

Singapore Government

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SPEECH

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

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Speech by Mr David Lim, Minister of State for Defence and Information and the Arts, at the employer's visit to 593 SIR's Live Firing Exercise at the SAFTI Live Firing Area, on 31 August 2000 at 2 pm

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me also welcome you to this field exercise by the 593rd Battalion, here on Elephant Hill.

Today's exercise is a routine training activity for the SAF. But it is through such regular exercises that our fighting forces are kept operational ready for their task.

The 593rd Battalion, 593 SIR, is an NS battalion, which is to say, the majority of men and officers are National Servicemen. But like all our NS battalions, it is not a reserve unit, to be deployed only as a back up. If called upon, they will fight as integral parts of our Combined Arms Division. Such NS units are the backbone of the SAF.

Singapore depends on National Service to maintain our defence capability. But keeping a high level of proficiency while relying on NSmen is no easy task. It places tremendous demands on the men, who have to cope with work and family for most of the year, and still make time to serve their country during their in-camp training. Their sacrifice is what makes Singapore secure.

Likewise NS also places demands on employers. MINDEF and the SAF recognise the indispensable role of employers, and I would like to take this opportunity to once again thank all of you for your support. We know that calling up your men for in-camp training may disrupt your companies' operations. And we try as much as possible to minimise this disruption. As you see today, little time is wasted when the men are on exercise. We try our best to ensure that your men are called up for the minimum amount of time needed to keep them operationally ready.

The NS call up system works best if the men turn up for their training as scheduled. This is why the SAF informs the men 6 months in advance, and often more, when their next training activity will take place. We recognise that despite such early notice, NSmen may ask to be deferred for personal reasons, and sometimes because of work demands. SAF takes a flexible approach and tries to accommodate such requests whenever we can do so without impacting training objectives. But it will be a waste of time if the exercise does not meet training goals because essential personnel are not present. I therefore hope that employers can help the SAF maintain an efficient functioning of the NS system by minimising their requests to defer their employees from in-camp training. You will benefit from a more efficient NS system.

MINDEF is committed to further improving NS effectiveness, and to show our appreciation to employers, NSmen and their families for the support they give to national service. This is why MINDEF recently convened RECORD III.

RECORD III is made up of active NSmen, and some spouses, who are in the best position to give us feedback. We also hope to receive inputs from the public. So far, we have received some excellent suggestions, and are considering implementing

some of these ideas. I hope that more people will give their feedback and suggestions, before we complete our deliberations by the end of this year. Your feedback, as employers, is also very welcome.

RECORD III recognises that the nature of jobs have changed. More NSmen are being posted on regional assignments, many together with their families. And in line with our emphasis on life-long learning, more NSmen are upgrading themselves by taking up tertiary studies. RECORD III is looking at how the administration of NS can be updated to keep pace with such changes.

But in our efforts to streamline NS, we must not forget that NS is ultimately a service and duty to the nation. RECORD III seeks to recognise, not reward, national service. The reward to NSmen and their families is priceless – and this is to have the privilege of living in a safe, secure, free and sovereign nation.

I hope you will enjoy your visit today, and I look forward to your continued support for NS.

Thank you.

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