



SPEECH

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Speech by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister For Defence Teo Chee Hean at 2nd Reading of the Singapore Armed Forces (Amendment) Bill

23 Nov 2009

Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move, 'That the Bill be now read a second time.'

Sir, before I commence with my speech on the bill, I would like to express my deepest condolences to the family of the late LTA Chee Zhi Hao and the family of the late LCP Mar Teng Fong, two servicemen who have been laid to rest this week.

Introduction

The Bill before this House seeks to amend the Singapore Armed Forces Act to effect key enhancements to the military schemes of service for the Singapore Armed Forces. These enhancements will ensure that the SAF can continue to offer an attractive career proposition to bring in and retain capable, committed and competent people for the defence of Singapore.

Strategic Imperatives

The last major review of the SAF career schemes was conducted over a decade ago. The manpower landscape and the needs of the SAF have shifted significantly since then. In particular, we face two strategic HR challenges:

First, the demographic and educational profile of our population is changing. The number of Singaporeans aged 17 to 25 entering the work force each year will start to decline from the year 2015 onwards. Also, young Singaporeans entering the workforce today are better educated and aspire for more challenging and responsible jobs commensurate with their qualifications. Today, 25% of each cohort graduate with degrees while 42% graduate with diplomas. In addition, 50% of diploma holders expect to subsequently go on to obtain degrees. This provides the imperative as well as the opportunity for the SAF to restructure its careers for good diploma level entrants to provide them with better opportunities for self development, job growth and advancement. This will also allow the SAF to make full use of the potential of these servicemen.

Second, the SAF is transforming into a leaner and more potent 3rd Generation SAF that leverages on advanced technology and sophisticated systems. We still need people with leadership ability, dynamism and high levels of physical and mental energy. But in addition, we need people with deeper specialisation, broader knowledge and more experience to fully exploit these advanced technologies; and to operate our more complex military systems.

Our HR policies and schemes of service must therefore evolve to address these strategic challenges.

Strategic Response by MINDEF

Over the last 2 years, MINDEF and the SAF conducted a fundamental review of our military schemes of service, in order to better match the aspirations of our people and potential recruits with the evolving HR needs of the 3rd Generation SAF. We will be making significant changes in three key areas.

New Military Domain Experts Scheme

First, we will introduce a new military uniformed scheme of service in the SAF, called the Military Domain Experts Scheme. This new scheme will complement the existing Officer and Warrant Officer schemes.

The Military Domain Experts Scheme will allow us to build and retain deep professional expertise and experience in critical military domain areas such as technical, engineering and intelligence. It will allow us to fully develop our current servicemen who are in these lines of work. It will also attract the more technologically savvy polytechnic and degree graduates who want to work with cutting-edge systems and advanced technologies, but are less inclined to join the traditional officer or warrant officer schemes. It will also facilitate mid-career professionals with the relevant expertise to join the SAF.

Personnel who join the new scheme will be known as Military Experts. Military Experts will enjoy a longer career with the SAF on full CPF up to age 60. The longer career will allow them time to develop specialisation and deep expertise as well as the necessary experience on the job required for key military domain areas. They will advance along an eight rank structure - Military Expert 1 to 8, with the pinnacle rank being ME8. ME8 will be equivalent to a Brigadier General in terms of job size. The entry rank for degree holders is ME4. Servicemen who hold the rank of ME4 or above will be known as Senior Military Experts.

Military Experts will be given opportunities to upgrade themselves academically and professionally. They will be offered attractive market-based remuneration. Progression will be based on the individual's level of professional expertise and the ability to take on higher professional responsibilities in their expertise domains. On the other hand, in the Officer and Warrant Officer Corps, progression depends significantly on command ability.

Our servicemen who are currently in vocations under the military domain areas identified for the Military Domain Experts Scheme will be given the option to convert to the new scheme

of service. They will be offered a fair package to transit to the new scheme of service.

Enhanced Warrant Officers' Scheme

Second, we will enhance the Warrant Officer scheme of service. Our Warrant Officers form the backbone of the SAF. They set high standards in tactical war-fighting and training, and are the repositories of values and knowledge in the SAF.

With the creation of the Military Domain Experts Scheme, the Warrant Officer Corps will be leaner and more focused. Their jobs will be re-designed and re-structured to focus on combat leadership roles, and to anchor the key SAF competencies in leadership, tactical warfighting expertise, and training supervision. They will continue to work in support of and in partnership with the Officers.

We will introduce a new 3rd Warrant Officer rank. This will allow those with the potential to reach the warrant officer rank to be promoted to a Warrant Officer rank earlier. Under the enhanced scheme, the best can become a warrant officer as early as the end of their 6th year in service compared to 12 years under the current scheme. This new 3rd Warrant Officer rank will be an important milestone to signal to a serviceman that he has the potential to rise up through the warrant officer ranks and hold greater responsibilities. Those who do not attain the 3WO rank can continue in their jobs until their retirement age, at age 50, as long as they are able to contribute. The retirement age for the Warrant Officers will remain unchanged at age 55.

To meet the aspirations of our servicemen to upgrade themselves academically earlier in their career, we will offer early degree sponsorships to promising servicemen with the potential to become Warrant Officers. Currently, they may be sponsored for degree studies only from their 6th year of service. Under the enhanced scheme, we will provide opportunities for them to embark on their studies as early as the end of their 2nd or 3rd year of service.

We target diploma holders with strong leadership qualities to serve as Warrant Officers of the 3rd Generation SAF. These changes will enhance the career proposition and make it more attractive to join the Warrant Officer Corps.

Enhanced Officers' Career Scheme

Third, are the changes being made to the military officers' scheme. The current officer career, which is compact, fast-paced and challenging with a retirement age in the mid-40s, has enabled the SAF to retain a dynamic and forward-looking officer corps. Officers receive a lump-sum payment at the end of their career with the SAF. They then transit to a second career in another part of the Public Service or the private sector.

The 3rd Generation SAF will continue to require dynamic and vigorous leadership. We will thus keep the officer career compact, fast-paced and challenging. At the same time, however, officers in the 3rd Generation SAF need more time serving ground tours and would also need time for more in-depth professional development in military leadership and advanced

operational and technological capabilities.

Hence, instead of retiring in their mid-40s, SAF officers will have their career extended till age 50. This extension is provided for all existing officers, but they have the choice of retiring at the current retirement age with their current retirement benefits. In other words, the option to stay on till age 50 is with the officers, as long as they continue to perform their duties diligently and well.

In addition, the SAF will introduce a new Senior Lieutenant-Colonel rank next year. This new rank will recognise the larger responsibilities and supervisory roles of certain Lieutenant-Colonel appointments in the SAF, for example, the Brigade 2IC appointment.

In summary, we will have 3 military schemes that have distinct roles and functions. The Officer Corps will continue to provide the senior military leadership; the Warrant Officer Corps will provide leadership to the rank and file and take on greater responsibilities in tactical training; the Military Experts will anchor deep professional expertise for key military domain areas for the SAF. Each of these three schemes of service will offer opportunities for personal and professional development, job growth and advancement, so that our servicemen can fulfil their aspirations, and the SAF can benefit fully from their potential. The changes to the SAF's military schemes of service will be implemented on 1 April 2010.

Key Provisions of the Bill

Mr Speaker Sir, the SAF Amendment Bill will provide the proper legal framework to effect the key changes to the military schemes of service for the SAF. Please allow me to highlight some aspects of this Bill.

For the new Military Expert, 3rd Warrant Officer and Senior Lieutenant Colonel ranks, the Bill proposes to amend the various provisions within the SAF Act to fit these new ranks into the current military law and discipline structure, and accord them the relevant disciplinary powers. A new Section 10C has been introduced to provide for the appointment and cancellation of appointment of senior military experts by the President or the Proper Authority. Amendments are also made to Section 118 to reflect the appropriate scale of punishment that such personnel can be awarded by the sentence of a subordinate military court.

A new Section 205D has been proposed to allow for the change of ranks when servicemen are transferred from the Military Domain Experts scheme to the Officers or Warrant Officers schemes. This is intended to cater to two situations.

First, a senior Military Expert might resign or be released from regular service before he completes the prescribed minimum term of service. This minimum term of service is the period of regular service needed before he is deemed to have fulfilled his full-time national service liability. He might then have to be transferred to the Warrant Officer scheme with an appropriate rank to serve out his remaining term of full-time national service.

Second, a senior Military Expert who has served the minimum term of service, and who resigns or is released from the SAF, may have to be assigned to a suitable post to serve his operationally ready national service (ORNS). The amendments in Section 205D provide for the transfer of these ORNS servicemen to the Warrant Officer corps at the appropriate rank to serve their ORNS if there are no suitable MDES appointments. Those who had been commissioned as officers will return to the officer corps in ORNS. This will be done taking into account their background and experience.

In view of the changes made to the SAF Act, there will also be a consequential amendment to the Enlistment Act, which is required to subject senior military experts to the statutory age of 50 for operationally ready national service. The statutory age is the same as that stipulated for officers in operationally ready national service under the same Act.

Conclusion

Sir, the SAF is the guarantor of our national security and peace. The SAF has developed into a strong, credible and highly capable armed forces today because of the quality, character and professionalism of its people. We need to continue to attract able and committed people to the 3rd Generation SAF. The enhancements to the SAF's military schemes of service enable us to continue to do so.

Mr Speaker Sir, I beg to move.

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