

NS Must be Relevant and Responsive to New Generation of Singaporeans: Defence Minister

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Singapore: Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen says Singapore must ensure National Service remains relevant and responsive to a new generation who will defend the country.

And that's the prime reason why the Government started the Committee to Strengthen National Service, which he chairs.

Today, the committee released a slew of measures to recognise and reward National Servicemen, even as he stressed that these benefits must "never ever become a monetary transaction for services rendered".

By 2020, all full-time National Servicemen will have been born in the 21st century, says the Defence Minister.

Dr Ng said since they are raised in affluent Singapore, they would have no direct memories of the country's early struggles.

"They would have been Net natives, socialised to global trends and influences and therefore with lifestyles, outlook and expectations and aspirations different from previous generations. Amid these changes, one constant must remain. We must ensure that National Service remains relevant and responsive to a new generation who will defend Singapore."

Dr Ng noted that the commitment to NS remains strong. In a survey commissioned by the committee and conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies - 98 per cent of all respondents felt that NS is crucial for national defence and for securing Singapore's peace and prosperity.

Dr Ng noted that many Singaporeans had argued against giving servicemen too many benefits, for fear it dilutes what it means to serve the country.

He added there is wisdom and virtue in this advice.

There were also those who suggested NSmen should be recognised for all contributions and compensated for opportunities lost.

"If you were so impractical to say: let's just do it completely with no recognition of benefits, NSmen would feel 'But I do sacrifice and I feel good if there's some recognition, whether it's from the government, or whether it's employers'.

"So we felt this was a balance when we recommended the recognition benefits. But neither did we want to go so far that you monetise or you create a transactional basis where you lose the spirit and ethos of National Service," he said.

Dr Ng said the committee's recommendations are comprehensive.

And while some will effect fundamental change he noted that, if implemented well, Singapore will end up with a National Service system and a strong armed forces that everyone can be proud of.