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Speech by Minister of State for Defence, Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman, at the SAF Senior Military Expert Appointment Ceremony

04 Dec 2013

Chief of Air Force,
Graduands of the SAF Senior Military Expert Course,
Parents and Loved Ones,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
A very good evening,

Congratulations on successfully completing the Senior Military Experts Course. This is a proud moment for all of you, and I am honoured to join you at this important milestone as you embark on your service to the nation as Senior Military Experts of the Singapore Armed Forces.

The Military Domain Experts Course which you have just been through prepares you for Senior Military Expert appointments in the SAF. This is the sixth installment of the course. It is a course aimed at developing you in three core areas of Leadership and Management, Military Domain Knowledge, and Domain Specialisation. It is rigorous, tough and demanding.

Courses like this are part of the professional development and continuing education opportunities available to you throughout your career in the SAF. They are aimed at developing expert knowledge in key military domains such as Engineering, Intelligence and Military Medicine. Opportunities like these lie at the heart of the Military Domain Experts Scheme. The Third Generation SAF leverages technology to build a potent force. And an increasingly complex and technologically advanced SAF requires competent and experienced personnel to operate, maintain and develop our systems.

As Senior Military Experts, you will require time and rigorous training to build deep expertise. Besides building a deep specialisation in your niche areas, the MDES aims to develop a breadth of professional military and warfighting competencies that will enable you to better contribute to the mission success of the SAF. This breadth of experience coupled with depth of knowledge is the hallmark of the Military Expert who will sustain the edge of the SAF into the future.

We need only to look at the experiences of previous graduands of the course to understand the vital role that Senior Military Experts play in "sustaining the edge". From their success stories, we can also better understand how "sustaining the edge" has not just been about having specialist book knowledge, but also about possessing the right military values and ethos in its use.

From 2007 to 2013, the SAF contributed to the multinational stabilisation and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Under the ambit of Operation BLUE RIDGE, a total of 492 soldiers were deployed, carrying out a wide-range of missions. Not all the soldiers were Military Experts, but certainly, most if not all the missions were anchored by services provided by them.

ME4 Benjamin Ng was deployed as part of a medical team. High velocity gun-shot wounds, blast injuries and traumatic amputations resulting from Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) were common sights in his theatre of operations. He notes how his deployment validated local medical training and affirmed their professional standing as soldiers and medical personnel alongside our in-theatre coalition partners. But the true impact of his contribution was amplified by the empathy he shared with the locals, who responded with touching acts of gratitude despite their tough circumstances.

ME4 Phua Cheng Ee was deployed as part of the Forward Support Team in Kandahar Airfield. Not many people might know this, but Kandahar Airfield is the largest NATO Military Airfield in the world housing over 20,000 troops. ME4 Phua's role, in this tent city, was to make sense of the complex network of diverse and often competing stakeholders. Only then could he achieve his mission of providing logistics support and inserting our troops via military flights to various areas of operations. He notes that other than representing Singapore and upholding the SAF Core values, it was equally important to be humble, sincere and show care and concerns towards others. He recalls an incident where he noticed a lone soldier still working when the rest of his countrymen had sat down to eat. Something stirred within him, and he packed a plate of food and some drinks for this foreign soldier, who was deeply touched by this simple act of kindness.

But we do not have to look so far afield to recognise the unique contributions of the

Senior Military Experts. From 17 to 20 June this year in Brunei, more than 1,800 people, 18 helicopters, seven ships and 18 countries came together for the first ADMM+ Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief and Military Medicine exercise. This was one of the largest multilateral exercises in recent years. Military forces practised responding to a disaster together, in the areas of search and rescue, military medicine, engineering work and giving out aid. Military Experts of the SAF, in partnership with Officers and WOSPECs, anchored many of these key exchanges. In so doing, they have contributed greatly to a regional security architecture of mutual interoperability, trust and friendship.

Whether it be demanding foreign deployments or complex multilateral exercises, we can be sure that our Military Experts will continue to be called upon to sustain the edge of the SAF. Through it all, your SAF values and thirst for more specialist knowledge will prove critical. Embodying these values, ME6 Reuben Lim became the first recipient of the SAF Postgraduate Award for a PhD last year. He is currently pursuing his doctorate at the United Kingdom's Cranfield University. As an air force engineer, ME6 Lim works with ground staff to ensure that maintenance processes and procedures on aircraft are carried out properly. We may buy the same planes as others, but the kind of environment that we fly in is unique. Hence, the challenge for our airforce is that no aircraft manufacturer can tell you exactly how to maintain your aircraft!

Two years ago, the Apache helicopters performed aerobatic displays at a series of air shows. However, there was no way to assess the damage accumulated in the aero-mechanical components as a result of these manoeuvres. Responding to the challenge, ME6 Lim wrote a programme to process data downloaded from the aircraft, which, when replayed, simulated the flight path. With this, he was able to calculate the degree of damage to the aircraft's components and prescribe just the right amount of maintenance.

Make no mistake: this was not a problem overcome solely by advanced mathematics, but also by ingenuity and hardwork.

I have taken the opportunity afforded by this speech to highlight just a few examples of the unique contributions of Senior Military Experts towards sustaining the edge of our SAF. As we can see from the earlier examples, our Military Experts contribute best when they twin specialist domain knowledge with the SAF core values and its military ethos. Similarly, I look forward to hearing of your contributions as you head towards new and exciting challenges. Our Military Experts, Officers and Warrant Officers complement one another to fulfil different roles and functions in the SAF. In order to anchor important capabilities within the SAF, each corps will need its own set of strong leaders.

Finally, I would like to recognise the support provided by your family and loved ones throughout this journey. Your support and encouragement have undoubtedly made a

difference. Please join me in thanking our spouses and family members who are present here today.

It now gives me great pleasure to appoint you Senior Military Experts. I am confident you will discharge your duties professionally and with the highest standards. I wish you all the best as you embark on your journey as Senior Military Experts of the SAF.

Congratulations. Thank you.

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