

**59TH WAR MEMORIAL SERVICE IN COMMEMORATION OF THE
CIVILIAN VICTIMS OF THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION AND
TOTAL DEFENCE DAY COMMEMORATION 2026**

SPEECH BY SCCCI PRESIDENT KHO CHOON KENG

15 FEBRUARY 2026

WAR MEMORIAL PARK ALONG BEACH ROAD

Mr Desmond Lee, Minister for Education, Minister-in-Charge of Social Services Integration,

Your Excellencies,

SAF Representatives, Religious Leaders,

Teachers and Students, Distinguished Guests,

Good morning.

1. Since the Civilian War Memorial was unveiled in 1967, the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry (SCCCI) has held this War Memorial Service on the 15th of February every year without fail. This year marks the 59th War Memorial Service. Together with the families of the civilian victims and our fellow Singaporeans, we honour and remember the civilians who passed away during the Japanese Occupation in Singapore. In conjunction with Total Defence Day, we also reflect on the importance of national security and defence. It is only by remembering history, staying vigilant in times of peace, upholding the spirit of harmony and unity, and upholding the belief that we must “have a country to have a home”, that we can safeguard our homeland and ensure that our future generations continue to enjoy the peace, stability and prosperity we have today.
2. In the face of geopolitical tensions, the rules-based global order established after World War II is increasingly under strain, with conflicts and disputes in different parts of the world. As a small nation with no natural resources and relies heavily on international

trade, these developments have profound implications for Singapore. In the recent Budget 2026, Prime Minister Lawrence Wong highlighted the importance of investing in national defence and security to keep Singapore safe and secure in a far more complex threat environment. PM Wong emphasised that Singapore's greatest strength lies not just in our policies and plans, but in the spirit of our people — our unity, inclusiveness and commitment to multiracial harmony.

3. At the same time, with the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies, national security threats have expanded beyond traditional military domains into the digital and cyber spheres. We must keep pace with these developments and continue strengthening Singapore's defence capabilities. Last year, the Ministry of Defence established the Digital Defence Hub that works and supports the Cyber Security Agency (CSA) to counter sophisticated cyber threats and risks.
4. To help our younger generation better understand and respond to these evolving challenges, we are honoured to have Minister Desmond Lee with us today to launch our new initiative, "Eternal Vigilance: Digital Learning Journey".
5. We are proud that this initiative was jointly conceptualised and developed by students from Nanyang Girls' High School and interns from the National University of Singapore. This interactive e-booklet presents a fictional scenario in which World War II historical archives have been corrupted by a mysterious "virus", guiding students to explore five key historical monuments in chronological order to restore these archives. Through this learning journey, I hope participants will gain a deeper appreciation of the hardships and resilience of our forefathers. They held fast to their convictions and values amid turmoil, emerged from darkness, and built Singapore into the prosperous nation today. This also marks our first collaboration with local illustrator Mr Alan Bay, whose vivid comic illustrations bring history to life by connecting the lessons of the past and the challenges of the present. Through this engaging approach, we hope students will develop a stronger sense of connection with our history and carry forward the indomitable spirit of our pioneers.

6. This year also marks SCCCI's 120th anniversary. From the colonial era and World War II to independence and nation-building, SCCCI has stood alongside Singapore through every chapter of its history, contributing to and witnessing the nation's growth and transformation. The perseverance, resilience and selfless dedication of our forefathers during the most challenging times remain a powerful source of inspiration today. As we navigate an increasingly complex and uncertain global environment, these enduring values continue to serve as our compass and form the bedrock of Singapore's sustained stability and prosperity.
7. To carry forward the timeless wisdom and spirit of our forefathers, SCCCI will continue to play an active and leading role in supporting national defence, strengthening economic resilience, as well as fostering unity and patriotism among Singaporeans. We will also continue to encourage employers to support their male employees to serve their National Service, assist enterprises to strengthen their readiness, develop robust Business Continuity Plans, and diversify supply chains. Through a multi-pronged approach aligned with national priorities, we remain committed to strengthening Singapore's overall resilience and preparedness for the future.
8. In closing, I express my deepest condolences to the civilian victims of the Japanese Occupation and their families. Let us stand united in defending our nation and securing a brighter future for our children and generations to come. Thank you.
