

## Indonesia Officials Skip Singapore Airshow as Tensions Increase

By Tanya Angerer and Berni Moestafa

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Photographer: Brent Lewin/Bloomberg

A woman, seen through a window, walks towards signage for the Singapore Airshow

Indonesia's top army officials will skip the Singapore Airshow as tensions escalated between the two nations after Indonesia stood by its decision to name a navy ship after marines who bombed a building on the island in 1965.

Indonesia's Deputy Defense Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin and other senior military officials won't attend the event in Singapore this week, both countries said separately. Teuku Faizasyah, a spokesman for Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, told reporters in Jakarta yesterday the government will stand by its decision to name the ship after the marines.

The no-show by the Indonesian army underscores relations between two neighbors that have been sprinkled with occasional frictions. In November, Singapore Foreign Affairs Minister K. Shanmugam met with his Indonesian counterpart following reports the city-state helped spy on its neighbor. In June, Yudhoyono apologized for forest fires that led to haze in the city-state.

"I don't expect the Indonesians to backtrack, and Singapore is registering its disappointment in hopes it won't happen again," said Eugene Tan, an associate law professor at Singapore Management University and a non-elected member of the city-

state's Parliament. "We may see a cooling off period in bilateral ties, particularly with military relations, but I don't see relations heading into a deep freeze."

Shanmugam contacted his Indonesian counterpart to "register Singapore's concerns over the naming of the navy ship and the impact this would have on the feelings of Singaporeans, especially the families of the victims," according to a statement from his ministry last week.

### **Texted Cancellation**

Sisriadi, a spokesman for the Indonesian Defense Ministry, said Sjamsoeddin and his Singapore counterpart were scheduled to meet for a "strategic dialogue" during the Singapore Airshow. The meeting was canceled through a mobile-text message from Singapore, which led to the decision to skip the event in the city-state, he said yesterday.

The Indonesian Air Force's Jupiter Aerobatic Team will still perform at the event if a slot is provided, according to Agus Barnas, a government spokesman.

Singapore's Ministry of Defence said in a statement on Feb. 9 that the Indonesian leaders, including Sjamsoeddin, Army Chief Moeldoko and chiefs of staff for the army and air force, "have decided not to attend the Singapore Airshow." Kenneth Liow, a spokesman at the Singapore Defence Ministry, couldn't be reached for a comment in his office yesterday.

### **Two Marines**

The two marines, Osman Hj Mohd Ali and Harun Said, were convicted and executed in Singapore for the 1965 bombing of the MacDonald House building in the city's downtown that killed three people and injured 33, according to the statement from the Singapore Foreign Affairs Ministry.

Singapore restored bilateral ties and considered the chapter closed in 1973 when then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew visited the graves of the two marines and scattered flowers, according to the statement.

Indonesia's Moeldoko said Singapore should stop regarding the two marines as terrorists as they were "stage actors," the Jakarta Post reported yesterday, citing the general.

"I am disappointed with the Indonesian decision to name their new warship after the two convicted ex-marines," Chan Chun Sing, Singapore's second minister for defense and



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former army chief, said in a statement on Feb. 7. Indonesian leaders shouldn't "reopen old wounds and hurt this relationship so carefully built up," he said.

The Jakarta Post reported two days ago that flight safety officers at the airport in Batam, an Indonesian island close to Singapore, detected several Singaporean fighter jets flying over the island without permission.