

SPEECH FOR THE HON'BLE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AS ADDRESS TO THE VETERANS CONFERENCE

Gentlemen,

I am very happy indeed for having this opportunity to address you, the members of the Southeast Asia Veterans Conference. Many of you, who are present here today, have been to my country. Many of you fought side by side with Malaysian soldiers during the dark days of the Pacific War. Many of you came to my country and helped us to defeat militant communism after a long bitter struggle. Many of you stood by our side when the Old Order in Indonesia tried to crush our new nation out of existence.

Today I have come to pay tribute to you; to thank you, on behalf of my country, for rallying to our defence when we were sorely tried by powerful enemies.

But my tribute would not be complete if I did not mention all those gallant comrades-in-arms who have made the supreme sacrifice for the cause of Malaysia's freedom. We Malaysians salute them for their heroic self-sacrifice and we will be indebted to them.

Today, therefore, we are renewing old ties forged in the heat of battle. Today we are renewing our dedication to the principles of freedom and justice. Today we look forward to the future of our region with new hope and new confidence.

Today there is a spirit abroad in Southeast Asia. It is the spirit of cooperation and friendship among the nations and people of Southeast Asia. It is a spirit born of the conviction that mutual isolation can never bring security, happiness and wellbeing to our region or to any country belonging to it.

On the contrary, mutual isolation will only encourage the common enemy to step up his efforts to divide, to disrupt, and eventually, to dominate.

I should like to tell you how we in Malaysia regard the new impulse towards growing regional cooperation.

Our standpoint is the standpoint of a small nation which has hardly known peace and tranquility since the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941.

The Pacific War had no sooner ended in 1945 than the Malayan Communist Party began to prepare to seize power by force. The communist insurrection, which began in 1948, and which the British politely termed the "Emergency", dragged on for 12 years, exacting a heavy toll in men and money.

I cannot describe adequately the tremendous sense of relief that greeted the ending of the "Emergency". Malaysians in all walks of life put aside the cares and anxieties of the past. They renewed their determination to build up a prosperous and happy society for their children and for future generations in conditions of peace and stability.

But, unhappily, this nationwide sense of relief and optimism was soon to be shattered by the onset of disruptive forces from outside. The Indonesian Old

Order, in collaboration with the PKI, the largest communist party in the non-communist world, and in virtual alliance with the Chinese People's Republic attacked our country in 1963.

Once more, we found ourselves in the throes of conflict and tension. Once more, we were forced to divert funds from our rural development programmes and from our economic development projects to the purchase of war materials and to the expansion of our armed forces.

You know the story of confrontation; how we stood firm and successfully resisted, with the staunch support of our Commonwealth friends. You know what fate overtook the Old Order in Indonesia; how it was swept aside, together with the Partai Komunis Indonesia, by the powerful forces of resurgent Indonesian nationalism. All this is recent history, including the resumption of our brotherly ties with Indonesia last year.

But few people realise how dangerous our position really was in early 1965, that is, only two years ago. Despite our successful defence against confrontation, our long term prospects were forbidding in the extreme.

Two years ago the situation in the North was very gloomy. It seemed as though nothing would prevent the North Vietnamese communists from achieving their ambition of seizing Saigon in 1965. But the massive United States and allied commitment to the cause of the Republic of Vietnam has dramatically transformed the scene. There is a new hope, a tangible hope for a new era to dawn throughout our region; an era in which every country will feel secure from external aggression; a new era in which the massive task of re-constructing our respective countries will be pursued in an atmosphere of growing trust, confidence and co-operation throughout the region.

It would be wrong to dismiss this new hope as a mere pipedream. The destruction of the Old Order in Indonesia is of great significance. Not only did it save Indonesia but it dealt the heaviest blow to China's disruptive policy in the region. It has also discredited communism throughout the region, since Southeast Asian Communism is, to all intents and purposes, an instrument of China's expansionism.

I believe it is of the highest importance that the rest of the world should appreciate our attitude to China. We in Malaysia, and we have no doubt that our view is shared by most of our neighbours – are convinced that China will resit as the major threat to our region. We are convinced that the prospects are excellent for the emergence of a Southeast Asia which will progressively consolidate its strength.

What perhaps has not been sufficiently realised outside our region is that the defeat of the Indonesian Communist Party represents a victory of the forces of Southeast Asian nationalism over the forces of an alien creed which is identified with China's expansionism. From Vietnam, too, where newspaper headlines unfortunately tend to misrepresent the struggle in terms of a primarily United States effort, there is heartening news. Steady progress towards effective Vietnamese self-government is being made. In Vietnam, the main problem in the long run is to create effective representative government and a collective will to survive backed by efficient administration. Without all these security and stability cannot be built up.

The next five years should, therefore, witness a sustained and combined effort by Southeast Asian countries, with the assistance of friendly powers, to strengthen the economic and political structures of every country in the region.

The importance of Indonesia in this regard cannot be over-emphasised. As a nation whose population represents more than half the combined population of the entire region; as a nation whose present leaders have done, and are continuing to do, a fine job despite enormous difficulties. In the long run, Southeast Asia will not succeed in standing on its own feet unless Indonesia effects her own recovery.

Let me now make a few brief comments on the role of my country in strengthening the security of our region.

Although the main function of the Malaysian Armed Forces is to defend Malaysia against external aggression, the Armed Forces and, in particular, the Army, are currently engaged in internal security operations because we have a communist problem today to deal with. There are 500 militant communists along our border with Thailand and for sometime now we have worked together with Thailand to eliminate them.

The internal security situation in East Malaysia is also serious. The Sarawak Communist Organisation (SCO) with 1,000 active members is preparing for a protracted armed struggle. As these terrorists operate in pockets in our border with Indonesia, we have now reached an agreement with Indonesia for co-ordinated action against them. This threat in Sarawak, coupled with the generally additional external defence responsibilities arising from the formation of Malaysia, has necessitated the considerable expansion of our armed forces. Such expansion has to be accelerated in view of the phased withdrawal of the British forces from Malaysia.

But despite the expansion programme, Malaysia will continue to require the assistance of Commonwealth forces during the next few years. Stated quite simply, we still do not have nearly enough troops of our own for our defence and security needs.

As I have mentioned before, Australia has always rallied to Malaysia's defence in the field of military operation. But it must also be emphasised that in recent years Australia has also increased her contribution to my country in the form of material aid.

Beginning in 1964, the Australian Government agreed to contribute aid worth about \$6 million (Australian) in the form of military equipment, secondment of Australian service personnel and the training of Malaysian Armed Forces personnel in Australia. We have fully utilised this offer.

A further aid programme worth about A\$19 million was offered to us in 1965. This will enable us to obtain from Australia such items as engineering plants and equipment, arms and ammunition, vehicles and a variety of other ordnance materials.

All this military aid has been of considerable assistance to us in our Armed Forces expansion programme; and I wish once again to record my government's deep appreciation of the Australian Government's generosity towards us.

In our common struggle against aggressive communism, it is imperative that the bonds of friendship and cooperation that exist between our two countries

should continue to be strengthened. In the military sphere my Government looks forward to increasingly fruitful collaboration with the Australian Government in terms not only of Assistance in the development of the Malaysian Armed Forces and of the Australian assistance in Malaysia's defence arrangements but also of closer consultations on other problems. One of these is the problem of providing for the welfare of our war veterans.

I am happy to inform you that the Malaysian Government is doing its best to assist the Malaysian ex-Services Association . My Government realise how much the country owes to our ex-servicemen. I am giving this my personal attention and I have appointed a special officer in the Ministry of Defence to liaise with the Exservicemens Association and to assist it in every way possible.

I am informed that only a few months ago the Returned Servicemen's League of Australia (RSL) sent a senior official to my country to assist in the re-organisation of the Malayan Ex-Services Association. I am most grateful to the Australian Ex-Servicemen for their generous, comradely gesture. I have since received a copy of this official and I have read it with interest.

I am very pleased with some of the recommendations he made. For example, there is a proposal for the Returned Servicemen's League to send one of its experienced officials to work and assist in the administration and the reorganisation of the Malaysian body. There is also a proposal from RSL to send a specialist to assist in the proposed establishment or rehabilitation training centres for our ex-Servicemen. Another proposal is for the RSL to award scholarships to children of Malaysia ex-Service Association to study in Australia and the intention is that when these children complete their studies they would be able to return to Malaysia and utilise the knowledge of some field of value in the rehabilitation of Ex-Servicemen.

I sincerely hope that these proposals will materialise in the course of this year and I can assure the RSL that my Government will give our full cooperation to their organisation in carrying out their objectives of assisting our Ex-Servicemen Association.

Finally, I would like to wish your Conference every success in its deliberations. We owe an immense debt to you and to those who have made that supreme sacrifice for the defence of our region against the forces of tyranny and oppression. For without your sacrifices we would not be standing, as we are today, on the threshold of a new era of hope and progress, of happiness and peace, in this important part of the world to which we all belong.