

24/12/1998

Maintenance is part of Armed Forces culture

Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Syed Jaafar Albar

I WAS taken aback by the comments in the Other Thots column (New Sunday Times, Dec 13) on the question of dereliction of duty by the military.

If the comments were merely directed at me personally, I accept it with an open mind. As human beings, we are bound to make mistakes along the way.

Let me put in the right context the comments made by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on instilling a sense of commitment in all Malaysians in order to develop and enhance a maintenance culture.

Dr Mahathir cited luxury yachts whose maintenance employees are only Europeans. He then asked me to direct the navy to include a course on maintenance so that there will be Malaysians working on luxury yachts as maintenance crewmen. The navy is taking the necessary action to facilitate this.

I am very concerned with the way you concluded your article. The Prime Minister did not suggest that there was a "dereliction of duty on the part of the military" or that we do not have a maintenance culture.

He wanted us to strengthen, enhance and put greater emphasis on this. Your suggestion that there is a dereliction of duty is very serious.

'Derelict' is defined in the dictionary as "forsaken, abandoned, failure in duty or neglect of duty", and to the members of the armed forces it is considered a serious offence. I am sure you did not mean it that way.

Having been deeply involved with the military for several years now, I cannot doubt their care and concern for the well-being of their equipment, weapons and vehicles and the grave implications any neglect would have on the lives of the men who use them.

Indeed, the military almost religiously sticks to vigorous and arduous maintenance routines that govern the use of equipment; and it is for this reason that they are still able to operate equipment that is more than 50 years old.

Hence your suggestion that there has been a dereliction of duty on their part is grossly unfair to an organisation that traditionally does not use the media in its defence.

Whilst we accept such incidents may have occurred within our organisation, it is not fair to suggest that the military as a whole has committed a dereliction of duty.

The military has contributed directly and indirectly to the well-being of the nation. On behalf of the Armed Forces, I wish to invite you to visit our establishments to enlighten you on the real situation.