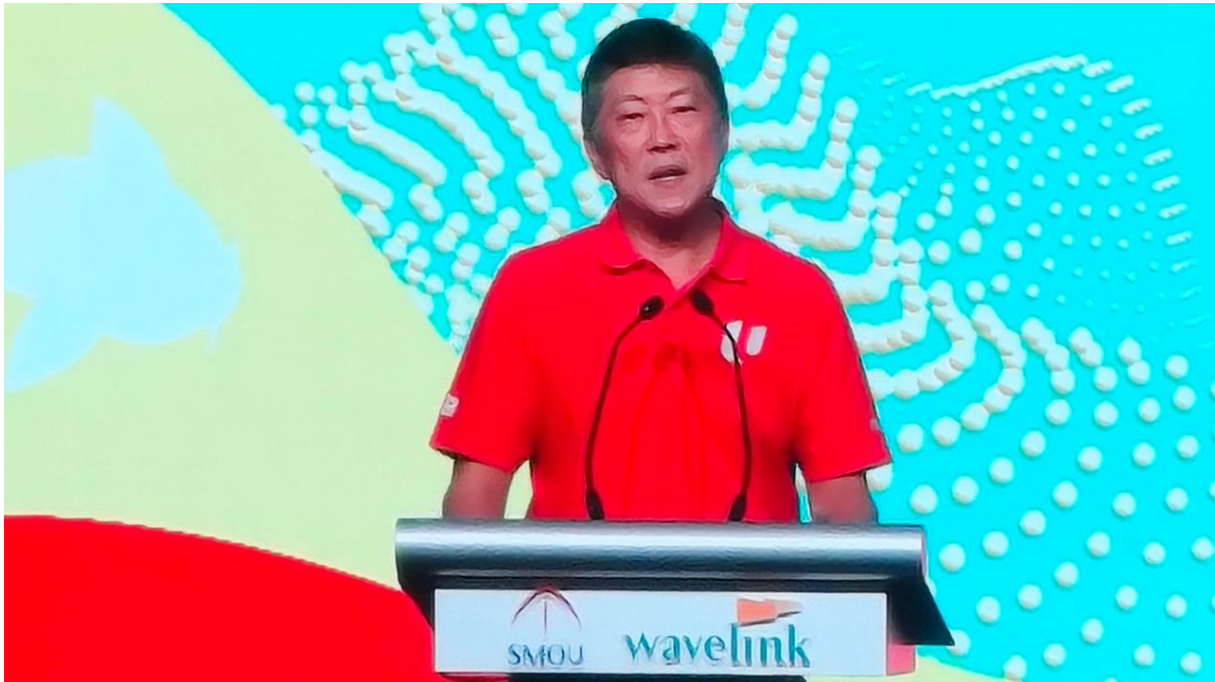


# Three key challenges for maritime in the Year of the Snake

Conflict, trade wars, and the battle for AI between east and west, were highlighted by Singapore's National Trade Unions Congress (NTUC) Secretary-General.

[Marcus Hand](#), Editor

February 3, 2025



Ng Chee Meng, Secretary-General of NTUC Credit: Marcus Hand

Speaking as Guest-of-Honour at the Singapore Maritime Officers' Union (SMOU) and Wavelink annual Lunar New Year luncheon Ng Chee Meng, Secretary-General of NTUC, noted that the Year of the Dragon had been a good one for Singapore with better than expected 4% GDP growth in 2024. However, he said, "As we welcome now the snake year in 2025, well there are challenges ahead."

Based on conversations with business, union, and government leaders Ng sees three key challenges ahead for maritime.

The first of these was geo-strategic challenges there were seen as developing the whole world. These are continued "hot wars in Europe", referring to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine with Russia, instability in the Middle East, and growing tensions in Singapore's back yard in Asia.

The second challenge layered on top of this is the new issue of trade wars. He said that with US President Trump imposing new tariffs and Canada imposing counter tariffs, and other countries possibly to follow, "trade wars are likely to be in our considerations for the next four years."

The third challenge is with AI in the technology space which he noted "many think will be the key determinant of economic power in the future". [China's](#) development of AI chatbot DeepSeek to rival the likes of ChatGPT unveiled last week has raised concerns both in the West and Asia. Ng said this raises implications of technological bifurcation between east and west.

"The geo-strategic uncertainties are real and they more likely not be in all our considerations whether you are in government, you are in business, or you are a unionist," he said.

