

SAF putting 'best people in the best positions'

But Mindef also aware people can be blackmailed, says defence minister

By **JERMYN CHOW**
DEFENCE CORRESPONDENT

SAF personnel are deployed to sensitive units in the armed forces based on their ability and beliefs.

This is to ensure that they do not pose a security risk, said Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen.

Race is not the issue, he added. He also disclosed that there are

now Malays deployed aboard ships as sailors who go out to sea.

Previously, Malays in the navy were only posted as "sea soldiers", who primarily patrolled naval bases.

The minister was speaking to a 200-strong crowd of students, academics in a forum organised by the National University of Singapore and the Government's feed-

back arm Reach.

Responding to the question on why Malays had previously been excluded from the navy, Dr Ng said that it was a "practical issue" of having halal-certified kitchens aboard ships.

"(This is) because in a confined space, it is hard to have a halal kitchen. If you spend months out at sea, it is difficult."

But provisions have been made for Malay Muslims who are willing to serve, said Ng.

"So we made and found some accommodation and started to have Malays in the navy as well, if

the person is willing."

He also reiterated that Malays now serve in the army, navy and air force, adding that with Singapore's small population, the SAF does not discriminate against anyone and promotes its service-men based on their ability.

"We want to get the maximum out of each person in the SAF... we are putting the best people in the best positions."

But for sensitive positions in the military, the SAF is not blind to the fact that "people can be blackmailed", said Dr Ng.

"We ask ourselves: 'can we

trust this person in that position to make sure he will not be made use of, that he will not be vulnerable?' "

During the 90-minute forum, the defence minister also fielded other questions including women doing National Service and how to make it more meaningful to serve the country.

Dr Ng said that close to 800 people had signed up for the newly formed SAF Volunteer Corps, which will enlist its first batch of trainees at the end of next month.

He also called on the younger generation to challenge new ideas and shun conventional norms and to build on the achievements of the pioneers.

"We need to have a population that explores, believes, has its own heroes, good heroes, celebrates its achievements and weeps at moments where there is a collective grief.

"We are not there yet, but in the next 50 years, Singapore will reach (that stage)."

✉ jermyn@sph.com.sg