



SPEECH

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SPEECH BY SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENCE, MR HENG CHEE HOW, FOR THE 22ND SENIOR MILITARY EXPERT APPOINTMENT CEREMONY (SMEAC) ON 12 JANUARY 2022

Senior Commanders,
Graduands of the 22nd SAF Senior Military Expert Course,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Introduction

1. My heartiest congratulations to all 97 newly appointed Senior Military Experts (ME). Your course has been a challenging but meaningful one, and you and your loved ones should be proud of your achievements today.

2. This milestone marks the start of your journey as Senior MEs and leaders in the SAF. You are now entrusted with the responsibility to lead the servicemen and women under your charge, while ensuring that the SAF continues to strengthen its operational edge across multiple domains. I have full confidence that you will discharge your responsibilities with integrity, excellence and dedication.

SAF's continued fight against COVID-19

3. 2021 was a challenging year as we continued our fight against COVID-19. The SAF made important contributions to the Whole-of-Government effort against this pandemic. Last year, when there was a sudden surge in COVID-19 cases within the community, we stood up the

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Home Recovery Task Group quickly to assist the Ministry of Health's Home Recovery Programme, ensuring that our national healthcare system retained sufficient capacity for patients who required advanced medical care. We continued our support for the Contact Tracing Task Group, to assist in contact tracing efforts. We supported MOH's Home Vaccination Operations to boost the vaccination take-up rate amongst vulnerable groups like our senior citizens. Our medical personnel were also deployed to augment operations at two COVID-19 Treatment Facilities.

4. Our fight against COVID-19 is far from over. During these uncertain times, our people are our greatest strength. And this includes MEs, who have played crucial roles in ensuring mission success in our nation's battle against the pandemic. Now just let me highlight a few examples. ME5 Jonathan Ng, an Air Force Engineer by training, led the innovation team within the Home Recovery Task Group (HRTG). Using his expertise from his day job as a senior data engineer in the Air Engineering and Logistics Department, he helped digitalise the workflow for patient management. Amongst many contributions, his team helped develop an automated oximeter reminder system for home recovery patients in less than a week. These efforts significantly expanded the capacity of the HRTG to manage more cases with a shorter turn-around time. Many of you here today also contributed in one way or another. ME4 Sherilyn Yeo, from the Naval Logistics Command, was deployed as an executive officer to the Contact Tracing Task Group. Her diligence and ability to guide her team mates to manage complex cases won praise from our Ministry of Health counterparts.

5. There are many other MEs who rose to the occasion when the SAF was called upon to support the national effort against COVID-19. I cannot list all of them today, but common to all are the innovative and dynamic spirit to go above and beyond to employ their domain skills in new situations, their dedication to the mission, and the resilience and ability to overcome daunting challenges.

Maintaining the SAF's edge

6. Even during this pandemic, other security threats loom. Singapore remains a prime target for terrorist attacks, and threats such as lone-wolf attacks by self-radicalised individuals

continue to be a distinct possibility. The increase in digital adoption and communication among Singaporeans during the pandemic also leaves us at greater risk from cyber threats and harmful disinformation. Beyond our shores, the geopolitical outlook remains uncertain, and we cannot discount the potential escalation of underlying tensions that will affect our region's stability. It is therefore imperative that the SAF remains focused on its primary mission of safeguarding Singapore's security and sovereignty – a mission in which all of you will continue to play an important role in your future appointments.

7. To this end, the SAF has progressively resumed training in a safe manner, with the conduct of key exercises such as the Exercise Bersama Gold and Exercise Safkar Indopura in Singapore, Exercise Pacific Griffin and Exercise Forging Sabre in the United States, and Exercise Wallaby in Australia. Our MEs played a key role in ensuring that these exercises were conducted effectively, safely and smoothly. For example, to enhance safety during Exercise Wallaby, the team led by ME4 Teo Liang Kai, an Army engineer from the 9th Army Maintenance Base, worked with the Republic of Singapore Air Force and Singapore Civil Defence Force to develop a new and improved process for medical extrication support by winching medical teams down from a Chinook helicopter. This replaced the traditional process for the helicopter to land at a dedicated landing zone, with the medical team driving to the incident site. Doing so enhanced the safety coverage for the exercise throughout the entire training area, which was about four times the size of Singapore. It also ensured that casualties could be extricated and evacuated swiftly to the nearest hospital. This embodies the 'can-do' spirit of our MEs, and their ability to work with partners to find innovative solutions for effective and safe operations and training.

Stepping up to future challenges

8. Even as we deal with the challenges of the present, we cast our eyes on the future. Past generations of SAF servicemen and women have laid the foundations for the strong SAF that we have today. We must build on what we have been entrusted with to make the SAF ever stronger and better. As we build towards SAF2040, the SAF will continue to harness new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, robotics and data analytics to give our soldiers the edge in future warfighting.

9. As Senior MEs, all of you are key to this transformation. Innovation is a key strength of the ME corps. Let me highlight two examples of how our MEs are already developing creative solutions to improve processes in the SAF.

10. The first example is ME5 Tang Jun Wen and his team from the Naval Logistics Command. They won the MINDEF Exemplary Innovator Award in 2021, with a project to simplify the gun alignment procedure on naval ships. This eliminated the need to sail the ships to perform the gun alignment for accurate targeting, which previously took up to 5 days depending on weather and sea conditions. With the new process developed by ME5 Tang and his team, the Republic of Singapore Navy can now perform this procedure in just 4 hours – so if you divide it, you will find that it is a 30-fold reduction in turn-around time.

11. The second example is the team led by ME4 Ryan Goh, a Military Intelligence Expert, who developed an in-house programme to streamline and automate information processing for subsequent analysis. In doing so, they sought constant feedback from colleagues to ensure that the programme was intuitive for users and would fulfil operational needs. Their work has helped the Military Intelligence corps reduce data processing time by 50%, and saved the SAF over a hundred thousand dollars in developmental costs.

12. The examples of ME5 Tang, ME4 Goh and their colleagues highlight the importance of your role as the SAF's domain experts. You form the nexus between the operations and the technology communities, helping to translate and operationalise these new capabilities for the SAF. You are the best people to do so as you understand the unique requirements of our operational warfighters, while working closely with the wider defence community to ensure that our capabilities are fit for purpose.

Conclusion

13. I would now also like to extend our gratitude to the families and loved ones of our graduands. To the families and friends of our graduands, thank you so much for supporting

our graduands, shouldering many of their responsibilities. It is because of your support that they are here today as successful graduands of this demanding course.

14. To the graduands, the road ahead will be fraught with many tough challenges. As Senior MEs, you have the responsibility to lead the men and women under your charge, and chart new ground for the SAF. So, lead with courage, and serve with your heart. Never forget why you serve, and make meaningful contributions in your new roles.

15. Once again, congratulations to our newly appointed Senior MEs. I wish you all the very best and may you have a fulfilling career ahead in the service of our country.

16. Thank you.

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