

Hiring for SAF's new cyber service to start this month

Digital operations centre, facility to host multilateral cyber exercises to be set up

Clement Yong

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

The Ministry of Defence said yesterday that it will be proposing legislation in Parliament next week to officially set up the Digital and Intelligence Service (DIS). If approved, the DIS could hold its inauguration parade as early as the year end.

This comes some three months after Mindef first said at the ministry's budget debate in March that it is creating a new stand-alone service to better coordinate and improve Singapore's cyber defence and intelligence gathering.

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 yesterday ahead of the 55th anniversary of the SAF, where he reit-



Full-time national servicemen undergoing cyber-security training at the Cyber Defence Test and Evaluation Centre. The Ministry of Defence will be proposing legislation in Parliament to officially set up the Singapore Armed Forces' fourth service, the Digital and Intelligence Service. PHOTOS: MINDEF

erated 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. 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 integra-

tion. 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... 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' new Digital Ops-Tech Centre will be a coordinating space for Singapore's digital expertise, with the 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 train DIS operatives. Mindef said it will be capable of simulating a suite of realistic scenarios such as enterprise information systems and critical information systems. It will also host exercises with commercial and military partners, here and from overseas.

The SAF will also be appointing a Chief Digitalisation Officer (CDO) to lead and drive the SAF's digital transformation. The CDO – distinct from the DIS chief – will set priorities and targets across the SAF for digitalisation, and will re-

port to the Chief of Defence Force.

With Covid-19 now in the SAF's rear-view mirror, 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 next month.

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

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

In the coming months, the air force will receive its first A330 Smart Multi-Role Tanker Transport that can refuel planes in midair automatically, 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 for both full-time national servicemen and operationally-ready national servicemen, such as by maximising soldiers' contributions through professional accreditation and academic certification of the skills they gain while in the military.

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 of such collaborations with tertiary institutions.

Dr Ng said the SAF is now more important than ever in the task of 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," he said.

"Singaporeans should gird ourselves for a troubled decade ahead, or even longer."

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SAF personnel dismounting from a Terrex Infantry Carrier Vehicle during Exercise Tiger Balm, a bilateral exercise between the Singapore Army and US Army, last month. Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen said overseas exercises have resumed and will match or exceed pre-pandemic levels, with some 4,000 troops to go for training in Australia later in the year and hundreds more to Brunei next month.