

NS Could be Shortened by a Few Weeks with More Career Soldiers Hired as Trainers: Dr Ng Eng Hen

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Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen said on Thursday that having more experienced professional career soldiers in units and training schools to teach the fledgling soldiers will make NS training more effective and efficient. Having more seasoned hands will also result in "greater impact on training outcomes, inculcating discipline and transmitting values", he said in Parliament during the debate on his ministry's budget.

Here is an excerpt from Minister Ng's speech in Parliament on March 6:

"I think Singaporeans should be heartened that NS continues to enjoy widespread support. Many of you would have read the independent survey conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies. It was randomised, [and] rigorous in statistical terms. We outsourced it so that it would not be connected to MINDEF.

"They surveyed 1,200 people last July. 98% of respondents acknowledged that NS is crucial for national defence and for securing Singapore's peace and prosperity. When they presented these results to me, I tried very hard to poke holes in their methodology, I said "These were people that you knew would say that defence is important." The researcher was somewhat taken aback and said, "No".

"He defended it well and I kept probing him. He was satisfied that his methodology was rigorous. I know of no issue in Singapore where 98% of the respondents give support. The Committee also engaged nearly 40,000 people from all walks of life to draw ideas and as well as to find ways that we think we can improve.

"I would say that while the majority of Singaporeans support NS, many also said that time committed to the SAF during full-time NS and In-Camp Training (ICTs) could be better utilised. I think that that is fair comment.

"The SAF takes this criticism to heart because those who gave feedback were not asking for lighter loads or less involvement. They in fact wanted NS to better strengthen our national identity and social cohesion, and instil discipline and values, which many members of this House have echoed.

"They said there should be less time wasted and more effective training systems. I agree that these are good outcomes, even if people are committed to NS and that we should find ways to improve the system, seriously look at the system to see if we can improve it. So I asked the SAF to take a serious view, take a serious look. Let me share with members some preliminary responses from the SAF.