

50 attend scaled-down World War II memorial ceremony

Free e-book launched to help keep memories of the war alive, especially among the young

Clement Yong

World War II veterans, families of those who died during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore and religious leaders yesterday attended a scaled-down memorial ceremony, as a free electronic book was launched to detail the sacrifices of people during the tumultuous years.

At War Memorial Park in Beach Road, about 50 attendees split into two zones observed a minute of silence and laid wreaths in a small ceremony. In previous years, up to 1,000 participants attended.

Yesterday marked the 79th anniversary of the British surrender to the Japanese in 1942 and was also Total Defence Day. The event was the 54th commemoration ser-

vice since 1967, when the memorial was unveiled by founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew.

The hour-long ceremony was co-organised by the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCI) and Nexus, the department responsible for total defence and national education in the Ministry of Defence.

The organisers focused heavily on keeping alive the memories of the war that were essential to Singapore's national narrative.

SCCCI president Roland Ng said at the ceremony: "We hope our future generations can fully understand the importance of freedom and peace because of the lessons learnt from the Japanese Occupation, reiterating the importance of staying united, defending our country and being prepared for danger in times of peace."



Madam Shen Pin Pin, 82, her husband Ang Eng Chong, 88, their daughter Ang Shen, 54, Ms Ang's nephew Leo Yug Chuen, 13, and Yug Chuen's father Leo Kum Chew, 48, paying their respects to Madam Shen's father after the 54th War Memorial Service at War Memorial Park in Beach Road yesterday. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

"Although the circuit breaker measures had been gradually eased and there have been slight changes to how the war memorial service is held this year, what remains unchanged are the lessons we learn from history and the importance of strengthening Singapore's national defence framework."

The SCCCI launched its 36-page e-book, *The Story Of The Civilian War Memorial*, yesterday. It contains brief information on how the memorial was erected and some stories of the war.

It is written in English and Chinese, and is aimed particularly at the younger generation, who are more distant from a war which the pioneer generation lived through and to this day are unable to forget.

One of the key events listed was Sook Ching, the anti-Chinese operation by the Japanese military police to break the spirit of an ethnic community it saw as particularly resistant to its colonial enterprise, and which killed 50,000 people.

Education Minister Lawrence Wong, the guest of honour, said:

"As time passes, the generation that endured the occupation... will gradually fade away. It is important that we keep these memories alive."

"(The e-book) will help new generations growing up to understand how we got here, why it could have easily turned out very differently, and why Singapore is worth defending."

Among the attendees was Madam Shen Pin Pin, 82, whose father and uncle – both journalists – were taken away by the Japanese in the middle of the night during

Chinese New Year in 1942.

"I make it a point to come every year. We waited till the end of the war but he (my father) never returned... We also had no more information about him. We heard that like other men arrested, he was shot in the public courtyard," she said.

Her husband Ang Eng Chong, 88, said: "What we thought were firecrackers at the time were actually gunshots. I remember the bursts of sound to this day."

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Draw on pioneers' spirit of solidarity in battling Covid-19: Minister

Lim Min Zhang and Fabian Koh

The sense of solidarity and collective responsibility that the pioneer generation embodied during the Japanese Occupation serves as a guide to how Singapore should deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, Education Minister Lawrence Wong said yesterday on the anniversary of the fall of Singapore.

Drawing parallels between the pandemic and World War II, he said the pandemic can be a defining moment in Singapore's history, where Singaporeans were tested but overcame the "toughest of circumstances" with resilience and resolve.

At a separate event to mark Total Defence Day yesterday, Senior Minister of State for Defence Zaqy Mohamad highlighted how Singaporeans banding together in spirit and actions helped to curb the spread of the virus when it was at its peak.

"In the past year, Total Defence has guided our nation's fight against Covid-19. Singapore has

been able to deal with the pandemic only because of the combined effort of all, each of us doing his part," he said at the Singapore Discovery Centre.

Echoing Mr Zaqy's point, Mr Wong said Singaporeans cooperated with necessary but painful measures that were taken to cope with the pandemic, which embodied the spirit of Total Defence and sacrificing for the common good.

For instance, front-line workers were on duty around the clock, businesses adapted to find new ways to pursue their livelihoods, neighbours reached out to help the vulnerable, and Singaporeans adhered to safe distancing measures and passed on factual and accurate information.

Mr Wong spoke at the 54th War Memorial Service to commemorate the civilian victims of the Japanese Occupation, as well as Total Defence Day, which marks the day Singapore fell to the Japanese in 1942.

He said that the country's pioneers, who endured the hardships of war, were a generation who got things done, served with honour



Education Minister Lawrence Wong (second from left), Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Roland Ng (far left) and other guests bowing to pay their respects to victims of the Japanese Occupation during the 54th War Memorial Service at War Memorial Park yesterday. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

and helped built Singapore.

"They have taught us that there is no trouble we cannot endure, no calamity we cannot overcome as a people."

While the Japanese Occupation of Singapore lasted more than three years, it is unclear how long the pandemic will last, although "at some point, it will be over", said

Mr Wong, who also co-chairs the multi-ministry task force tackling the pandemic.

"At that time, I hope we can look back and say that this has been a

defining moment in our history. We have been tested in this crucible, but we have overcome the toughest of circumstances together with resilience and resolve, and we have prevailed and forged a stronger sense of solidarity and unity.

"Ultimately, that's the best homage we can pay to our forefathers and our pioneers, to uphold their conviction and values of our nation, to take on the responsibility that they shouldered, and to commit to building a better Singapore together," he added.

At the separate event at the Singapore Discovery Centre, Mr Zaqy noted that the spirit of volunteerism was active among the young, saying that it was very heartening to see many Singaporeans stepping forward as volunteers to help others. These efforts included delivering meals door to door and creating translation websites.

He hosted an online discussion on Total Defence for a Future Singapore with 92 youth participants, who raised the issue of enhancing social defence, as well as how they could assist in educating the older generations on modern issues such as digital threats and fake news.

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<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/50-attend-scaled-down-world-war-ii-memorial-ceremony>



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