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Still room to address inefficiencies in NS

FROM KWAN JIN YAO

I refer to the commentary “Why full-time NS can’t be shortened” (June 18).

Mr Ho Shu Huang’s first point, that full-time National Service (NS) in Singapore cannot be shortened simply because of shorter periods of conscription in other countries, is valid. Dissimilar geographical and geopolitical features should be accounted for and Mr Ho also asserts that training standards are much more rigorous in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF).

Furthermore, any such discourse should include analyses of the impact following the reduction or elimination of conscription.

Take Sweden, for instance: Compulsory military service ended in 2010, but recent statements made by the Supreme Commander of the Swedish Armed Forces — cited in a Centre for Eastern Studies publication — have given rise to concerns over the country’s overall defence capabilities.

Yet, this should not preclude debates on the length of NS. Mr Ho

reckons technology is “a force multiplier” and “a double-edged sword”: Efficiency can be — and has been — increased, but only if soldiers develop effective proficiency.

However, the suggestion that soldiers require more time to get used to new technologies seems a little out of place. Growing up in an Internet- and gadget-powered environment, this new generation of conscripts is likely to be adept with these new roles and responsibilities. When the Ministry of Defence announced in 2004 that the duration of full-time NS would be reduced, it explained that a “key driver” was the “transformation to the 3rd Generation SAF”.

Mr Ho’s claim that “a certain amount of inefficiency in NS might actually be desirable”, citing opportunities for bonding, is even more puzzling.

This ignores the structural reasons for these inefficiencies, which many who have gone through NS can attest to. A waste of time is a waste of time. Why not solve these problems, which may then translate into less time required of each serviceman?

Second, he has conflated “periods of idle time” with rest-and-recovery time between field exercises or sessions. The latter is crucial. But the “wasted time” many allude to often arises out of shortcomings and should be minimised.

I reaffirm the significance of NS in Singapore, but there is room for improvement. First-hand insights can only be enriched by a greater comprehension of Singapore’s broader defence and operational policies, facilitated through more intimate sharing sessions. We should bridge the disconnect between the command and the men on the ground.

Haze: Not just a domestic affair

FROM DANIEL KOH KAH SOON

I am glad our ministers have conveyed our concerns to their Indonesian counterparts about the unhealthy level of haze coming from Indonesia. The Indonesian government should take the initiative to address the problem with the help of countries such as Singapore and Malaysia, because the haze originated from there.

If the haze was caused by farmers using the slash-and-burn method to prepare the ground for new crops, the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations can come together to help farmers find

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better ways of preparing the soil.

If it was caused by companies owned by Malaysian or Singaporean business groups, name them and take them to court.

What the Indonesian officials should not do is to say that “foreign parties should not be interfering with our domestic affairs”, as reported in “S’pore leaders want firms causing haze to be named” (June 19).

No one wishes to “interfere” with Indonesia’s internal affairs. But when domestic problems encroach on other territories, the affected countries have every right to request for clear and credible action to be taken.

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