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Collision at Sea Findings: Statement by DPM and Minister for Defence, Dr Tony Tan

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This morning, MPA released its investigation report on the collision involving RSS Courageous, which was on operational patrol duty around Pedra Branca on the night of 3 Jan 03.

MPA's findings on the sequence of events leading to the collision are consistent with the findings of SAF's Higher Board of Inquiry.

MINDEF agrees with MPA's conclusion that there were errors of judgement in assessing the situation on the part of the Officer of the Watch (OOW) LTA Ng Keng Yong of RSS Courageous.

The next stage of the investigation process is the Coroner's Inquiry. MINDEF has submitted the findings from SAF's Higher Board of Inquiry to the State Coroner. The Coroner's Inquiry will evaluate the evidence and give its findings on the causes of the accident.

The RSN has drawn important learning points from this incident. While incidents due to human error can never be totally eliminated, measures are being implemented in the RSN to minimise the occurrence of human errors of judgement during operations and training. This involves reinforcing emphasis on the systems already in place and implementing new initiatives focused on enhancing the RSN's training system.

The RSN will continue to ensure that its OOWs are familiar with the application of International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at sea (or COLREGs in short). RSN seaman officers are required to take the COLREGs test every six months. The RSN has also started a programme to equip its officers with a better understanding of the manoeuvring

characteristics of commercial ships and their behaviour in busy seaways. This is to ensure that RSN officers will take appropriate measures vis-a-vis commercial vessels in the event that operational requirements necessitate deviations from the COLREGs.

There are now expert teams sailing on board RSN ships to regularly inspect the conduct of watch-keeping and engineering. This will augment the current system of inspections by the squadrons and higher headquarters. These teams will also promote the sharing of identified good practices across squadrons.

The OOW training system is also being reviewed. A dedicated group of experienced officers has been formed to enhance the OOW training management plan to better prepare trainee OOWs for their qualification as navigating officers on board RSN ships.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Police Coast Guard vessels for their prompt response and their professional and timely actions in rendering assistance to RSS Courageous and her crew. I would also like to thank the Singapore Civil Defence Force for their assistance in our search and recovery operations. This shows the close professional and operational links and camaraderie that exists between the SAF and the Home Team.

This most tragic loss of our four servicewomen is a sober reminder of the risks and dangers that SAF servicemen and women face as they discharge their duties in safeguarding the security of Singapore. While the SAF does everything possible to enhance and ensure safety, we have to accept that military operations are inherently risky and potentially dangerous.

This has certainly been a difficult period for the SAF, and especially for the RSN. But it is in such moments of adversity that the real quality and character of an organisation and its people are revealed. The Navy family rallied together with strength and compassion. The strong bonds enabled the Navy to withstand the shock and respond in the right way.

The RSN has emerged stronger from this setback, and I have every confidence that the RSN will continue to make a vital contribution to protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Singapore.