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Speech by Senior Minister of State for Defence Mr Chan Chun Sing at the Committee of Supply Debate 2013

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Prudent and Optimal Stewardship of Resources Mr Deputy Chair, MINDEF is deeply appreciative of Singaporeans' support for our defence and security. We owe it to Singapore and Singaporeans to be good stewards of the resources entrusted to us - be it money, land or time, issues which Dr Lim Wee Kiak asked about.

MINDEF takes a long-term view towards building our capabilities, which Defence Minister has spoken about. Through steady defence expenditure and by stretching each defence dollar, we are able to build up a strong SAF to meet our defence needs.

Likewise, we also plan long-term for the SAF's land-use. Over the years, while the size of the SAF units may have become smaller, their operational capabilities have become more sophisticated and they require more extensive training space. For example, a typical infantry unit or battalion used to require a 24 square-km training area for a manoeuvre exercise. Today, with motorisation and other advanced systems, the same unit can easily operate and dominate a 40 square-km area.

To meet our training requirements, MINDEF uses a combination of simulation as well as local and overseas training. Our investments in simulation (like the marksmanship trainers) allow us to achieve much higher throughput at much lower costs. It also allows us to correct our soldiers' fundamentals before we deploy them out for more costly outfield exercises. Innovative concepts like the Multi-Mission Range Complex where we combine 7 rifle ranges into 1, take ideas from concepts like multi-storey golf driving ranges stacked on top of each other, and bowling centres equipped with individual computer diagnostics to aid the bowlers. All these make good use of the finite land space

we have.

For local training, MINDEF has over the years consolidated our training plots to use the spaces we have more effectively. There will be two main training areas - the live firing and manoeuvring areas in the West and the offshore training area in Pulau Tekong. We have also synergised the usage of Army and Air Force training areas where possible. For institutional land use, we have continued to intensify the use of our camps and equipping centres to the extent we can, subject to operational, security and safety requirements.

When it comes to time, we know how precious time is to our servicemen. Where possible, we continually challenge ourselves to make it more convenient for our NSmen to come back to train and to serve. For in-camp training, where possible, preparatory modules are given to NSmen to better prepare them before they return for their in-camps. To allow NSmen to stay connected when they are off-duty, we have designated zones that are in non-sensitive areas where they can access the internet and stay in touch with their work commitments. Another good example is how we have evolved our mobilisation system to allow our NSmen to be mobilised much more efficiently, while increasing their confidence and operational readiness many times.

Mr Deputy Chair, if I may have your permission to share with this House some slides on the changes to our mobilisation system. Our more experienced NSmen might remember that mobilisation exercises used to be a fairly tedious process. In the past, our NSmen would have to report for mobilisation at various schools and camps, after which they would have to go and collect equipment from various locations before returning back to the mobilisation centre for equipping. All these takes time. Actual equipping and force preparation only begins after this. It is a sequential process, one after another. Today, our NSmen report to our Mobilisation and Equipping Centres or the MECs as we call them.

The equipment that they need is already in the centres. The ammunition that they need will be pushed to them. Likewise, for other supplies.

All these ammunitions and other supplies are pushed to them in pre-packed modules where they do not need to go round to collect from different stations. It is unlike the previous method where we have the proverbial Chinese medicine shop where people have to go to different stations to collect their different types of munitions and equipment. In the new system, you go to one place, you get the entire package that is configured for your respective units. This saves much time. The time saved can now be used for our NSmen to undergo currency training that includes shooting the SAR 21 rifle, chemical defence, first aid and other training that may be required specific to that unit. All this is done concurrently, which allows our NSmen to not only be ready in a much shorter time but also to have a much higher level of proficiency within the time allocated to them. Having said that, we will not rest on our laurels and will continue to seek further

improvements.

At this point of time I would like to share with Dr Lim and Ms Irene Ng some issues on safety. Indeed, like what Ms Irene Ng said, safety is of utmost concern to the SAF. First, we must have good systems to make sure that our procedures and our operating methods, tactics, are safe. More important than good systems, we need good people and good commanders who not only know how to work the system but at the same time, they must have an eye for safety and be able to react when circumstances change. These are the fundamental building blocks of the SAF system - good systems and good people. Dr Lim asked if we can do away with the grenade training. Let me assure Dr Lim that this is actually one of the defining moments for all the recruits training and we would like to train our recruits and our soldiers as they would operate in war. But before they do any live training for with grenades, they actually go through various sessions starting with dummy grenades, progressing to something that is almost an exact replica of the actual grenade before they go on to embark on throwing the live grenade. So there are proper procedures in place. But having said that, we still need commanders with a keen awareness of danger to know his men and his machine to ensure that our recruits and all our soldiers are safe. But having said that, I must reiterate that the military has inherent risks in everything it does and it is incumbent upon all men and commanders to make sure that they stay alert and not be complacent just because there are training rules and safety regulations in place. Training rules and safety regulations cannot be a crutch to the sense of vigilance required in all our soldiers.

I would also like to respond to Mrs Lina Chiam's comments about compensation. Let me reassure Mrs Lina Chiam that our compensation is not on a case-by-case basis. MINDEF has a proper system to look at compensation. In fact, the MINDEF compensation board is chaired by a senior legal officer from the Attorney General's Chamber (AGC). So it is not just an internal MINDEF process. And if there are any concerns with this, there is also an appeal process. So it is not a case-by-case basis but there is a proper system to ensure that compensation is done fairly.

The SAF's Medical System

Next, if I may move on to the SAF medical system. The well-being of our servicemen is also an important priority for MINDEF. Let me update the House on how we are improving medical care for our servicemen, which Dr Lim, Ms Irene Ng and Mrs Lina Chiam have also asked about. We had reviewed our medical system in 2012. The review was co-led by BG Benedict Lim, Commandant of the SAFTI Military Institute and A/P Eillyne Seow, Divisional Chairman for Ambulatory and Diagnostic Medicine at Tan Tock Seng Hospital. The review concluded that our medical system, which covers medical classification and screening, is fundamentally sound. Nevertheless, we will continue to improve, and look for partnerships and initiatives to provide better care for

our servicemen.

For example, the SAF has been collaborating with the National Heart Centre Singapore to leverage on their advanced cardiac diagnostic capabilities to provide timely and quality cardiac screening for our soldiers. The SAF will also be collaborating with Jurong Health Services to provide specialised emergency medical services as well as training in this field. This will enhance medical support for our soldiers training in the western part of Singapore. It will also allow the SAF to benchmark our standard of emergency care.

The SAF is currently exploring having experienced Family Physicians serve as in-house physicians in selected SAF medical centres, and also to mentor our more junior doctors. The SAF will continue to harness the medical expertise and experience at the national level to ensure that our servicemen can have peace of mind when they train hard in service of our nation.

MINDEF's Anti-Corruption Systems and Processes

Mr Deputy Chair, Ms Sylvia Lim asked about Transparency International's (TI) D+ grading for Singapore in its Government Defence Anti-Corruption Index 2013. TI's assessment of corruption risk is weighted heavily towards the availability of public information in its defined risk areas of political, finance, personnel, operations and procurement risk. For example, we would have scored higher if we release information about how much we spend on sensitive operations and classified research and development projects. But Singapore does not publicise such details of our defence and security expenditures, as it would compromise our security. To reduce the risks of corruption, MINDEF has instead put in place several layers of internal and external checks.

Internally, officers that are in positions to approve projects are subjected to security vetting regularly. The checks conducted as part of the vetting process would include credit bureau checks and checks of the assets held by the officers and their family members to identify any indications of unexplained wealth. In addition, the officers are regularly rotated to reduce the risk of them being cultivated by suppliers.

MINDEF also conducts regular reviews of our financial and procurement procedures, and MINDEF's Internal Audit Department or IAD also performs regular audit checks. As part of our processes, we utilize data analytics to spot outliers and investigate each and every such incident. IAD's audit reports and the follow-up actions are reviewed by the MINDEF Audit Committee chaired by the Permanent Secretary (Defence Development), which meets every two months. On an annual basis, a comprehensive report that grades how MINDEF and the SAF agencies perform is also submitted by the IAD to the

Minister for Defence.

Externally, MINDEF is audited by the Auditor-General who submits an annual report to the President and Parliament for scrutiny. That annual report is publicly available. Over the years, the Auditor-General has identified areas in MINDEF's procurement and payments systems for improvement, which MINDEF has rectified.

MINDEF, like the rest of the government, has zero tolerance towards corruption. Our defence procurement process is widely recognised to be of the highest standards. Suppliers know that MINDEF has high expectations and that we drive a hard bargain when it comes to pricing. We have also been described as a "reference customer" - that means that when Singapore buys a platform, it sets a benchmark for cost effectiveness for that platform.

We have studied the TI report in detail and will decide where more information can be released, so long as it does not compromise our security goals. We are confident that our current systems and processes to guard against corruption remain robust. Nevertheless, we will regularly review our processes to ensure that we remain corruption free because we owe this to Singapore and Singaporeans to be good stewards of the resources entrusted to us.

Let me now hand over to Dr Maliki who will speak on our training efforts and Total Defence.

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