

01/01/2003

Over-confidence can lead to downfall

S.T.

I READ with admiration the statement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that we are not going to war on the issue of overlapping claims of islands and territory and that we will be very professional about it (NST, Dec 27).

Until I read the statement, I must admit I shared the same sentiment with a lot of fellow Malaysians that we ought to reply to any provocative act by a disputing party.

Malaysia has been very patient on a number of issues where its interests have been jeopardised by the activities and behaviour of a certain party.

In more than one of these issues, subtle threats of military action were directed at us. Such threats can only emanate from a party that is arrogant of its military superiority.

But the assumption of military superiority is a dangerous state of mind, especially for a party where none of its soldiers has ever fired a shot in anger.

I believe that a party willing to play the dangerous game of brinkmanship using military resources must be afflicted by one or more of the following maladies.

Firstly, there must be a sweeping confidence of absolute and overwhelming military superiority.

Perhaps they feel Uncle Sam is behind them more than he is behind us.

Or perhaps they are absolutely certain the other party will not respond in a hostile manner. With Dr Mahathir's latest statement, they have been proven correct on this premise and hence are likely to continue with such games of brinkmanship.

But it would be wise not to be too certain lest things turn out