

## Committee of Supply

### Debate on the Estimates of Expenditure for the Ministry of Defence

Amendment Speech (2.5 min) by Viswa Sadasivan, NMP

## NSF Enlistment and NS call-up policies

### Preamble

1. Recognising the importance of NS, MINDEF has been fine-tuning the policies and practices governing enlistment and NS call-ups to cater as much as possible to the diverse interests of those affected.
2. In this regard. I have 2 specific suggestions:

### Suggested Areas of Focus

3. First, *Enlistment for full-time NS* - I would suggest that MINDEF give greater thought to how we can make it less inconvenient and stressful for those residing abroad. Firstly, we should be pleased that they are committed enough to do NS. It is important that this goodwill and appreciation is conveyed during the various interactions which start when the enlistee turns 17. This is also the time when the enlistee and his parents are pre-occupied

with university admission - which can be stressful as most overseas universities may not be sympathetic to NS commitment and the need to defer studies for 2 years. The enlistment paper-work can be quite intense, often requiring them to make trips to Singapore, which is costly. Finally, exactly when he is enlisted is a matter of significant consequence to the enlistee. Typically, the university term overseas starts in September. If the enlistee is assigned to an intake after September, say in February, he would miss the university enrolment date two years down. This means he loses an additional year, on top of the 2-year NS. Besides, some universities may not keep the seat for an additional year. Yes, we need to treat all enlistees fairly. But the cost and opportunity cost for overseas enlistees, I believe, is higher. Would MINDEF consider giving greater assurance to affected enlistees that they can defer a few months earlier so that they would not have to miss their university enrolment? This would provide much needed comfort and peace of mind - resulting in the enlistee doing NS in a positive frame of mind.

4. ***Second, Call-ups for NSmen*** - There are instances where NSmen are called up for in-camp training twice in a calendar year, which can be very disruptive for the NSmen and their employers. This happens because MINDEF works on a fiscal year basis which means that if you are called up in January and then again after March - it registers as 2 separate years. But for the NSman and his employer, work

commitments and leave are on the basis of the calendar year. This anomaly needs to be rationalised as they can erode goodwill and commitment in good NSmen and employers.

## **Conclusion**

5. I would like to end by acknowledging that it is not easy to cater to the interests of such a large and diverse group. But when we see a policy or practice inadvertently affecting a significant number of enlistees which could erode commitment we need to go the extra mile. The system should send a strong signal to those who evade, and an equally strong signal to those who step forward to serve.
  
  6. Mr Chairman, Sir, I thank you.
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