



SPEECH

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Speech by Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, at the opening of REFLECTIONS at Bukit Chandu - A World War II Interpretative Centre

15 Feb 2002

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Exactly sixty years ago on February 15th 1942, Singapore fell to invading Japanese forces. This date marked the beginning of the Japanese occupation, and close to four years of suffering and trauma for our forefathers.

Much has changed since then. Singapore has progressed and developed into a thriving city-state. However, our path has not been a smooth one. Over the years, Singapore has faced various challenges, both external and internal - ranging from Confrontation, race riots and economic survival in the earliest days of our independence to the recent tests to our national unity and social cohesion. In dealing with all these challenges, Singaporeans have always pulled together as a people, confronted the challenges squarely, overcome them, and emerged stronger than before. If we hope to build for our children and ourselves a strong economy and a high standard of living, we must continue to ensure that Singapore remains safe and secure. Without peace and security as a foundation, we cannot hope to develop and progress as a nation.

We would do well never to forget that the security environment can and will change, sometimes suddenly and in totally unexpected ways. That has happened many times in the past. The September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States are a particularly pertinent example. That brought about a paradigm shift in the way we have to deal with security threats. Such unexpected changes in our security environment also require that we take our defence and security very seriously and are always vigilant and prepared. That is why we have put a high priority on developing a modern and operationally ready armed forces fully capable of defending Singapore. However, the efforts of the armed forces alone are not enough. Ultimately, the defence of Singapore must be the responsibility of all Singaporeans.

These two messages - that we cannot take our peace and stability for granted, and that all Singaporeans must play their part to ensure Singapore's security - are of fundamental importance. However, they may also be easily forgotten, for Singaporeans who have not experienced the troubles of Singapore's early years may tend to take our peace and prosperity for granted. It is similarly convenient to expect the military to bear the full burden of defending Singapore. While some younger Singaporeans may feel that these constant reminders smack of unwarranted anxiety, their grandparents and parents who have lived through Singapore's early years, especially those who suffered during the Second World War, know that we can never be too careful.

It is useful to remind ourselves every February 15th, the anniversary of the fall of Singapore. We mark this as Total Defence Day. This day serves not only to remind Singaporeans of the tragedy that could befall us if we cannot defend ourselves. It also reminds Singaporeans that we all have a role to play in ensuring that Singapore continues to enjoy peace and security, be it in the area of Military, Civil, Economic, Social or Psychological Defence.

As part of the national effort to foster a keener appreciation of our history among Singaporeans, the Government is committed to the preservation of historical sites to honour and reflect on the contributions and sacrifices of our forefathers who built up this country, and to nurture an understanding of relevant lessons from our past. Here, at Reflections at Bukit Chandu, we honour the gallantry displayed by the soldiers of the Malay Regiment who defended this hill during World War

Besides this centre, Singapore has also devoted considerable resources to establish museums and heritage centres. For example, we have invested in the redevelopment of the Singapore History Museum. By 2005, it will be fully redeveloped and become a one-stop repository of knowledge on Singapore history, and one of the biggest, state-of-the-art, history museums in the region. This interpretative centre, together with other museums and heritage centres being developed across the island, will provide a comprehensive story of Singapore's political, social, cultural, architectural and artistic history and heritage. We are mindful that a state without a sense of its past can never become a nation. The nation becomes stronger only when it has a soul, cultural pride and historical memory.

In an increasingly uncertain world, we can leave no inheritance for our children more valuable than the messages contained within this centre – that a nation's peace and stability should never be taken for granted; that they must be closely guarded; and that this requires the commitment and sacrifice of every citizen.

I am pleased to declare the Reflections at Bukit Chandu officially open.

Thank you.

News Release:

- Reflections at Bukit Chandu - Re-Telling the World War II Story for Young Singaporeans (Document No: MINDEF_20020215001_2.pdf)

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