

SECOND PHASE OF PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS TO START AUG 30

Camera phones allowed in 15 more SAF camps

Move will help NSmen balance In-Camp Training duties with other commitments

XUE JIANYUE
 xuejianyue@mediacorp.com.sg

SINGAPORE – Servicemen can take their camera phones to designated places in 15 more Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) camps from next month, the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) announced yesterday, bringing the number of such camps to 29.

This move, to allow flexibility and minimise disruption to servicemen in camps, was announced during a meeting by the Committee to Strengthen National Service (CSNS), which reviewed feedback from the first wave of public consultations conducted between May and this month.

The meeting discussed, among many things, measures to help civilian soldiers better balance their In-Camp Training duties with other commitments outside camp.

Camera phones have been allowed in less-sensitive zones of 14 camps since last September, as part of a pilot programme dividing camps into two security zones, Green Zone and Red Zone.

*** THE 15 CAMPS**

- Amoy Quee Camp, Bukit Panjang Camp, Dieppe Barracks, Jurong Camp I & III, Kaki Bukit Camp, Keat Hong Camp, Kranji Camp I, Lim Chu Kang Camp, Mandai Camp II, Mandai Hill Camp, Nee Soon Camp, Selarang Camp, Sembawang Camp, Stagmont Camp, Tanjong Gul Camp



Minister for Defence Ng Eng Hen having lunch with full-time national servicemen yesterday at Sembawang Camp after chairing the CSNS' 3rd Steering Committee meeting. PHOTO: OOI BOON KEONG

These devices were permitted in the Green Zones but not in the more sensitive Red Zones, where classified information and equipment are processed and managed.

For civilian soldiers, known as operationally ready national servicemen (NSmen), the removal of camera phone restrictions means they can check work email on their personal smartphones. "We are all very connected on the Internet," said Mr Allan Lim, who sits on the CSNS Steering Committee. "A lot of our work is done just looking at emails and approving stuff."

Allowing access to email will keep NSmen in touch with critical decision-making processes at work, allowing employers to value their contributions to National Service, said Mr Lim, who is Chief Executive Officer of Alpha Biofuels. Besides, work will not pile up during week-long ICTs and stress out NSmen, said Mr Lim.

Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen had in March convened a committee to conduct a comprehensive review of the support network around NS, as the Government seeks to reinforce one of the key pillars of national security.

A total of 17 focus group discussions were held during the first phase of public consultations, which concluded this month. Active servicemen, parents, women, grassroots members, employers and even junior college students shared thoughts on the importance of NS and the level of community support it should receive.

Participants discussed NS' role in building national identity, opportunities for NSmen to optimise defence contributions and improving recognition and support for servicemen.

They also talked about enhancing efficiency and effectiveness and NS administration. The first phase, described as "largely divergent" by CSNS member Bervyn Lee, was designed to gather as much feedback as possible.

The second phase of public consultations will start on Aug 30 and focus on gathering ideas to be considered for CSNS policy recommendations.

Discussions at this phase will be more targeted, said Mr Lee, who is Director of the Office of Student Life at Singapore Management University. He said: "The challenge is to deliver actionable ideas after the second phase."

It was reported in March that the committee would complete its work within one year.