BERSATU PADU: FIVE-POWER EXERCISE MOVES TOWARD PEAK

(By Mr. Malcolm Fraser - Member for Wannon and Minister for Defence)

The five-power military exercise code-named Bersatu Padu, involving some 25,000 servicemen, about 200 aircraft and nearly 50 warships, is now working towards its peak.

To Australia and the other nations involved it has an importance relevant to each nation's military role and to co-operation in the region after the withdrawal of British military forces in 1971.

The Australian objectives in these military exercises are "to train and exercise Australian forces in the Malaysian/Singapore area in co-operation with the four other powers".

The exercise is based on a hypothetical situation in which a mythical country called Ganasia launches aggression with the long-term aim of overthrowing the governments of Malaysia and Singapore.

It is supposed that the year is 1975, and that British forces are no longer based in the region.

The five nations involved - Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand and Britain - act to counter the aggression.

Australian and New Zealand forces are re-inforced, a Singapore battalion is made available at short notice, a brigade group is flown in from Britain, forces in the area are reinforced by Australian, New Zealand and British aircraft and a naval task force is formed.

Australia is contributing considerable forces to the exercise. Included are the carrier HMAS Melbourne and nine other Naval units including an Oberon submarine, the Mirage fighters based at Butterworth, the joint Australian/New Zealand battalion group and other land units - involving the deployment of some 5,000 personnel.

Malaysia's force includes a battalion group and a number of warships and aircraft. Singapore has contributed an infantry battalion, and New Zealand's force includes its part in the joint Anzac battalion as well as a warship and aircraft.

The British contingent includes the commando carrier Bulwark, and the British have airlifted forces on the 7,500 mile route from England.

The decision to hold the exercise was made at a five-power ministerial conference in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) in June, 1968. The exercise has been under intense planning since early last year by officers from the five countries.

The exercise is in three parts. A major combined exercise - which I intend to watch on my coming Malaysia/Singapore visit - is to be held in the Malaysian State of Trengganu which includes an amphibious assault on an airstrip and an airlift of troops into the area.
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The other two are a maritime exercise in the South China Sea and an air defence exercise over Butterworth, Singapore and the fleet at sea. The Australian contribution to Bersatu Padu reflects the firmness of the Government's commitment to the security of Malaysia-Singapore in the period of change ahead.

We have a strong record of co-operation with Malaysia and Singapore over the years, both in the military and non-military sense.

When the British announced their intention to withdraw their military forces, the Australian Government came out with its decision to maintain land, sea and air forces in the region, provided the two governments continued to desire our presence there.

We aim to co-operate as regional partners, to help to develop the defence capabilities of both countries, and to help consolidate five-power security arrangements for the region.

We hope that Bersatu Padu will further these objectives.
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