

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

EVENT: THE OPENING OF THE DEFENCE SERVICES ASIA EXHIBITION

VENUE: THE PUTRA WORLD TRADE CENTRE (PWTC), KUALA LUMPUR (K.L)

DATE: 20 MAR 1990

TIME:

Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the organisers for inviting me to declare open this exhibition. Since the 80s countries around this region have hosted various defence exhibitions and shows. As to whether this is a reflection of the tensions in the region or merely a desire for prestige is for the Southeast Asian watchers to analyse. But like it or not, the defence industry is big business and for some countries, especially the developed nations, defence sales form a significant portion of their exports.

2. For Malaysia, as I have stated on many occasions, defence preparedness is only necessary in order to ensure stability for economic and social development. We are not an aggressive nation, and we have no territorial claims. Likewise Malaysian territory is not for sale to anyone. But we accept the need to defend our seas and our territories with all the strength we are capable of.

3. Our main defence requirement in the past was in order to counter communist insurgency. Since 1948 a fair percentage of the national budget had to be expanded to counter communist terrorist activities. It is a war that does not call for very sophisticated and expensive weaponry. The main need is skill in anti-guerilla jungle warfare. Over the years of the 'Emergency' Malaysian soldiers acquired skills which are second to none in this type of warfare.

4. Not many countries have been able to defeat the communist guerillas. Malaysia is one of the few. Although the initial period of intense jungle warfare exacted a high toll in men and money but the protracted war of attrition which followed was no less debilitating. But perseverance paid off and in December 1989, 41 years after the communist launched their armed attempt to overthrow the Government, the Malayan Communist Party or MCP decided to lay down arms.

5. Now that the guerilla war is over, we are not about to forget our skills in this area. But we do realise the need for some conventional warfare capability. We have already decided what kind of weapons we need, and how much we can

afford. They are relatively simple and modest. We are not about to keep up with the Joneses. But we will be capable.

6. In the meantime we hope everyone will divert their research and energy to meet the needs of a world without a Cold War. The market for arms will shrink. It already has. We should not regret this. The energy, funds and research capabilities will not be wasted for there are non-military applications aplenty. Weapons and sophisticated surveillance systems are going to be much in demand to combat smuggling, particularly of drugs. Already AWACS are finding a place in this field in America. If the sophisticated surveillance systems could be adapted for counter-smuggling work, and costs are reduced, the market for these should sustain the arms industry, or at least its considerable expertise and resources in terms of inventiveness and innovation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. Malaysia, together with the other members of ASEAN, will continue to strive for the realisation of a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality or ZOPFAN for Southeast Asia. Together with the member countries, Malaysia will also work towards a nuclear free zone in this region. Southeast Asia must be kept free from any superpower conflict and rivalry so that development and progress can continue. Any attempt or action that is not in keeping with the objectives of ZOPFAN would not only hinder the realisation of this objective but would also provide excuses for others from outside to involve themselves in the region. This would be detrimental to our well-being and security.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. The holding of this exhibition and my presence here should not be interpreted as an endorsement by the Government towards the arms industry or as an indication that Malaysia is going to embark on an arms build-up. Malaysia has no wish to do so. But the arms industry, like the other industries too, have undergone rapid changes and development. Malaysia would be left behind if it does not keep abreast with the changes taking place. It is for this reason that the Government supports this exhibition.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. Once again I thank the organisers for inviting me to officiate this Exhibition. I have now much pleasure in declaring open the Defence Services Asia Exhibition.
Thank you.