and disruption on maritime ports and channels.

10. Third, piracy and sea robbery. According to ReCAAP’s¹ Annual Report 2014, the number of piracy and sea robbery attacks in Asia has increased by 20 percent last year. Although the majority of these incidents were petty in nature and seldom involved the use of violence, they remain a cause for concern for mariners and security agencies. All coastal states must play their responsible and active role in keeping these waters safe. While the littoral states have successfully suppressed piracy and sea robbery in the Malacca Strait, we will now need to extend our efforts to new hotspots in the South China Sea.

Way Forward – Three Focus Areas

11. These challenges that I have mentioned arising from territorial disputes, terrorism and piracy cannot be solved by any single state, no matter how large or well-resourced. It will require concerted efforts from the global community with vested interests.

12. First, we must continue to have dialogues and practical cooperation through multilateral platforms such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM-Plus, ASEAN Regional Forum, as well as the Shangri-La Dialogue so that we can forge understanding if not trust and confidence.

13. A good example is the ADMM-Plus Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief and Military Medicine Exercise which was conducted in Brunei in 2013. This exercise saw the deployment of more than 3,000 personnel, 7 ships, and 15 helicopters from 18 nations coming together to tackle a wide range of scenarios. Through such practical cooperation, we promote stable military-to-military relations in the region.

14. Second, we need practical measures that reduce miscalculations at seas, based on internationally accepted norms and legal frameworks. A good example is Brunei’s proposal to establish a Direct Communication Link, or hotline, to maintain open channels of communications in the event of emergencies. The endorsement of the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea by the Western Pacific Naval Symposium in April 2014 is another practical way to reduce the risk of misunderstanding and mishaps at sea. ASEAN and China should also expeditiously conclude the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

15. Third, we must build capacity to respond to challenges swiftly and effectively. Integral to this is information sharing which the Republic of Singapore Navy’s Information Fusion Centre (IFC), seeks to facilitate. Since its inauguration in 2009, the IFC has established linkages with 65 operations centres in 35 countries, and International Liaison Officers from 16 different countries are currently deployed at the IFC. These extensive linkages have

¹ Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia

allowed the IFC to provide accurate and timely information, to resolve several actual cases of maritime threats such as piracy and sea robberies.

Value of IMDEX-Asia

16. Ladies and gentlemen, it is clear that there many challenges facing our maritime community. To ensure that our seas remain safe and secure, we need to work together as a region to deal with security challenges that threaten us all. So I am glad to note that the key events of IMDEX-Asia 2015 have been organised with the aim of strengthening maritime security cooperation in mind. The 4th International Maritime Security Conference, co-hosted by the RSN and the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, will focus on the theme of maritime cooperation at sea. In addition, the 15th APSC will also seek to reinforce partnerships among the submarine operating navies in the region.

Conclusion

17. I am confident that your interactions will help spur greater understanding, cooperation, and trust to help us realise the goal of advancing peace and security in our region.

18. On this note, I am happy to declare IMDEX-Asia 2015 open and wish you all a fruitful conference. Thank you very much.

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