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Caldecott Broadcast Centre,
 Andrew Road, Singapore 299939
 Tel: 6236 4888 | Fax: 6534 4217

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Encourage debate on National Service

FROM **KWAN JIN YAO**

That Singapore needs a strong military, in which conscription continues to feature, is hard to dispute, and Mr Ho Shu Huang's commentary "How do people view national security?" (Feb 17) makes a strong case for a long-term defence posture.

But it is less clear whether those who give priority to national defence can be persuaded that these "long-term security concerns cannot unconditionally eclipse immediate and real bread-and-butter concerns".

In this vein, to shape perceptions of National Service, younger Singaporeans should be involved in related discussions. The perceived absence of threats necessitates stronger engagement on the "vulnerability" narrative

“How should the Government respond to bright-eyed suggestions that Singapore, sans a sizeable force, can rely on diplomatic overtures or its allies when crisis strikes?”

Mr Ho emphasised.

However, such discourse should not be didactic. Instead of overwhelming participants with talking points or rehashed arguments, they should be encouraged to articulate personal perspectives.

There may have been missed opportunities during the Committee to Strengthen NS endeavour, when little attention was given to the pillars of defence and deterrence upon which conscription is premised.

Young Singaporeans should be asked for feedback beyond the present suite of surveys and convinced through

conversations, not refrains such as the maintenance of a "defence posture", which might be eclipsed by more immediate worries as Mr Ho mentioned.

For instance, how do they value the military and its conscription policies? Do perceptions change after NS?

Are they convinced by the prevailing narrative, and how should the Government respond to bright-eyed suggestions that Singapore, sans a sizeable force, can rely on diplomatic overtures or its allies when crisis strikes?

The answers might seem straightforward for the Government, yet it is the engagement process that matters. Tedious as it may be, individuals should not be told why conscription is necessary, but be encouraged to debate its relevance.

Learn from Japan's woes as S'pore curbs foreign labour

FROM **JUNE CHEAH-NICHOLLS**

In "Bring back 'keep clean' campaign" (Feb 13), the letter writer equated a growing population to declining cleanliness standards here, which is unfortunate at best.

She wrote also that "cleaning staff were stationed" at restrooms in certain Asian cities to keep the facilities

clean. It is in exactly that, manpower, that Singapore is at a disadvantage.

It has been noted that Singapore is a clean city because of cleaners, and not yet as a direct consequence of, or inherent within, its national psyche.

No matter how many campaigns as are necessary, one issue that will not be resolved is the manpower crunch, which is already hampering social and national interests at different levels. It is only 15 years before a fifth of the population will be categorised as aged.

But many have seemingly not grasped the relationship between an ageing population, competition and globalisation, as well as the huge impact of such demographics on the socioeconomic and political landscape.

“Many have seemingly not grasped the relationship between an ageing population, competition and globalisation, and the huge impact of such demographics on the socioeconomic and political landscape.”

Ageing is expensive for any country, money- and manpower-wise.

Japan, in the grips of a low birth rate and an ageing population, has opened up its workforce recently to the highest performers from around the region.

Singapore has a head start, but as policies are being reversed, let us hope that Japan's woes is a lesson learnt before Singapore, too, loses its hard-earned advantage in this region and its place in the world.

If we are serious about valuing seniors and their contributions to making Singapore what it is today, the realities befalling us must become national priorities before ageing and manpower issues overwhelm us.

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