

Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY MR S DHANABALAN, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND CULTURE,
AT THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY OF SAF OFFICERS
AT THE ISTANA ON FRIDAY, 15 JANUARY 1982 AT 6.30 PM

This evening, 119 officers will be commissioned. For each of you, this marks the beginning of an interesting and important phase of your life, that of an officer in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF). What you have learnt for the past nine months will be put to the test. More important, you will be entrusted with the responsibility of training and moulding national servicemen, to turn them into an effective and formidable fighting force.

However, your contribution to the SAF is not limited to full-time national service only. This part constitutes only a fraction of your service to the nation. Together with your men, you will serve in the reserve after completing your active service. It is here in the reserve, which forms the main bulk of our defence forces, that your service and contribution will be most needed. The importance of the reserve has been emphasized often but its importance cannot be overstated.

For this purpose, MINDEF has, over the last two years, spared no effort to upgrade the reserve. Continual attention has been and will be given to the grooming of reservists to assume higher appointments at the various levels. It is the intention of MINDEF that key appointments in the reserve be gradually filled by the best of the reservists. It is therefore imperative that able reservists be progressively upgraded to administer, train and lead their own men. We must strive to reach the stage where reservists can and will ably run the whole show in the reserve units. Towards this end, increasing numbers of promising reservists will be identified, trained and recycled to assume higher appointments in their units. They will be sent for advanced courses to acquire more knowledge in military tactics and procedures. In the process, this select group of reservists will have to do more in-camp training . This must not

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be looked upon as a penalty for having performed well in the military; on the contrary, it is a distinct honour to be recognised as a man of proven abilities. It is indeed something for you to be proud of.

To upgrade our reserves, we must have the full support of our reservists' employers. Being a young army, we have not reached the stage where most of our employers are also or had been reservists. To enhance the employers' understanding and appreciation of reserve training, more employers will be invited to visit their employees at reserve training from this year onwards. During these visits, they will be shown various aspects of reserve training. There will be dialogue sessions in which relevant policy matters will be explained and discussed. We hope that this will enhance employers' empathy as well as foster greater rapport between the employers and the SAF. Eventually, we need to arrive at a situation in which employers will have positive influence on the sense of commitment of reservists towards their reserve duties.

In addition to the vocational upgrading of selected reservists, it is also essential that every reservist be kept informed and updated on changes in the SAF, particularly on new developments in doctrines, tactics, equipment and weapons. Briefings are already being conducted at the beginning of each in-camp training while formal exchange sessions between active and reserve officers, such as the Reservist Officer Days, are held periodically. In addition, newsletters are also regularly published by the reserve formations. More recently, the coverage of "Pioneer", an SAF monthly publication, has also been widened to cover reservist training and activities. Amidst their civilian demands, our reservists should avail themselves of such information. We can ill afford a situation where our reservists think, talk and fight differently from their active counterparts.

It is in this context that reserve units will be called upon to perform standby duties as from this year. This task has hitherto been carried out only by active units. While on standby, the reserve units are expected to be operationally ready to fulfil all required operational tasks. This will go a long way to remind reservists that they are also our frontline troops.

In conclusion, your commission tonight is only the beginning of your career as an officer in the SAF. In the past, there was a tendency to see this as a short career restricted to your active service only. But by now, you must be quite clear that your responsibilities and commitment to the nation go beyond the remaining 18 months of your active service. It would be wise for you to train yourselves and your men with this thought in mind.

I congratulate each and everyone of you for attaining your commission.

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