

SPEECH BY: DATO' SERI DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD
(PRIME MINISTER)

EVENT: THE OPENING OF THE ASIAN DEFENCE EXHIBITION AND CONFERENCE

VENUE: THE PUTRA WORLD TRADE CENTRE IN KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 18 FEB 1986

TIME:

Honourable guests;
Distinguished participants;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a pleasure for me to be able to be present here today at this Asian Defence Exhibition and Conference-Defence 86 - and also to address this distinguished gathering.

2. For Malaysia, this is the second time that we are hosting a defence exhibition, the first being in 1980. I have been told that this Defence 86 Exhibition has attracted a large number of exhibitors from several countries and this exhibition is one of the biggest in the Asia-Pacific region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

3. Malaysia has managed to put down the menace of Communist terrorism in the early years of its independence. Consequently this country recognised the importance of defence and security in ensuring the development of the country. Without security, we may not be able to achieve the objectives of our development programmes. The importance is reflected in the financial allocation for this purpose under the various 5-year plans. I would say that Malaysia has been able to strike a balance between the importance of economic and social development and defence requirements.

4. However, Malaysia being a developing country has not and will not place the defence and security as the top most priority in our annual budget allocation. It will still remain an important component, next to economic and social development. The reason is obvious. If defence is to become effective and get the backing of the people, what is to be defended must be worthwhile. It is in order to make Malaysia worth defending that economic and social development has to be carried out.

5. If we take defence as a total concept, economic and social development must be considered a major factor in national defence. In the context of a modern nation, the backing of the people for the armed forces to defend the country is as important as the strength and skill of the armed forces themselves. Likewise basic defence is necessary for economic and social development efforts to take place. Taking these factors in its totality, defence and

economic and social programmes are complementary factors in achieving overall national resilience.

Ladies and gentlemen,

6. There is never enough of anything. Certainly no country can find enough funds for the needs of defence. This is made even more glaring because of the increasing cost of sophisticated weapons. Where once we could buy a whole squadron of planes, now the same amount of money can buy only half an aeroplane. By the time enough money is raised to buy the squadron, not only have the costs escalated but new technology would make the original equipment obsolete. And new technology will cost more money.

7. I am reminded of a story of a weapon designer who brought blueprints for the ultimate weapon to the commanding general of a country. He pointed out the danger the country would face if it does not have this ultimate weapon of his. So convincing was he that the general decided to buy the blueprint. No sooner had he signed on the dotted line when the designer produced another set of blueprints for a weapon to counter the ultimate weapon. Again the general was persuaded to buy this new blueprint. Then the designer produced yet another set of blueprints of a weapon to counter the counter weapon he had just sold. The angry general refused to buy. Whereupon the weapon designer said he would go to the country's enemy to sell the weapons.

8. The situation these days makes this story no more a joke. Weapons get obsolete so quickly that we get breathless merely trying to catch up with the literature on the latest technology or what is tantalisingly described as the state of the art. One wonders sometimes whether it is worthwhile buying any weapons since it is going to be obsolete by the time delivery takes place. Then there is the problem of choosing between several with the same specifications but are somehow different. To a civilian like me, no choice is right. Invariably when a decision is made, everyone will point out how much better are the other weapons.

9. Over and above all these is the question of how much to spend on defence. We know already that it is never going to be enough, especially to the professional soldiers. But even if it is not going to be enough, we still have to determine how much more or how much less should the allocation be. Can a price be put on the security of a nation? Can the security of a nation be correctly assessed so as to ensure that the correct allocation of funds and correct choice of weapons are made?

10. These are problems that trouble every government. And Malaysia is no exception. We do not really know whether our allocation and our weapons are right or not. How much must we curtail development in order to cater to the needs of security and defence? Looking at the vast array of weapons

and equipments that are on show at this Exhibition, we can become either more enlightened or more confused. But one thing is certain. Defence costs and the worst thing that can happen in terms of cost is an arms race. Even the super powers can be bankrupted by such a race, long before we have star wars. I do hope that here in South East Asia, we do not have a mini arms race.

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. Malaysia is not ambitious when it comes to producing arms. We have no desire to become a supplier of arms to anyone else. We are a peace-loving country and our needs for weapons are simple. If we go into the manufacture of arms it is only to meet these needs. Only if economies of scale forces us, will we produce more than our needs and sell the excess.

12. But there are many areas where defence needs coincide with civilian needs. Thus the repair and overhaul of aeroplane engines are of interest to both the military and the civil aviation. It is because of this that the facility initially set for the repair and overhaul of military aircraft has now been converted into a privately-run industry, available also to civil aircraft. That facility now owned by Aerospace Industries of Malaysia will be expanded in order to manufacture flight instruments and other avionics.

AIM is still interested in having joint ventures for servicing and manufacturing with interested foreign partners. It will not go beyond that. It will certainly not be manufacturing aircraft.

13. Additionally we have gone into heavy industries hoping that we may be able to fabricate some components of both civilian and military vehicles. We have already begun to produce our own cars and the expertise gained would be useful should we need to produce designs, parts and components for military needs.

14. As you can see we are very modest about producing our own arms. For a very long time we will have to buy our defence needs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

15. It is useful to have a Defence Exhibition like this. It enables a lot of people involved with defence and security to appreciate the range and variety of weapons and equipments available. It might even be enlightening to civilians like me who are willy-nilly dragged into making decisions on matters that we are really not competent to make, and yet are expected to make wisely.

16. The holding of a Defence Exhibition in Malaysia should not be misconstrued as official support and endorsement for an arms build-up in this country or in this region. As I

have said Malaysia is a peace-loving country. It has no wish to be a military power and it would be very nervous if there are military powers around it. But it accepts the need to upgrade its knowledge if not its capability for defence. Towards this end your conference and the various papers that will be presented will be very useful.

17. But, of course, this Exhibition is open to all. We are going to learn nothing more than what others, including our neighbours, will learn. Perhaps it may make us wiser so that, much to the disappointment of the exhibitors, we will decide that it is futile to enter into an arms race and spend our limited funds on development instead. However, I would hasten to assure the exhibitors that their investment in this show is not likely to have that effect. I am sure that a lot of us are going to be persuaded to buy equipment which we will never really use. But weapons that never need to be used may prove to be the best investment. We can say that they are a deterrent. It was a British Prime Minister, I believe, who said that "To have peace you must prepare for war". Britain was unprepared then and Britain had war. Malaysia unfortunately cannot afford to believe too much in that maxim.

Ladies and gentlemen,

18. Once again I would like to thank the organisers for inviting me to officiate at this Exhibition and Conference. To all participants and exhibitors I wish you success and a pleasant and memorable stay in Malaysia.

19. I now have much pleasure in declaring the Asian Defence Exhibition and Conference open.
Thank you.