

## Hiring for SAF's new fourth service to start in July, centre for digital ops to be set up



More details about the size of the force, its uniform and insignia will be made known to the public later. PHOTO: MINDEF



**Clement Yong**

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SINGAPORE - The Singapore Armed Forces' new fourth service will commence hiring within weeks, while its core training and operations facilities such as a new centre for digital operations and a facility to host multilateral cyber exercises will also be set up in the same time frame.

The Ministry of Defence said on Thursday (June 30) that it will be proposing legislation in Parliament next week to officially set up the Digital and Intelligence Service (DIS). If this change to the Constitution is approved, it will pave the way for the DIS to hold its inauguration parade as early as the year-end.

This comes three months after Mindef first announced its intention to create a new standalone service meant to better coordinate and improve Singapore's cyber defence and intelligence gathering in March, during the ministry's budget debate.

More details about the size of the force, its uniform and insignia will be made known to the public later.

Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen revealed these during an interview with the media in conjunction with the 55th anniversary of the SAF on Thursday (June 30), where he reiterated Singapore's need for the new service given recent geopolitical developments such as the continued cyber attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure.

The bolstering of Singapore's military capabilities comes amid increased contestation following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February. Dr Ng said the rhetoric around international collaboration has become more aligned with countries' ideologies and values, rather than the realpolitik approach mainly taken in the past few decades.

"There will be no more thought of cooperation, let alone integration. There are shades of the 1930s when Germany invaded Czechoslovakia, and Asia is not immune," Dr Ng said.

"Already, alliances are reshaping in Asia, either newly formed or strengthened along different fault lines. I'm sure the reconfigurations are ongoing as we speak, as different countries change their calculus of geopolitics - the prism which they use to see another country, whether it is likely (a) friend or foe."

The DIS's new Digital Ops-Tech Centre will be a coordinating space for Singapore's digital expertise, with SAF partnering the defence technology community, the Government's other digital agencies, academia and industry.

Meanwhile, a new Centre of Excellence for Cyber Range will be the focus of many DIS operatives' training. Mindef said it will be capable of simulating a suite of realistic scenarios such as enterprise information systems and critical information systems and will host exercises with commercial and military partners, here and from overseas.

Dr Ng said the chief of the fourth arm will be appointed at the end of the year, and that DIS will form its own National Day Parade contingent by next year, to march alongside contingents from other arms in the army, air force and navy.



The SAF will also be appointing a Chief Digitalisation Officer (CDO) to lead and drive the SAF's digital transformation to make up for manpower loss due to falling birth rates. The CDO - distinct from the DIS chief - will set priorities and targets across the SAF for digitalisation, and will report to the Chief of Defence Force.

With Covid-19 now in the rearview mirror of the military, Dr Ng said overseas exercises have resumed and will match or exceed pre-pandemic levels, with some 4,000 troops to go overseas later in the year for training in Australia and hundreds more to Brunei once exercises there resume in August.

The delivery date of the first Invincible-class submarine, however, has once more been delayed from this year to 2023.

Other assets are still on schedule, after taking into account supply chain delays during Covid-19.

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In the coming months, the air force's first A330 Smart Multi-Role Tanker Transport, which will be able to refuel planes in midair automatically, should reach Singapore's shores, while a Next-Generation Howitzer gun will be delivered from 2024 and four F-35 Joint Strike Fighters in 2026.

Dr Ng said his ministry continues to commit to making the SAF worthwhile both for full-time national servicemen and operationally-ready national servicemen.



The SAF understands it has to stay attractive to young people in a tight labour market, in particular focusing on maximising soldiers' contributions through professional accreditation and academic qualifications of the skills they gain during their time in the military, he said.

A new scheme, for example, lets those who graduated from nautical studies or marine engineering diplomas to have their sea-time serving on the navy's ships be recognised for seafarer certificates issued by the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore.

The first batch of digital specialists sponsored by the SAF to take courses in Nanyang Technological University will enlist early next year, and new recruits can look forward to more such collaborations with tertiary institutions.

Dr Ng said the SAF is now more important than ever to protecting Singapore.

"It's anybody's guess how long peace can continue in Asia. The risk of confrontation is no longer trivial, let alone zero. We are working on that basis," he said.

"In security terms, it is not possible to predict exact change... Singaporeans must gird ourselves for a troubled decade ahead, or even longer. The SAF will do its part - it will stand vigilant to guard Singapore's peace and sovereignty."

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