

Featured in this edition: Total Defence Convention

Key Insights


The inaugural Total Defence (TD) Convention was held in conjunction with the 40th anniversary of Total Defence at the Shaw Foundation Alumni House on 25 Apr 2024. Themed "Building Societal Resilience and Readiness in Crises and Disruptions", the convention aimed to rally and strengthen partnerships within the TD community.

Jointly organised by Nexus and the National University of Singapore, the convention featured a diverse line-up of both local and international speakers. Over 250 key partners and practitioners participated in the convention.

Keynote Address from Senior Minister of State for Defence, Mr Zaqy Mohamad

Speaking to the convention participants, SMS Zaqy emphasised the continued relevance of Total Defence for a strong and resilient Singapore.

“



Total Defence is not just about crisis response. It is about building resilience and readiness consistently... our strategies for preparedness must therefore evolve in tandem, so that Singapore stands ready to respond.

”

Read the Keynote Address by SMS Zaqy here: <https://go.gov.sg/smszaqyspeech>



Plenary 1: Building Societal Resilience

Participants uncovered perspectives and experience on building societal resilience from Sweden, New Zealand and Singapore from various speakers:



Mr Tor-Björn Åstrand
Swedish Psychological
Defence Agency



Mr David Gawn
New Zealand National Emergency
Management Agency



Ms Dawn Yip
SG Govt
Partnerships Office

(i) What is Societal Resilience and Why is it Important?

- Societal resilience is the **first line of defence and a key enabler** when it comes to defending one's nation.
- It is the ability to:
 - **Anticipate** and resist disruptive events;
 - **Minimise** adverse impacts and be able to respond effectively;
 - **Maintain** or recover functionality; and
 - **Adapt** in a way that allows for learning and thriving.



In Sweden, resilience is included in its defence posture and their TD framework includes being prepared from peacetime to crisis.



In New Zealand, societal cohesion is developed and nurtured before a crisis, rather than during a crisis. This is pertinent for a country well-characterised by natural disasters and hazards.

(ii) How to build Societal Resilience?



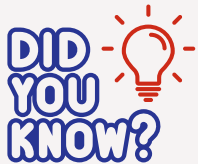
In Sweden, it starts with commitment and leadership, and a need for a systematic approach, and an understanding of one's vulnerabilities.



In New Zealand, resilience support is enabled at three levels; (1) locally led; (2) regionally supported; and (3) nationally enabled.



In Singapore, strong institutions and policies contribute to societal resilience. Deepening partnerships between Government and citizens is the next bound of resilience.



The SGPO is a new office set-up on 19 Jan 2024 to strengthen the government's partnerships and engagements with citizens.

Read about what the SGPO does and how you can partner them here!
<https://go.gov.sg/aboutsgpo>



Plenary 2: Readiness in Disruptions and Crises

Participants drew lessons from the healthcare, social, philanthropic and business sectors to understand success factors in building societal readiness from various speakers:



Prof Kenneth Mak
Ministry of Health,
Singapore



Mr Sim Gim Guan
Singapore National
Employers Federation



Ms Joanne Ng
Temasek
Foundation



Prof Anna Hornidge
German Institute of
Development and
Sustainability



Healthcare Sector

- Crisis management in Singapore adopts an **integrated approach** and involves a whole-of-society partnership.
- Resilience in outbreaks requires **flexibility in mindset shifts**.
- **Maintaining public trust** was key to success.



Social/Philanthropic Sector

- Three ways to elevate societal readiness: **(1) Peacetime Preparation; (2) Public-Private Partnerships; and (3) Engage the Community**.
- Ground-up groups were very important enablers. As such, we can consider channeling resources or funds to support ground-up groups or projects during peacetime too.

Read more about the OSCAR fund here.

<https://go.gov.sg/oscarfund>



Business Sector

- **Employment is the foundational social support** we can provide to citizens.
- Companies are microcosm of societies: explore strengthening of bonds within companies through Corporate Social Responsibility projects.
- Individuals must up-skill and re-skill to remain career resilient. With trained workers, businesses increase their competitive advantage, and undertake transformation efforts.



How to Build Societal Readiness as an International Community?

- Common challenges facing the international community are climate change, multilateralism, and a multipolar world.
- Besides being ready nationally, international cooperation is needed in a time of global disorder.

Fireside Chat with Mr Lim Siong Guan on “Total Defence – Origin. Evolution. What’s Next?”

These were some points raised by former Head Civil Service and former Permanent Secretary(Defence), Mr Lim Siong Guan.



1984: “The National Defence Concept”



When incepted in 1984, TD aimed to **rally all Singaporeans behind the Singapore Armed Forces**, should we face a conventional military threat.

TD was also envisioned to **build up the people's commitment** during peacetime to **stand up for Singapore** and maintain the peace that we cherish. This observation was made as servicemen needed the support of their families and the community to believe in their cause, too.

Relevance of TD amidst increasingly complex challenges

Total Defence is even more important now than when it was first conceptualised.

To ensure the relevance of TD, Singapore needs to learn from the past, adapt to the present, and anticipate the future.



When we think about TD, we should consider this question “How do we provide the best way we can for the survivability and sustainability of Singapore?”

On what his hopes for Singapore are:

“ Singapore can be the best place in the world where its citizens can have the best opportunity to develop their talents and abilities the best way possible. ”

Thoughts on key challenges faced by Singapore



External Environment



Social Divide



Shrinking Singaporean Core

The hidden wealth of nations lies in the quality of relationship between the citizens of the land. But often, governments do not pay much attention to this because this has to be delivered by the citizens themselves in the way they interact with one another, and cannot be through direct intervention and action by the government - Government has to position itself as active nurturer and facilitator, and be comfortable with citizen initiative.

How can TD be made relevant for youths these days, and how we can involve them in discussions of TD?

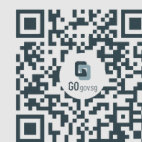
Survivability was a pressing concern for post-war Singaporeans. They developed an implicit trust in the national leadership through smart policy delivery by the government. Today’s young Singaporeans, and even their parents, did not live through the trauma of separation from Malaysia in 1965.



The future for Singapore **lies in being a highly innovative and creative nation**. This requires a renewed push on TD, especially on Social and Psychological Defence, at the same time, because a focus simply on innovativeness and creativity could undermine the TD fundamentals which assure deterrence and the survivability of Singapore.



<https://go.gov.sg/feedbacknif>
or email us at nexus@defence.gov.sg



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