

1. TOTAL DEFENCE DAY 2021

On the evening of 14 Feb, Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen delivered his Total Defence Day video message, where he spoke about the power of Singapore's Total Defence, demonstrated in our fight against COVID-19. Here are the key points:



- Singaporeans were **united against a common enemy**, rallying together and prioritising national interests.
- Even as various sectors and communities were hard-hit, Singapore was **able to move towards recovery**. Our efforts helped save lives and jobs, and we gradually opened our borders to resume trade and commerce.
- The fight against COVID-19 reaffirms that **Total Defence is a living concept** necessary to ensure Singapore's well-being, and is central to our ability to overcome challenges.

Ways Singaporeans came together



← Full-time National Servicemen extended their service to contribute to COVID-19 efforts.



← Youths delivered food and essentials to the elderly and those under quarantine.



← Singaporeans complied with safe-distancing measures and restrictions.



← Economic agencies kept supply lines intact to prevent shortage of essential goods.

2021 Total Defence Day Commemoration Event

On 15 Feb, Senior Minister of State for Defence Mr Zaqy Mohamad made a speech at the commemoration event held at the Singapore Discovery Centre. He made similar key points:



- **Total Defence has guided us through difficult times**, from the threat of terrorism to Singapore's fight against COVID-19.
- Each one of us can play our part to help contain the virus and support others in our community. While the road to recovery could be long, **Singapore can overcome this crisis and emerge stronger as long as we stand united.**

[Sources: ST, 14 Feb; MINDEF & ST, 15 Feb]

2. BUDGET 2021: EMERGING STRONGER TOGETHER

On 16 Feb, Deputy Prime Minister Mr Heng Swee Keat delivered the Budget 2021 Statement in Parliament.

He said that the battle against COVID-19 is far from over. Budget 2021, which includes the **S\$11 billion COVID-19 Resilience Package**, has measures to help Singapore weather the crisis, restructure our economy to secure our future, and be agile in responding to changes brought about by the pandemic, such as:



- **Shifts in competitive advantages** due to technological advances, the US-China technology race, and the re-configuration of global supply chains.
- **Rising inequalities** as the virus has hit countries unevenly.
- **Growing awareness of the importance of sustainability** to combat climate change and address the interdependencies of our ecosystem, so that we may safeguard it for future generations.

Scan the QR code for more information on Budget 2021.



Budget 2021 will help Singapore emerge stronger in a post-COVID-19 world by:

- **Deepening Singapore's position as a Global-Asia node**, by restoring our physical connectivity and expanding our digital connectivity.
- **Creating opportunities for businesses and individuals to build capabilities**, remain competitive, and seize opportunities that might arise. This contributes to our economic and workforce transformation.
- **Strengthening our social compact** and emerging stronger as a society, by providing short-term relief, strengthening social safety nets to address challenges faced by the more vulnerable members of our society, and encouraging charitable giving and volunteerism.
- **Building a sustainable home for future generations.** The Singapore Green Plan 2030, announced on 10 Feb, is a national effort to meet the existential threat of climate change.

Scan the QR code for more information on The Singapore Green Plan 2030.



Let us continue to focus on what lies ahead, and chart a clear direction forward [...] Let us strive to emerge stronger together, as a united and shining red dot, trusted by all."

– Deputy Prime Minister Mr Heng Swee Keat in the Budget Statement on 16 Feb

Singapore's earlier response to the COVID-19 pandemic

- Nearly S\$100 billion was spent in five Budgets to cushion the impact, giving rise to the largest budget deficit since independence, at S\$64.9 billion. Of which, **S\$42.7 billion** was expected to come out of the estimated S\$52 billion **from past reserves** that was fenced off for the crisis.
- The economic impact of the crisis was contained, which saved some jobs and provided support for low-income households.
- Singapore **avoided incurring a huge debt** as **earlier generations built up strong reserves** ahead of this crisis.

[Sources: ST, 10 Feb; CNA & MOF, 16 Feb]

3. HARMONY OVER HATE

On 27 Jan, the Internal Security Department (ISD) announced that a 16-year-old Singaporean boy was detained in Dec 2020 under Singapore’s Internal Security Act (ISA). Here are the key details:

- The youngest person to be dealt with under ISA for terrorism-related activities and the first detainee to be inspired by far-right ideology, the boy was planning to attack Muslims at two mosques in Woodlands on 15 Mar, the second anniversary of New Zealand’s Christchurch attacks.
- A Protestant Christian of Indian ethnicity, he was self-radicalised through online content, including the livestreamed video of the Christchurch attack, the Christchurch attacker’s manifesto, and Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) propaganda videos.



Responses

On 27 Jan, the **Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS)** said:

- This is an isolated incident, but also a reminder of the threat of online radicalisation.
- Religious institutions have prepared for such scenarios under the SG Secure Framework and the Crisis Preparedness for Religious Organisations programme.

On 28 Jan, **leaders from the National Council of Churches of Singapore (NCCS)** met **Muslim leaders** at the Yusof Ishak Mosque. They:

- Reaffirmed the mutual trust and understanding between the two communities.
- Agreed on the need to guide the young from being influenced by extremist ideologies.

On 29 Jan, a sermon prepared by the **Office of the Mufti**, the highest Islamic authority in Singapore, was delivered at all mosques:

- It urged Muslims to respond with kindness to evil and enmity.

Various political office holders also responded to the announcement. They agreed that it is a reminder of the need for Singaporeans to **stay vigilant, be proactive, and remain united** to combat the threat of terrorism.

“Singaporeans, regardless of race, religion, or even age, should stand united to defeat terrorist elements that seek to plant distrust, divide and turn us against one another.”



– Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Mr Masagos Zulkifli in a Facebook post on 27 Jan

“Let us stand strong against hatred and enmity, and continue to support one another, regardless of our different faiths or beliefs.”



– Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Mr Edwin Tong in a Facebook post on 27 Jan

“It is a reminder that we must be vigilant and proactive in our efforts to combat these threats and keep up our efforts in engaging and educating each other.”



– President Halimah Yacob at a Roses of Peace event on 21 Feb

[Sources: CNA, 27 Jan; ST, 28 Jan; ST, 29 Jan; ST, 30 Jan; ST, 21 Feb]

4. MYANMAR MILITARY COUP AND REACTIONS

On 1 Feb, Myanmar’s military seized power in a coup against the democratically-elected National League for Democracy (NLD) government.

Ms Aung San Suu Kyi and other leaders of the NLD party were detained. The military then declared a year-long state-of-emergency and said it would hold elections thereafter. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing took power. 24 ministers and deputies were removed, with 11 replacements named.



Since then, large-scale protests have followed. On 22 Feb, a general strike against military rule shut businesses there, despite warnings from the authorities on 21 Feb that confrontation could be deadly.

As of 25 Feb, the situation in Myanmar is still developing.

What led to the coup?

- In Myanmar’s Nov 2020 election, the NLD captured 396 out of 476 seats.
- The military challenged the results by alleging voter fraud. It cited the government’s failure to act on those allegations as the reason for the coup.

Responses in Myanmar

- Resistance and civil disobedience are growing in Myanmar, with large-scale street protests that began on 4 Feb and increasing clashes between citizens and the authorities.
- On 20 Feb, security forces fired live rounds and rubber bullets at anti-coup protesters, leaving at least two dead and 30 injured.
- Since 6 Feb, Myanmar has gone through periodic episodes where internet services were shut down.

[Sources: CNA & TODAY, 1 Feb; BBC & CNA, 3 Feb; ST, 7 Feb; CNA & ST, 8 Feb; TODAY, 9 Feb; CNA & TODAY, 10 Feb; CNA, 11 Feb; CNA, 20 Feb; Reuters, 22 Feb]

Responses from the International Community

Various countries, including Singapore, and international organisations have expressed concern about the events in Myanmar:

At Parliament on 16 Feb, Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Vivian Balakrishnan said:

- He hoped stakeholders in Myanmar would find a long-term, peaceful political solution, and negotiate in good faith.
- ASEAN and its partners could play a discreet but constructive role in managing the crisis by fostering dialogue in Myanmar.
- Widespread sanctions on Myanmar would cause suffering to ordinary people.



On 20 Feb, in response to reports of civilian casualties, Singapore’s **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** issued a statement condemning the use of lethal weapons against unarmed civilians, and urged security forces to “exercise utmost restraint to avoid further injuries and loss of lives, and take immediate steps to de-escalate the situation and restore calm”.

[Sources: CNA, 16 Feb; CNA, 20 Feb]

- **ASEAN and some of its member states**, including Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia, have urged peaceful reconciliation and resolving dispute through lawful means.
- This year's ASEAN Chair Brunei issued a Chairman's Statement on 1 Feb which emphasised the importance of principles in the ASEAN Charter.



“We recall the purposes and principles enshrined in the ASEAN Charter, including, the adherence to the principles of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, respect for and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

- Brunei, the current ASEAN Chairman, in a statement on 1 Feb

[Sources: CNA, TODAY, ST & ASEAN, 1 Feb]

Other governments and leaders, and the **United Nations (UN)**, including the **UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC)**, have condemned the coup, expressed their support for upholding democratic processes, and urged the military to release all detainees:



“The members of the Security Council [...] encouraged the pursuance of dialogue and reconciliation in accordance with the will and interests of the people of Myanmar.”

- UN Security Council Statement on 4 Feb

- In an interview on 3 Feb and a statement on 14 Feb, **António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General**, called on Member States to collectively exercise influence to protect human rights and freedoms in Myanmar. In a Twitter post on 21 Feb and his annual address to the UNHRC on 22 Feb, he condemned the use of lethal force against, and intimidation and harassment of peaceful demonstrators.
- On 10 Feb, **US President Joe Biden** approved a new executive order to sanction the military in Myanmar. On 19 Feb, the **United Kingdom** and **Canada** followed with their own sanctions, and the **European Union** followed on 23 Feb.

[Sources: CNA, BBC, ST & UN, 4 Feb; AP & CNA, 12 Feb; UN & UN News, 14 Feb; CNA, 19 Feb; ST, 22 Feb; CNA, 23 Feb]

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