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# The Workers' Party in Parliament

Budget Debate 2016  
Speeches and Cuts

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# Foreword

At the start of each year, the Government would present its Budget for the nation in Parliament and Members of Parliament would have the opportunity to offer insights, debate the Government's position and make queries of each Ministry. While Budget 2016 is no exception, it is special as it outlines the Government's priorities as we begin the next 50 years of our nation building.

This publication showcases all the speeches made by our six MPs and three NCMPs during the two-week Budget and Committee of Supply (COS) debates in April 2016. We hope that this compilation will provide you with an understanding of the policies put forward by the Workers' Party and to help fill the gap in the news reports from the various media outlets.

This compilation starts off with speeches from the Budget Debate, where six of our MPs spoke in response to the Finance Minister's Budget Statement. WP chairman Sylvia Lim advanced the Party's 2015 Manifesto proposal to introduce a redundancy insurance scheme to support retrenched workers and their families. Faisal Manap and Dennis Tan called for more inclusiveness in government schemes, especially for children of single, unwed parents. Daniel Goh and Pritam Singh asked for greater accountability on government spending, while Leon Perera reiterated another Manifesto proposal to have a National Secretariat for SMEs to uplift local enterprises.

The second section comprises of Committee of Supply cuts categorized by each Ministry. All nine WP MPs delivered a total of 83 cuts spanning across all Ministries, providing their views, feedback and proposals on a wide range of issues. Bread and butter issues that affect all Singaporeans, namely the Ministry of Transport, Education and Health, saw the most cuts from our MPs.

Last but not least, we also have a profile page introducing all WP MPs in the 13<sup>th</sup> Parliament of Singapore. This includes 6 constituency MPs and 3 non-constituency MPs. Please feel welcome to send your feedback on the speeches to the respective MPs.

As Singapore readies itself for a more complex political and economic climate, The Workers' Party will continue to be a responsible and rational voice for you in Parliament.

Enjoy reading!

**The Workers' Party Media Team**

# Our Members of Parliament



Low Thia Khiong  
Member of Parliament for  
Aljunied GRC



Sylvia Lim  
Member of Parliament for  
Aljunied GRC



Muhamad Faisal Bin  
Abdul Manap  
Member of Parliament for  
Aljunied GRC



Pritam Singh  
Member of Parliament for  
Aljunied GRC



Chen Show Mao  
Member of Parliament for  
Aljunied GRC



Png Eng Huat  
Member of Parliament for  
Hougang SMC



Dennis Tan Lip Fong  
Non-Constituency  
Member of Parliament



Leon Perera  
Non-Constituency Member  
of Parliament



Daniel Goh Pei Siong  
Non-Constituency  
Member of Parliament



# Table of Contents

<b>DEBATE ON ANNUAL BUDGET STATEMENT</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Seeding Innovation for All Singaporeans</i> by Daniel Goh	2
<i>Unlocking the Entrepreneurial Potential of Local Firms and Singaporeans</i> by Leon Perera	9
<i>Understanding and Addressing Employment Insecurity</i> by Sylvia Lim	14
<i>Semangat Kerjasama ke Arah Pemupukkan Masyarakat yang Daya Tahan, Inklusif dan Penyayang (Spirit of Partnership)</i> by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap	18
<i>Focusing On HDB Shops, The Unemployed and Our Youth</i> by Dennis Tan	23
<i>Fiscal Prudence and Sustainability</i> by Pritam Singh	29
 <b>COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY - MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS</b>	 <b>33</b>
<i>Terrorism Threat</i> by Pritam Singh	34
<i>Key Performance Indicators for Ministry</i> by Sylvia Lim	35
<i>Manpower for Security/Enforcement</i> by Sylvia Lim	36
<i>Gambling Outlets &amp; Licenses</i> by Png Eng Huat	37
<i>Keeping NRICs Up to Date</i> by Png Eng Huat	38
<i>Stateless in Singapore</i> by Png Eng Huat	39
<i>Imprisonment with Humanity &amp; Dignity</i> by Sylvia Lim	40
<i>Tackling Recidivism</i> by Leon Perera	41
 <b>COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY - MINISTRY OF LAW</b>	 <b>43</b>
<i>External Law Degree Holders</i> by Dennis Tan	44
<i>New Law School &amp; Employment Issue</i> by Dennis Tan	
 <b>COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY - MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS</b>	 <b>46</b>
<i>South China Sea Tension</i> by Pritam Singh	47
 <b>COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY - MINISTRY OF DEFENCE</b>	 <b>49</b>
<i>Cyber Defence</i> by Low Thia Khiang	50
<i>Defence White Paper</i> by Pritam Singh	51
<i>NS Training System</i> by Pritam Singh	52
<i>Training Safety</i> by Pritam Singh	53

<i>Compensation for SAF Personnel</i> by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap	53
<i>Navy Vessels</i> by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap	
<b>COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY - MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY</b>	<b>56</b>
<i>TPP &amp; Singapore Businesses</i> by Pritam Singh	57
<i>Working Capital Loan</i> by Leon Perera	57
<i>National Robotics Plan</i> by Leon Perera	58
<i>Nuclear Energy</i> by Low Thia Kiang	59
<i>Energy Security</i> by Low Thia Kiang	60
<i>Energy Market Authority</i> by Low Thia Kiang	61
<i>Trade Bodies and Chambers</i> by Leon Perera	62
<i>Business Space and Rental</i> by Chen Show Mao	63
<b>COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY - MINISTRY OF EDUCATION</b>	<b>65</b>
<i>Ensuring Every School is a Good School</i> by Png Eng Huat	66
<i>Equitable Funding for Schools</i> by Dennis Tan	68
<i>Assistance Schemes, Awards &amp; Funds</i> by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap	69
<i>Cultivating Non-Academic Attributes</i> by Leon Perera	70
<i>CCAs in Schools</i> by Chen Show Mao	71
<i>Teach for Singapore</i> by Daniel Goh	71
<i>Teacher-Student Ratio</i> by Daniel Goh	72
<i>Civic Consciousness in Schools</i> by Png Eng Huat	73
<i>Sugar in Schools</i> by Chen Show Mao	74
<b>COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY - MINISTRY OF MANPOWER</b>	<b>75</b>
<i>Fairness in Employment</i> by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap	76
<i>Flexible Work Arrangements</i> by Daniel Goh	77
<i>Under-employment Indicators</i> by Sylvia Lim	78
<i>Silver Support</i> by Chen Show Mao	79
<b>COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY - MINISTRY OF FINANCE</b>	<b>80</b>
<i>Government Procurement</i> by Chen Show Mao	81
<i>Tax Credits for Caregivers</i> by Daniel Goh	81

<b>COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY -</b>	
<b>MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS &amp; INFORMATION</b>	<b>83</b>
<i>Withdrawal of 2G Phone Services by Pritam Singh</i>	84
<i>Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) by Png Eng Huat</i>	
<b>COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY - MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>86</b>
<i>Mitigating Homelessness by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap</i>	87
<i>Elderly Subletting Facility by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap</i>	88
<i>Lease Buyback by Chen Show Mao</i>	89
<i>Lift Upgrading Programme Designs by Png Eng Huat</i>	90
<i>Lift Maintenance by Low Thia Kiang</i>	91
<i>Pneumatic Waste Conveyance System by Low Thia Kiang</i>	92
<i>HDB Goodwill Repair Assistance by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap</i>	93
<b>COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY - MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT</b>	<b>94</b>
<i>MRT Breakdowns by Dennis Tan</i>	95
<i>Safety Protocols for MRT Operations by Dennis Tan</i>	96
<i>Autonomous Vehicles by Png Eng Huat</i>	97
<i>Public Transport for Persons with Disabilities by Leon Perera</i>	98
<i>Change of Rules for Bicycles by Dennis Tan</i>	99
<i>Enforcement of Bicycle Rules by Pritam Singh</i>	100
<i>Uses of ERP 2.0 by Leon Perera</i>	101
<i>Equitable COE System by Daniel Goh</i>	102
<i>COE for Motorcycles by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap</i>	103
<b>COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY -</b>	
<b>MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND WATER RESOURCES</b>	<b>105</b>
<i>Climate Change Fund by Pritam Singh</i>	106
<i>Dengue by Sylvia Lim</i>	107
<i>Food Waste Recycling by Daniel Goh</i>	108

## COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY -

### MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT 109

<i>Kindergarten Fee Assistance Scheme (KiFAS)</i> by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap	110
<i>Informal Caregivers</i> by Chen Show Mao	110
<i>Single Parents and Child Benefits</i> by Dennis Tan	111
<i>Financial Counselling for Families</i> by Chen Show Mao	113
<i>ComCare Graduation</i> by Daniel Goh	113
<i>Social Mobility</i> by Leon Perera	114

### COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY - MINISTRY OF HEALTH 115

<i>Waiting Time in Polyclinics</i> by Leon Perera	116
<i>Waiting Time for Specialist Consultation</i> by Low Thia Kiang	117
<i>Patient Downgrade from Private Care</i> by Dennis Tan	118
<i>MediShield Life and Overseas Singaporeans</i> by Sylvia Lim	119
<i>Integrated Shield Premiums</i> by Pritam Singh	120
<i>Mental Health</i> by Low Thia Kiang	121
<i>Community Nursing</i> by Daniel Goh	122
<i>Hospice</i> by Low Thia Kiang	123
<i>Enhanced Primary Care</i> by Daniel Goh	124
<i>Sugar Content Labelling</i> by Daniel Goh	124

### COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY - PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE 126

<i>Anti-Corruption Reputation</i> by Sylvia Lim	127
<i>Total Fertility Rate</i> by Leon Perera	128

## COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY -

### MINISTRY OF CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND YOUTH 129

<i>Malay/Muslim Community Development Fund (MMCDF)</i> by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap	130
<i>People's Association</i> by Sylvia Lim	131
<i>Interpreting Singapore's History</i> by Low Thia Kiang	132
<i>Heritage Impact Assessment</i> by Chen Show Mao	133

# DEBATE ON ANNUAL BUDGET STATEMENT



# Seeding Innovation for All Singaporeans

by Daniel Goh

Madam Speaker, the emphasis on innovation as the third pillar in the Industry Transformation Programme is a right emphasis. This is more than just a good thing to do. As the Minister said in his Budget Statement, it is critical to the Programme. If we fail at innovation, we will fail to transform our economy for the next stage of value creation for growth, and this will endanger our very existence as a global city and an independent nation.

Innovation is not an aspiration, it is a survival imperative. It is therefore important to get our innovation policy approach right. In this respect, I have three issues to raise.

## Accounting for the Investments

The first issue is accountability. Significant public monies are being invested by the Government in innovation. I believe most Singaporeans do not object to this necessary investment. However, this does not mean that the Government should not account to Singaporeans that their money is well spent and there are good results to show from the investment.

Nineteen billion dollars have been set aside over the next five years for investment in science and technology research under the Research, Innovation and Enterprise (RIE) 2020 plan. Under the plan, \$4 billion has been earmarked for industry-research collaboration. The Government is further topping up another \$1.5 billion to the National Research Fund (NRF) in this Budget. It is crucial, as the Minister said, "to capture the economic and social value of R&D".

But the public needs to know exactly how much of the value is being captured for the benefit of the Singapore economy and, I must emphasise, for the benefit of Singapore society, that is, Singaporeans ourselves.

The example of the Procter and Gamble Singapore Innovation Centre (SgIC), set up in collaboration with A\*STAR and EDB, is well worn. The question is, as an “open innovationhub”, how many Singapore enterprises is the Innovation Centre helping to facilitate research and accelerate product development?

We should not begrudge P&G for obtaining a large benefit from the Innovation Centre for their own product development. After all, P&G is promising to share valuable expertise and experience. Nevertheless, Singapore enterprises should have a fair share of the R&D outcomes.

As it has been two years since the Innovation Centre was set up, the Minister should be able to give the public a sense of how much of the economic and social value of R&D at the Innovation Centre Singapore enterprises will be and has been capturing.

For sure, returns on investment in R&D and also tech start-ups are long term by nature. In this regard, Infocomm Investments Private Limited, the venture capital subsidiary of the IDA, has been around for 20 years now. Surely, the Government will be able to give us much more than a sense of the value Singapore enterprises are capturing through the funding from Infocomm Investments. The Government should be able to give us the actual return on investment, the ROI, in innovation for Infocomm Investments.

This is important because Infocomm Investments is the foundational model for SG-Innovate, which is a far more ambitious scheme to expand venture funding and accelerator and incubator support to new and emerging sectors. The success of Infocomm Investments should be detailed beyond a few anecdotal examples. On top of accounting for the investments to the public, explaining the ROI for Infocomm Investments would greatly inspire public confidence about the Government's present efforts on innovation and allay general cynicism about Singaporeans' ability to innovate.

A more fundamental question then is whether the Government has any framework to measure and evaluate the ROI in innovation and enterprise. Measuring ROI in innovation is fast becoming a norm internationally.

A recent report for the UK Government estimated the median private rates of return to R&D investments are around 20%-25% in terms of economic output or productivity increases, and social returns are typically two to three times larger than private returns. In the UK, public R&D investments have yielded social returns of around 20%. This is a ready benchmark for us to adopt.

I emphasise that I am referring to the general ROI in innovation and enterprise for the whole R&D sector and for key vehicles like Infocomm Investments, Biopolis and Fusionopolis. Investments in innovation and enterprise are inherently risky and fine-grained ROI with regard to individual investments and grants may stifle R&D instead.

If the Government has an internal framework to measure and evaluate the ROI in innovation and enterprise, then it should share this with the public and let Singaporeans know how we are faring viz-à-viz international competitors. If the Government does not have an existing framework, then now is the time to develop a framework to measure ROI in innovation and publicise it.

This is not to embroil the Government agencies in the politics of blame and shame. This is to instil basic accountability for good governance as well as to mobilise Singaporeans for the innovation drive, which is a survival imperative.

### **The Singaporean Core in R&D**

The second issue is the development of a Singaporean core in R&D. In order for the economic and social value of R&D to be captured in the long run, we need to make sure R&D funding for scientific research is benefitting Singaporeans directly. While we invest heavily in deepening R&D capabilities, the corresponding focus should be to make sure these capabilities are anchored by a Singaporean core in the R&D sector.

The NRF has been actively trumpeting the latest scientific advances. One such advance featured in the news in 2013, the invention of an invisibility cloak to make things disappear from view, quite literally caught my eye. This is the stuff that makes for the thrill of Harry Potter fantasies and Star Trek science fictions and captures the public imagination. But does it capture the economic and social value of R&D for Singapore and Singaporeans?

It was a good scientific advancement, but industrial application of the cloak is still very far off, as the materials used were bulky and cloaking was effective only from six perspectives. This is understandable. Scientific progress takes time and the translation from science to marketplace is an undertaking that requires patience and commitment. Beyond the medium-term economic value of R&D for Singapore, another concern is the long-term social value of R&D for Singaporeans.

It was reported that the research team that invented the invisibility cloak was led by a Singaporean permanent resident, a young professor at the Nanyang Technological University. This is not quite accurate. The team comprised six other collaborators from Zhejiang University in China and the Marvell Technology Group Boston in the United States.

From the order of names listed as co-authors of the paper of the invention published in a prestigious scientific journal, the Singapore PR professor was listed last and appeared to be a junior member of the team. The team leader appears to be a Zhejiang University professor who conceived the original idea and led in the design of the cloaks and the experiments.

The global university field is characterised by the mobility of talents. Though probably just a junior member of the team, the Singapore PR professor involved in the invention of the invisibility cloak is a young researcher under the age of 35 and has many decades of breakthrough research work in him yet. We need to attract and retain foreign talents like him. Better still, we need to help him and his family sink roots in Singapore as a citizen, so that he will become a member of the Singaporean core in R&D.

We are making progress in deepening our R&D capabilities, as the invisibility cloak example shows. But the ideal would be that a cloak nearing industrial application be produced by a local industry-university team led by Singaporean scientists.

My point and my plea is this: while the Government pumps generous funding into R&D to deepen innovation capabilities, that it does not ignore the social factor. It is not a matter of just plonking talents together and getting them to talk and work with each other. We need to focus on developing more Singaporean innovators as well as retaining non-Singaporeans who would help Singaporeans innovate. We must strengthen and empower the Singaporean core in R&D. Only then will they continue to create value for the nation deep into the future.

### **Beyond the Innovation Enclave**

The third issue is the risk of the innovation enclave. The industrial park model has been successful for us in the last 50 years. It is right we celebrate Jurong and how its success has benefited the country and the countrymen.

Madam Speaker, this is what Jurong means for me. Not an industrial enclave, but a focal point for our successful industrialisation, which was replicated in the many satellite industrial estates co-located with HDB towns, such as in Toa Payoh and Hougang built in the 1970s and 1980s. The network of industrial parks merging into our heartland mobilised a

generation of Singaporeans to become workers to transform the country and taught all of us the culture of hard work and perseverance.

The Jurong Innovation District looks glamorous. The concept of getting researchers, entrepreneurs, industrialists and investors to live, work and play in the same mega-mall so that chance and choice encounters could produce new ideas, inventions and businesses is very plausible and attractive. But does it really work?

Research on science and technology parks and their influence on innovation have seen mixed results. Some studies show that science parks promote interaction between firms and research institutions, while others show that notwithstanding the increased interaction, geographical proximity does not seem to be an important factor for forging formal research links and innovativeness.

The question remains for researchers of science park innovation: are these parks “seedbeds” or “enclaves” of innovation? The difference is this. The science park as “seedbed” would see the science park as providing the right environment to nurture new technology start-ups benefitting from technology transfer, research spin-offs and the development of innovative products. But depending on the whole host of factors, the science park could very well end up as an innovation “enclave”, where enterprises are attracted to the science park due to the status and prestige of being located in the exclusive park. The science park becomes a high-tech island with innovation taking place separated from the rest of society.

We have had science park development in the Buona Vista area, including Biopolis and Fusionopolis, next to the National University of Singapore for two decades now. There is therefore a precedent for the Jurong Innovation District. It is worthwhile for the Government to make its case to the public that the Buona Vista science parks work as innovation seedbed and are not an innovation enclave detached from the rest of Singapore.

Are the Buona Vista science parks successful by measures of innovation? What is the ROI in innovation for the Buona Vista science parks? Have Singapore enterprises and Singaporean innovators that relocated into the science parks become more innovative?

How have Singapore enterprises benefited from these science parks? Are the main beneficiaries vertically integrated foreign MNCs which have merely shifted their operations to Singapore? Are the benefits to Singaporeans mainly trickle-down effects rather than improving Singaporeans' innovativeness?



Have the science parks trained up a Singaporean core of R&D professionals? Is the R&D leadership in the science parks still dominated by foreign scientists? Are formal research links between NUS and firms located in the science parks significantly higher than those located outside the parks?

My concern is that the Jurong Innovation District is going to develop into an enclave enveloping NTU. Such an innovation enclave would mean foreign MNCs and venture capitalists congregating in the enclave with more foreign researchers and managers. They would live, work and play with an exclusive group of local elites selected to interact with them.

My concern is that the Jurong Innovation District, by virtue of its exclusive urban design, would become a high-tech island detached from the rest of Singapore, from the heartland estates where Singaporeans and Singapore enterprises are supposed to be beneficiaries of innovation. Are we creating mega-ivory towers, one surrounding NUS and the other surrounding NTU? How would the science parks plug back into Singapore society to diffuse creativity and innovation into the rest of the city?

### **The Singapore Model**

Has the Government considered decentralising the industrial district-cum-science park concentration to seed a network of smaller science parks in the heartland estates, so that innovation can tap on the mass creativity of the Singaporean workforce? The benefits of this alternative model are these.

Instead of focusing only on start-ups, the innovation drive will also plug into the large body of SMEs to enrich our enterprise base and spread innovation to our local companies. Instead of hoping only for foreign know-how to somehow spread to selected local entrepreneurs, the heartland science parks will multiply and synergise local entrepreneurship, so that innovation will take off from a Singaporean base to engage the world.

The network of heartland science parks will bring a beneficial diversity to our public housing towns, making them more cosmopolitan than they already are. Conversely, the rich heartland life worlds will expose otherwise isolated researchers to a grounded diversity that could generate interesting and relevant innovations. In time, the different science parks could evolve into diverse specialisations, creating experimental niches that will give local character to the towns. Bedok may well become a fin-tech powerhouse, while Bukit Batok becomes the clean-tech town.

A positive side effect is urban renewal of our heartland estates. Our heartland town centres will stay economically vibrant as local businesses provide services to the science park crowd. It will also increase the number of local jobs available in the heartland for those who find it difficult to travel. Overall, it may help solve the problem of ageing estates as older townships continue to attract younger families to move into them due to the heartland science parks.

Most importantly, innovation will not be concentrated in two districts but will be everywhere in Singapore, turning the enclaved city into the creative city where innovativeness becomes a cultural norm for everyone in every vocation, from the cleaner to the CEO, from the office clerk to the scientist.

This, I believe, is what Jurong was for Singapore in the 1970s. I hope the Jurong Innovation District is just the beginning to create a network of innovation estates all over the island, across the city, through the heartland.

We are now at the cusp of another industrial revolution. Let us be brave for a brave new world. Seed innovation everywhere in Singapore and empower every Singaporean to pursue innovation. On this note, Madam Speaker, I support the Budget.

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# Unlocking the Entrepreneurial Potential of Local Firms and Singaporeans

by Leon Perera

Madam Speaker, before I begin, please allow me to declare that I am the owner of a mid-size, Singapore-based enterprise.

Madam Speaker, we need local enterprises as the third pillar of our economy, standing alongside MNCs and Government-linked Companies (GLCs). Right now, the share of SMEs in value-added in our economy is less than what their share of business numbers and employment would imply. We lack the equivalent of Germany's Mittelstand, a critical mass of world-leading SMEs who are world leaders in niche product categories or technologies, like for example, Faber Castell, a manufacturer of pencils.

The issue should not be framed in terms of just providing State support to help companies survive, but in terms of providing enablers to help companies to develop their own competitiveness. The State has a vital role to play in countering some of the downsides of our economic environment like high costs, but it should also act as a catalyst to help our SMEs identify, develop and maintain their own critical competitive success factors. This is especially so in regards to developing productivity, where Singapore is still struggling in certain sectors especially in services, construction and other domestically-oriented sectors.

To this end, our main focus should not be only on short-term props like ensuring more public sector construction projects, even if those are necessary, to smooth out short-term fluctuations, but on making SMEs more competitive and more productive. In this regard, I have several suggestions.

## Productivity Benchmarking System

Firstly, companies all operate at different levels of productivity, even within the same industry. I used to bring my children for breakfast before taking them to swimming class when they were much younger. Near the swimming class, there were two café outlets. One frequently had five, six or seven staff present, many of whom were standing around with nothing to do much of the time. Yet, many dishes were not available or took a long time to prepare. Orders were sometimes forgotten or mistaken. The other café outlet had two to three staff and yet, all the food and drinks were prepared fairly quickly. No prizes for guessing which one we went to for our breakfast most of the time.

However, companies do not all know how well they are performing vis-a-vis their industry peers. This is particularly true of SMEs. They do not have the visibility about the rest of their industry and often do not have the resources to understand what productivity levels are like in other developed countries and how those are achieved. What is available is public information which tends to be about larger, public listed companies and industries dominated by these larger companies.

No doubt the National Productivity Council and SPRING do work with SMEs to raise productivity, disseminate best practices, and so on. But nothing beats a simple quantitative ranking to focus minds. I suggest a productivity benchmarking system. This would be similar to how our household utilities bills show a chart of our electricity and water consumption compared to similar sized households and the national average.

Economic-promotion agencies or the Government can agree on a company-level standard, for example, "poor", "average", "good" and "excellent", productivity for specific industries. Government agencies could then automate the extraction of data from financial statements, filed with ACRA, even for private-exempt companies. This data analysis could be used to derive the average figure within the industry and the figure for each company.

ACRA, SPRING or another Government agency could then write to each company each year to inform them of their level of productivity, where it is ranked versus the industry average and where it stands relative to the benchmarks which have been derived from global analyses.

Improvement in a company's productivity rank could be used as one criterion or one forward-looking condition, not the only one, to grant access to Government incentive schemes.

## R&D Matching

My second suggestion is to create an R&D-matching facility to allow SMEs to work with autonomous universities (AUs) and national research centres (RCs) and research institutes (RIs) under the A\*STAR umbrella to call for tenders, as it were, for standalone R&D projects. The Minister for Trade and Industry revealed in response to my Parliamentary Question that from 2004 to 2014, the total number of licensing agreements signed with private companies by Exploit Technologies Pte Ltd, which helps commercialise IP from the R&D sector, was 920, or just over about 80 a year. Of these, about 80% were with SMEs and start-ups.

We can do even better in intermediating between the R&D sector and local SMEs to allow synergistic projects. The example of Taiwan's Industrial Technology Research Institute (ITRI), Germany's Fraunhofer Network or even how some Japanese MNCs collaborate very closely with Japanese universities to outsource part of their R&D work, is interesting in this regard.

Madam Speaker, I suggest we create a facility whereby local SMEs are able to proactively put out a tender of sorts for potential R&D projects and assess bids from interested researchers at our RIs, RCs and AUs. If a project is agreed between the parties, A\*STAR and/or other relevant agencies could provide co-funding in exchange for job creation commitments or some form of modest profit-sharing. This would appeal to SMEs who seek R&D support for ideas they may have but lack in-house R&D resources and who may not want to go down the path of the Get-Up Programme, which allows researchers to be seconded to companies, since their needs are more project-specific.

## Services and Construction Sectors

Next, Madam Speaker, I would like to speak on sector-specific measures. The services and construction sectors are two sectors, which are still grappling with productivity issues. These two sectors will see foreign worker levy rises. But with PIC support tapering down towards 2018, are the measures in Budget 2016 such as the Automation Support Package and Industry Transformation Initiatives enough? We need both carrot and stick for these sectors.

It may also have been the case with some firms that PIC was not used to make game-changing investments in technology in the past. For these two sectors, to help them to transition to a higher productivity future, we should pay careful attention to ensure that funding support is available to make transformational game-changing investments in



technology and work processes, either using the Automation Scheme provisions or some other incentives.

### **Small Medium Enterprises**

Next, SMEs still face problems to do with high cost, problems attracting talent and access to finance. Some of these issues were highlighted in the Singapore Business Federation's January 2016 report on "A Vibrant Singapore Private Sector". The Government needs to help balance the playing field. For example, unit labour cost for the overall economy increased at an average rate of 2.15% from 2010 to 2014. This is higher than labour productivity growth of 0.3% measured in terms of real value-added per worker, and 1.3% measured in terms of real value-added per hour worked over the same period.

In this regard, I would like to discuss the Jurong Innovation District. I will take up the issue of access to finance in the COS and access to talent later on. On the Jurong Innovation District (JID), one of the key challenges that SMEs face is rental costs. Will the JID provide a rental cost environment that will be conducive to SMEs and star-ups, who also wish to take advantage of the space, or will rentals be high, eating into their start-up funding? More broadly, the issue of high rentals has to be addressed as it is a bigger and more fundamental impediment to start-ups and SMEs evolving innovation capabilities as opposed to gaining access to innovation districts with purported network effects. My colleagues will have more to say on this issue of rentals during the COS.

Next, the Workers' Party suggests that we create a mechanism to ensure a high-level whole of Government approach to SME development that goes beyond just the Ministry of Trade and Industry. If we see local enterprise development as a critical priority, as I believe we should, we should create a national secretariat for local enterprise development, one that brings together multiple Government departments and Ministries and which can create and execute goals for different Government agencies to nurture local enterprises in their spheres of responsibility. In the same vein, the Singapore Business Federation has suggested creating a Minister for SMEs.

Next, on nurturing SMEs, the pool of local enterprises is also not equal in terms of their goals and aspirations. Some aspired to become world class whereas others aspired to maintain themselves as SMEs indefinitely.

Our approach to incentives should reflect this inequality very strongly as was practised by Japan and Korea in their early days of post-war development. I think there is far more room

for SME Government support such as access to finance, tax incentives, cash grants schemes, and so on, to be much more calibrated based on the aspirations of SMEs. We can give more aggressive support and higher quantum of incentives and agree on stretch goals with those local enterprises who want it and – this is the crucial point – who can deliver results. The support should be conditional on hitting goals in terms of revenue, investment, job creation, and so on, as determined objectively by audits or checks. The support should be unequivocally withdrawn if results are not achieved within a certain time frame. The genuinely entrepreneurial and ambitious SMEs that we have would welcome this.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, and briefly, making SMEs more competitive is also about unlocking talent in Singaporean entrepreneurs and workers. There is a pragmatic case for egalitarianism as unlocking hidden talent particularly for our local enterprise sector, which needs it most.

The CareerBuilder Singapore's Employer of Choice 2015 survey showed that sectors like the Government and Public Service, Airline and Travel and Banking and Financial Services are the top industry sectors that Millennials want to work in. In other words, many of our young Singaporeans are drawn to work in the Public Sector, Banks and large enterprises. This draws talent away from start-ups and local enterprises, particularly SMEs. To tilt the playing field so as to nurture our local enterprises, we should consider a few possible actions.

Firstly, we should do more to foster entrepreneurial attitudes in school, not only at the Tertiary level but at the Secondary level as well. We should also teach our children about the contributions of entrepreneurs and local firms.

The SME Talent Programme (STP) helps local SMEs attract talent from local educational institutes by co-funding internships, study sponsorships and fresh-hire training. In 2015, the Minister for MTI replied to Mr Chen Show Mao that 155 STP job matches and over 700 STP internships were implemented, benefiting 192 enterprises. More publicity should be created around existing SME Talent Schemes among both SMEs and students to drive the take-up rate even higher, which I believe is possible. This should be done in terms of media awareness programmes as well as school events. SMEs should also be encouraged and supported to develop employee branding initiatives, so as to be more successful in hiring.

Lastly, we should do more to measure and raise social mobility to provide more educational support to persons with disabilities to develop their talents and to work with ex-prison inmates to support their entrepreneurial dreams.

I shall have more to say on these topics in COS and future debates, but the reason I raise this subject in the context of a discussion on local enterprises is that future entrepreneurs and innovators can come from such backgrounds. In a situation of talent scarcity, with a large and attractive Public Sector and MNC sector, we must do more to unlock resources of talent, not just because it is the right thing to do morally but also economically. The late Andy Grove of Intel, for example, was severely hearing impaired as a young man but went on to transform Intel and the global semiconductor industry. Thank you.

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# Understanding and Addressing Employment Insecurity

by Sylvia Lim

Madam Speaker, the focus of my speech today is on understanding and addressing employment insecurity.

Madam, this year's Budget Statement acknowledges that businesses are facing difficult and uncertain conditions. To this end, we see a continuation of some existing schemes to support businesses, such as the Wage Credit Scheme and an extension of the Special Employment Credit which provides a modest offset for wages paid to Singaporeans. These measures benefit employers and employees still on the payroll. The painful reality is that there is a significant proportion of Singaporeans who have lost their jobs or are at risk of losing their jobs. What is the size of this problem? The Minister said that unemployment remained low at 1.9% but this percentage included foreigners in the computation. What about unemployment among Singaporeans?

According to the Labour Market Report issued by the Ministry of Manpower last month, unemployment among Singaporeans rose to 3% in December, meaning that more than 58,000 Singapore citizens were out of work. As for long-term unemployment among residents, for those who have been searching for work for more than 25 weeks, for the whole of 2015, there were 12,700 residents in this predicament. The Report further noted that among those rated redundant and sorted to re-enter the workforce, only about some of them were able to do so within six months.

These figures paint a worrying picture but in all likelihood represent the problem. This is due to the definitions adopted in compiling the data. While the definitions used are in line with international norms, it is useful to elaborate briefly why unemployment statistics likely under represent the employment landscape.

First, a person is considered unemployed only if he is out of work and actively searching for work. If the job seeker is unable to find work and decides to give up the job search or to go into training, he is not considered unemployed. In addition, a person is considered employed in Singapore so long as he has work for just one hour in the period in question. Thus, a General Manager who loses his job and works just five hours a week at a fast food chain counter is considered employed and off the unemployment statistics. Clearly, the plight of this General Manager deserves attention.

One of my residents recently shared with me his worries about employment in security. Some of his friends in their early 40s had recently lost their jobs. They had decided to dumb down their expectations and found jobs in other industries, but the reduced pay was insufficient to meet their commitments, leaving some of them to become Uber taxi drivers to supplement their income.

Such persons are not captured in our statistics. But are these displaced workers not worthy of attention? What stress befalls a breadwinner who loses his job at a stage of life when he has to support children or elderly parents, service a mortgage and more? These stresses in turn have ripple effects for the quality of family life and the ability of children to concentrate on their studies.

Madam, it is time for the Government to put in more efforts to measure under-employment. Unlike unemployment which refers to the extreme situation of a total lack of work, measuring underemployment will indicate what extent a person is suffering from a partial lack of work. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), measure underemployment is increasingly relevant for industrialised countries. The ILO noted that many countries were facing changes in the employment situation, labour market flexibility and the rise of various forms of non-standard employment. Thus, new situations have emerged that can be regarded as under-employment. According to the 16th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, under-employment reflects an under-utilisation of a productive capacity of the employed population.

Measuring under-employment usually starts off with the time-related measures, namely, the hours worked versus the hours that the employee could be available and willing to work. We note that the Government has been putting up some statistics on time-related underemployment in the Labour Force Reports. While looking at under-employment based on time is certainly useful, it does not present the full picture. Returning to the General Manager, for example, the fact that he works five hours a week, as compared to a full 50-hour week is one indicator, but it is also relevant to consider that he is now drawing pay at a rate that no longer commensurate with his qualifications and his experience. A person's earning potential is just as relevant as the hours spent at work.

In order for us to better understand the phenomenon of under-employment in Singapore, I call on the Government to do the following: first, the Government can use the existing data it already collects and publishes headline numbers, showing not just unemployment, the headline numbers should include time-based under-employment and the numbers of demoralised workers, meaning those who have given up looking for work, and hence dropped out of the unemployment statistics.

Putting these three measures in headline numbers will ensure that public attention will be focused on these. Secondly, the Government in time should go beyond this to look into a substantive measure of under-employment and publish that. For example, employment income versus the median income for that academic qualification and age, or versus the previous employment income. This will give some idea of the extent to which people are downgrading expectations and taking up jobs that are below reasonable labour market expectations, just to make ends meet.

Madam, I believe that such additional measures will enable us to understand better the under-employment facing Singaporeans so that appropriate policies and mitigation measures can be put in place.

Coming back to the Budget measures, what does this Budget do for workers who lose their jobs? There is an Adapt and Grow Initiative and the TechSkills Accelerator. Adapt and Grow is stated to be targeted at those who face greater difficulty in finding jobs and for mid-career job seekers. The emphasis is on inducing employers to hire through wage support to the employers and in retraining and job matching assistance. These are certainly laudable, but it may take some time before the job seeker is able to find meaningful employment, through no fault of his own.



As for TechSkills Accelerator, it is not clear whether it is meant only for those already from the ICT sector or has a broader catchment. However, it is very ambitious. I can see that I am no ICT professional, but TechSkills Accelerator assumes that technical skills learning can be accelerated. For simple level skills, that might be the case, but for specialised knowledge, I can imagine that it would take years of experience to master, just like other professions, say, engineering or law.

In this economic transition, there are hardworking Singaporeans and their families being pushed into limbo. As a society, we should devise some safety nets to give them some peace of mind. To this end, the Government should look into the feasibility of introducing redundancy insurance. One model could involve requiring working residents in Singapore and their employers to each contribute a very small percentage of the employee's monthly salaries towards a fund. The fund should be geared towards helping workers who undergo involuntary unemployment, meaning those who are made redundant, including those terminated with notice. The fund could gear towards giving a six-month payout at a fraction of the worker's last drawn salary, say, 40%, subject to a cap based on a median wage. Such a modest scheme of limited payouts which end after six months will send a clear signal that only a temporary buffer is being provided, incentivising the worker to actively prepare to earn his own income again.

Madam, such redundancy insurance has benefits for both the individual and society. For the individual, he would seriously have recourse to this buffer which he contributed to. He may not need to queue up at the social assistance agency and tap on public monies. He also need not grab the first job opportunity that comes along but be able to take a bit of time to hold out for a suitable job, enabling a better employee to job fit and sustainability.

Madam, this Budget emphasises the need for innovation which, in turn, requires people to feel secure. As pointed out by the panelists at the Economic Society of Singapore post-Budget Roundtable, better cushions for the unemployed will also encourage more people to venture out on their own and become entrepreneurs, an essential element of an innovative society.

Madam, economic restructuring and downturns from time to time will result in redundancies. It is also inevitable that if we succeed in our productivity and automation drives, people will be displaced from their jobs. We should devise a feasible scheme to tide our fellow citizens through these difficulties.

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# Semangat Kerjasama ke Arah Pemupukkan Masyarakat yang Daya Tahan, Inklusif dan Penyayang (Spirit of Partnership)

by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Madam, I will deliver my speech in Malay.

*(In Malay):* Madam, one of the main themes for this year's Budget is the Spirit of Partnership. In his speech, Minister Heng Swee Keat emphasised the importance of this factor in transforming our nation's economy and in strengthening Singapore towards being an inclusive and caring society. I agree and concur that emphasis and focus should be given to this Spirit of Partnership because, in our present lives that are full of trials and tribulations, efforts that require cooperation or collaborations between different groups and entities, are the best way to cope with an uncertain living environment. As the Malay saying goes, "Whether the burden is light or heavy, we will carry it together". The value of the Spirit of Partnership is the main theme of my speech for this year's Budget debates.

Madam, the Government's plans and efforts that focus more on the business sector are a welcome move. This is to be expected, especially with the gloomy overall economic outlook in the near future. The support given to small and medium enterprises is important because SMEs form 99% of all local businesses, creating 70% of the nation's labour force and contributing 50% towards Singapore's GDP. If something unfortunate happens to our SMEs, the whole of Singapore will be affected. For instance, the winding down of an SME will result in job losses for Singaporeans. I feel that the main objective is to gain a collective benefit and not for only certain groups. The collective benefit is gained by Singaporeans through the jobs made available when small and medium enterprises continue to grow and progress. This collective benefit is a main factor in achieving an inclusive and caring society.

For this Budget, one of the main emphasis is the effort to increase systems automation and encourage mergers and acquisitions. The Government has provided grants to support SMEs to achieve this. In terms of economy of business, any increase in automation will be viewed as something positive because it is closely linked to an increase in productivity. However, the next question will be, what will be the impact of automation on the economy of employment? Economic experts have different views on the impact of automation on jobs. The moderate view is that, while automation will make jobs disappear, at the same time, it will create new jobs. A study by George Graetz from the Uppsala University and Guy Michaels from the London School of Economics in 2015 showed some evidence that automation will result in job loss to low-skilled workers and to certain moderately skilled workers. Retrenchments and job losses cannot be avoided when mergers and acquisitions occur. In this decade, mergers and acquisitions occurred rapidly in many industries, like banking, logistics, manufacturing, and others.

Madam, one of the main concerns of Singaporeans is the loss of income. The main aim of the Government in supporting the increase in automation, and encouraging mergers and acquisitions, is that Singaporeans can reap the collective benefits, and that it will not only benefit certain groups. Many hope that the Government will pay close attention and monitor it closely, so that this aim of reaping collective benefits can be realised. We certainly do not want a situation where automation and technological development result in certain segments of society feeling that they are left behind, and sink amidst the tide of modernity and progress, resulting in negative feelings, as the saying goes, "being discarded after they are no longer useful." If this happens, it will weaken our efforts to build an inclusive and caring society. As one way to manage the impact of retrenchment that will certainly occur in the effort to achieve progress, I support my colleague Ms Sylvia Lim's suggestion that the Government consider introducing a Redundancy Insurance. This is an insurance scheme where employers and workers each contribute a small portion of the worker's monthly salary into a fund. The objective of this fund is to help workers who are facing unemployment due to involuntary retrenchment, including those who were served notice. This fund can perhaps provide payouts over a period of 6 months, whereby the payout amount can be based on a small proportion of the last salary received by the worker, within the range of 40%, but at the same time, have a limit that is based on the median income. This simple scheme can give an indication that the help provided is short-term in nature, but at the same time, it can give some relief and financial assistance while these individuals strive to look for new jobs.

Madam, in addition, I would like to convey the wishes of many people to increase the amount allocated for the SkillsFuture credit. The people welcome the SkillsFuture scheme, especially amongst the low-skilled and low-wage community members, who wish to upskill so

that they will not sink amidst the tide of technological development and automation. However, their intent to upskill will be affected due to cost issues. On the basis of inclusiveness and caring for one another, I hope that the Government can seriously consider the suggestions mentioned as part of the Spirit of Partnership between the Government and the people to help Singaporeans cope with the challenges that will emerge in our nation's pursuit of progress.

Madam, I would now like to touch on the social aspect of the 2016 Budget. In his speech, the Finance Minister said that we will like Singapore to be a great place to raise a family, where we bring out the best in every Singaporean, and a society that takes care of those who have special needs, who are less well off. The Minister once again emphasised the Spirit of Partnership between individuals, society and the Government in order to achieve this objective.

For this year's Budget, in an effort to aid early childhood development, a new initiative KidStart was introduced. The KidStart scheme aims to help the early development of children's physical, cognitive and social skills. The present Child Development Account scheme or CDA has been enhanced with an additional First Step grant of \$3,000 as an initial assistance. As mentioned, these schemes provide support for Singaporean children in order to give them the best start possible in life.

On the basis of this noble aim, I appeal to the Government to extend these schemes to every Singaporean child including those born out of wedlock. Presently, Government schemes exclude this group of children. I do understand that the Government provides these schemes only to children who are born to married couples in an effort to strengthen the institution of the family. As a family and household counsellor, I agree with this approach. But I also feel that we should assess this from another angle.

Firstly, children born out of wedlock are also Singaporean children who will contribute to the development of this nation when they become adults. Secondly, these children are just like other children, born the same way and have the same needs, in terms of physical, cognitive and social development. Thirdly, these children should not be treated differently because of something that their parents did. I would like to reiterate that, while I agree with the Government's efforts to strengthen the institution of the family, nonetheless I believe that there are better ways, in the form of early prevention that can be taken to deal with this issue. The Government's approach in this issue should be changed so that when these children grow up, they will not feel marginalised, left out and angry because society seems to blame them for something that their parents did. I believe that the Government's support towards the

development of every Singaporean child, regardless of their status, will be welcomed by Singaporeans.

Madam, I would like to now touch on the development of the Outward Bound School which aims to build resilience. The development of resilience among our students is important in preparing them for the various challenges in life and giving them self-confidence. I support the plan to build the Outward Bound School in Coney Island, which will be able to accommodate more participants. In order to build one's resilience, we need to have a holistic approach, whereby every aspect of the human brain, that is, Intelligence Quotient (IQ), Emotional Quotient (EQ) and Spiritual Quotient (SQ), must be developed and nurtured.

Spiritual Quotient (SQ) first came to the attention of academics, especially in the field of psychology, early last decade. According to academics, Spiritual Quotient is closely linked to awareness towards the meaning of life, being responsible in life and the need for humility in life. By possessing Spiritual Quotient, it will point an individual towards having a personal vision and work towards it, with the objective that every benefit gained is not meant just for him, but also for society and the world in general, in other words, achieve collective good. In short, he turns himself into a blessing for all.

I am of the view that a combination of these three quotients will not only result in resilience, but it will also build other positive human traits. Here, I would like to repeat a suggestion that I gave previously in this House, that is, the reintroduction of Religious Knowledge subjects in secondary schools. I feel that schools are the best place to develop a holistic person that should combine IQ, EQ and SQ. I would like to share that I have one child who is studying in a full-time madrasah, one in a public school and one more in a Mission school. I had the opportunity to examine how these three schools nurture good values and good traits. The advantage that Mission schools and madrasahs have over public schools is that they also focus on developing the Spiritual Quotient.

Madam, I mentioned earlier that one of the efforts that the Government does to strengthen the institution of the family is by excluding children born out of wedlock from enjoying the support schemes provided by the Government. Following that, I said that it is better to undertake early preventive measures so that this situation, where a child is born out of wedlock, can be lessened or prevented. I am confident that this can be achieved through the development of the Intellectual, Emotional and Spiritual Quotients in each person. A partnership, which combines the Intellectual, Emotional and Spiritual Quotients, can result in individuals who are highly resilient and gives priority to the collective need. These are the Singaporeans that we need in our effort towards building an inclusive and caring society.



The final issue that I will touch on is the Government's move to encourage Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and other ground up initiatives, by providing more support. Here I would like to suggest that we establish a more effective link or cooperation between corporate entities and individuals, with the Social Service Office (SSO). I do understand that the main role of the SSO is to coordinate and increase cooperation between voluntary welfare organisations within their respective jurisdictions, so that the local communities can receive the maximum benefit. This is done by monitoring the demography and needs of the local community. For example, monitoring is done to see if there is a duplication of services, whether the service provided currently is sufficient, and so on. The partnership between the SSO and programme organisers, be it corporate entities or interested individuals, can help to fill in the service gaps within a certain area. This partnership not only benefits the needy, but it also helps organisations that provide assistance or that wish to implement community programmes, and hence creating a win-win situation for everyone.

Before I end my speech, I would like to state that the Spirit of Partnership is an important aspect of personal development, as well as the development of society and the nation. The Spirit of Partnership aims to combine resources and manpower so that it can give the best and maximum benefits possible to every member of society. But we must be careful so that this partnership does not lead to unwanted side effects, and resulting in a segment of society feeling marginalised and neglected, because that will run against our country's mission to build an inclusive and caring society.

Madam, I support this Budget.

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# Focusing On HDB Shops, The Unemployed and Our Youth

by Dennis Tan

Madam Speaker, today, I shall be touching on three different aspects of the Budget.

I will first start with the Budget proposal to enhance the Revitalisation of Shops (ROS) scheme. In November 2007, the Government introduced the ROS to enhance the vibrancy and competitiveness of HDB shops. As of March 2016, the HDB website stated that the scheme has benefitted 4,600 shops at 54 sites. It also stated that this covers over 50% of our town and neighbourhood centres. The scheme covers upgrading of common areas, promotional activities and rent-free periods for tenants to renovate their shops.

In last year's Committee of Supply debate in March 2015, former Senior Minister of State for National Development, Mr Lee Yi Shyan, said that HDB has spent \$8.4 million since the ROS scheme was introduced in 2007. Assuming the effective period of expenditure was from 2008 to 2014, this amounts to an average of \$1.2 million per year. I hope the Minister can share with the House some details about how the ROS scheme has improved the businesses of HDB shops in the past nine years.

Budget 2016 will set aside \$15 million annually to enhance the ROS scheme. This is a large increase compared to previous years, more than 10 times the average expenditure in previous years. While I am sure it is good that our existing HDB shops are receiving more assistance to enhance their businesses, I hope the Minister for Finance can share the reasons for this large annual increase in funding for the scheme and also share details about how the proposed increase in funding will be utilised, and in what ways will the coming year's programme be different from the past.

Madam, in many HDB estates, especially the older ones, it is quite a common sight to see shops in an unfavourable facing or location doing badly. It could be due to their relative poor location compared with shops in a different location in the same estate, or it could even be due to over-supply of shop spaces in the same estate. For such shops, I hope the Minister

can look into how the ROS can better assist them, or to consider how parts of the town centre where these shops are located could be redeveloped.

As we provide assistance to our existing HDB shops, let us also not forget about building adequate new shops in our newer HDB estates. Residents of then-newly built HDB estates like Sengkang and Punggol experienced a lack of basic amenities and shops when they first moved in. The design of most of the void decks was also not conducive for constructing shops. One reason for this is the philosophy of building amenities like convenience shops and coffee shops only when there is a critical mass demand. I feel that this philosophy should be tweaked to build amenities ahead of demand. This is so that pioneering residents are not deprived of amenities when they move in. You may ask how can businesses thrive when demand has not reached critical mass. That is where the Government can step in to provide reduced rents until critical mass is reached.

Another way we can improve new HDB estates is to build town centres consisting of low rise HDB shop houses to a competitive retail mix to meet the wider needs of residents. I know that in recent years, the approach has been to build a shopping mall that acts as an integrated hub for the estate. However, in my view, a town centre like the ones in mature estates, such as Bedok and Tampines, are better suited to meet the needs of residents and to create a sense of community and identity. A shopping mall can still be built but only as a complement to the town centre. A shopping mall must not compromise the businesses of the retail shops in the town centre but complement and enhance the business in the neighbourhood shops by helping to draw people to the town centre and making the town centre a lively place where residents of the town and even residents of nearby estates will want to visit and spend their time, thereby bringing business and vibrancy to the town.

I am glad to note that the URA Masterplan states that the Bidadari Estate will have a wide range of amenities like a bus interchange, neighbourhood police centre, places of worship and healthcare facilities. I certainly hope that amenities, such as mini-marts, provision shops, convenience shops, coffee shops, can be built ahead of demand. I also hope that town centres with low-rise HDB shop houses can be incorporated in the plans for not just new HDB estates like Bidadari but also other new estates as well as when older estates are redeveloped.

I will end this part of my speech with an anecdote. The hawker centres at different parts of Bedok, such as Block 85, Bedok North at Fengshan SMC and Block 511, Bedok North at Aljunied GRC, see many customers who are from relatively new estates like Punggol or Sengkang. I have spoken to quite a few of these customers during my visits to these markets

over time. One common reason given is the lack of good dining places in Punggol or Sengkang. How often do you actually see people from Bedok going to Punggol or Sengkang to have dinner? There may be various reasons for this but certainly, in my view, poor town planning is one of the reasons. Madam Speaker, may I next speak in Mandarin.

*(In Mandarin):* Madam Speaker, from this year's Budget, it is evident that companies are facing difficulties and uncertainties in the business environment. Although the Government has announced measures to benefit employers and employees, Singaporeans who are already unemployed or facing impending unemployment, their difficulties warrant even more help. This is especially so when the unemployed is the main breadwinner of the family. Besides supporting their own family, they may also need to service their housing loan and look after their elderly parents. Many PMETs who were retrenched from their jobs with both SMEs or MNCs had to resort to driving taxis as a full-time job as they were not able to find suitable replacement jobs or, for others, who were only able to find jobs where the income offered was much less than their previous incomes, they had to resort to driving taxis on a part-time basis to supplement their incomes. This is what we call "under-employment".

This underemployment situation is worrying. It means that we are unable to utilise our human resources effectively to fully develop our economy. However, our employment statistics does not reflect this under-employment situation.

We do not know which category these 'under-employed' people fall under in our employment statistics. We also do not know whether our published employment statistics reflect this situation.

Underemployment will cause underutilisation of the working population's productive capacity. The question is, how do we prevent this from happening? In other words, how do we fully utilise the working population's productive capacity? In this regard, measures announced by the Government, such as the Adapt and Grow Initiative and TechSkills Accelerator, should be able to facilitate the utilisation of the productive capacity of the working population to a certain extent.

However, these measures are primarily targeted at existing workers or workers undergoing training for career conversion; it not only requires the cooperation between employers and employees, but also takes some time before the effect kicks in.

For unemployed or retrenched workers, in the absence of a stable income, their entire family's financial situation may be adversely affected. If workers can be provided with

retrenchment insurance, in the event of retrenchment, he can receive financial assistance by way of a payout from such insurance policy for say a few months before he finds a new job. This may alleviate any financial difficulty and lighten his financial burden.

*(In English):* I would like to spend the final part of my speech on what the Budget has provided for our children and young people. This is found in section C of the Budget, which is entitled "Building a Caring and Resilient Society". Under this section, there are various sub-headers, including "Caring for our young".

I am happy to note that for Budget 2016, the Government will introduce a new Child Development Account (CDA) First Step Grant for all Singaporean children. Parents will automatically receive \$3,000 in their child's CDA which they can use for their children's healthcare and childcare needs. This is a departure from the previous practice of dollar for dollar matching which placed lower income families at a distinct disadvantage. I understand that my Workers' Party colleagues have spoken up on this in the previous Parliament and indeed other Singaporeans too. The new CDA grant with its \$3,000 is certainly a good first step in the right direction.

Madam, just to be sure that I understand correctly, may the Minister confirm that when it is stated that the grant is, I quote from paragraph C6, "for all Singaporean children" unquote, it includes children of single unwed parents too? I think this would be good because we should not focus on the parents but the welfare and benefit of their Singaporean children and the value they will bring to Singapore.

Next, under the section "Caring for our young", there is also sub-heading "Building Resilience in our Youth". Under this section, the Government is making a single proposal that through a new national outdoor adventure education masterplan, it will build a new Outward Bound Singapore (OBS) campus on Coney Island. It is stated that the new OBS will be built to help our young people develop a sense of adventure, resilience and be ready to challenge themselves to be their best.

Madam, I agree that the OBS programme is good for our young people and as many of our young people as possible should be encouraged to attend. I hope that the new OBS will be able to provide many opportunities for our young people to enhance their sense of adventure.

A one-off participation in the OBS programme alone may not be enough to build resilience or a sense of adventure. There are other activities that our young people can be

encouraged to participate to build resilience or nurture a sense of adventure. For example, we can encourage our young people to join CCAs like certain uniformed groups, sports or outdoor activities clubs.

I was a scrawny and introverted schoolboy. Spending six years in the National Cadet Corps (Sea) opened my eyes to adventure and teamwork. I struggled when I had to canoe round Singapore in three days. But I could not disappoint my buddy in the same canoe and, together with our friends in other canoes, we learnt to cheer and encourage each other and finished as one big team.

Resilience training involved much more than a round island Singapore canoe expedition or one off OBS programme. We need to re-look the way we educate our children. We should not be happy with an education system that encourages our children to succeed by being "exams smart" alone. The system should encourage more of our young people to explore different "adventures", for example, taking time off studies or work to excel in sports or hobbies, like some of our national athletes. Or even taking time off to see the world and broaden your horizon, like what many young people in Europe do.

And our young people should not fear losing out by graduating later or starting work later. We have had Singaporeans who took time off to climb mountains. They are fine examples.

We also have to find a way to teach our children not to be afraid of failure but to learn to cope with failure. There must be latitude in the education system to allow this. If our children are afraid to fail, they are less likely to be adventurous. They will always go for safe options. They are also less likely to appreciate innovation and entrepreneurship. We can forget about Singapore having the next Sim Wong Hoo, not to mention Steve Jobs.

As a schoolboy with questionable motor skills, I was not very good at sports like rugby or football. Rather fortuitously, I discovered the joy of distance running, and never stopped running since.

What has running got to do with resilience or fortitude? You can run many miles to prepare for a marathon. You can plan to run each kilometre of your race in five or six minutes but you will never know whether you are going to get the cramps at 33 km, which will throw your marathon race into disarray.

Resilience is when you are down with cramps at 33 km and you keep pushing to cross the finishing line and not give up. Resilience is when you are down with shin splints but still work on your recovery to get back to finish your race another day.

Running, and indeed sports, mirrors life. Like marathon runners, all of us have our own race in life to run. When the chips are down, when you are struggling with your business or when you are laid off by the MNC you work with for 20 years, what do you do in the race of life? Do you just sit and despair or do you pick yourself up and press on to cross the finishing line another day? Thank you, Madam.

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# Fiscal Prudence and Sustainability

by Pritam Singh

Madam Speaker, this is the first Budget that allows the Government to tap on Temasek's Net Investment Returns Contribution alongside the MAS and GIC, presenting the Government with a cumulative total of \$14.7 billion. This is a substantial increase of about 48% from the NIRC of \$9.9 billion at the Government's disposal last year and has given this Government more leeway and flexibility to implement its plans, with the \$3.4 billion surplus as well.

Madam Speaker, the focus of my speech is to persuade the Government to consider a deeper discussion of fiscal prudence and the trade-offs in determining our Budget priorities. By doing so, we can have a richer discussion on the Budget and my speech will seek to provide some suggestions on the contours of such a discussion.

As with almost all Budget announcements made over the last few years in particular, it is usually followed by a discussion in some quarters, especially in commentaries and forum pages, about whether the Government is turning populist, or if welfare is taking root in Singapore, or a combination of similar themes. Very seldom are fears of welfare accompanied by a look at the overall fiscal state of affairs and both in the short and long term.

The additional details in this Budget about the Silver Support package exemplify a recognition by the Government that there are many Singaporeans – more than 140,000 of them, in fact – who are not adequately equipped for retirement and live precarious lives, perhaps, not only physically, but more significantly, even mentally.

The total expenditure for this year's budget comes up to \$73 billion. The \$330 million expended on the Silver Support package will rise in the years to come because of our demographic profile. To put things in some perspective, the State collects \$2.2 billion a year in gaming revenue. Our vulnerable elderly deserve to retire with dignity. This must be a central social objective of the Singapore system.

No discussion of financial prudence can escape the important behavioural question of ensuring our society retains a positive work ethic with permanent schemes like Silver Support and Workfare. However, this question should be posed with a sense of not just perspective, but also proportion, in view of the demographic transition in Singapore and the structural changes

that come with economic transformation, both of which will become more apparent in the years to come.

How can we better approach a discussion on the Budget going forward?

Firstly, the evolution of technology and data analytics ought to make discussions on Budget projection generate more light rather than heat. In the same way, MINDEF human resource planners can project with sufficient granularity the number of men that will serve National Service in about 20 years' time, and as a consequence, determine force size and structure to a reasonable degree, a richer public debate on permanent schemes like Silver Support can take shape if we assess the sustainability of such schemes with a long-term perspective in mind. This would help the public better understand the overall costs and sustainability of such schemes rather than leave it to conjecture.

For example, a more coherent and holistic public debate on the pros and cons of potentially expanding Workfare can also take place if the public is presented with tools to better understand how much such permanent initiatives are likely to cost years down the road. Many Singaporeans have in the past suggested tweaking Workfare to raise the cash component. Currently, a 50-year-old employee earning \$1,800 on Workfare gets an additional \$9 in cash and \$13 in CPF contributions every month, with the amount payable every quarter, subject to the number of months he or she remains employed.

However, an important consideration in the context of fiscal prudence, and understanding such permanent schemes better could be, for example, an exercise that compares raising the WIS payout amounts as compared against the initiative announced in this year's budget which increases the income eligibility threshold from \$1,900 to \$2,000. How many additional Singaporeans would benefit by this threshold rise and is there scope to further raise the payouts under WIS, and if so, what would be the specific impact on the Budget, and would it be wise? Such enquiries will make the public better appreciate the trade-offs and operationalise the meaning of fiscal prudence.

A second trend that often repeats itself prior to the Budget debate is the wishes of specific industries or industry leaders who call for more reliefs or taxpayer support. What we do not see much of is the debate about whether some companies have grown to expect the equivalence of constant assistance or "welfare" from the State, without the same scrutiny extended to permanent schemes for the needy or less well-off.

Like permanent schemes that help individual Singaporeans, a fuller public discussion on fiscal prudence should also extend to companies and industries, and enquire whether Budget initiatives indeed achieve the policy outcomes that they were intended for. For example, it would be helpful for the Government to set out how much the Productivity and Innovation Credit scheme (PIC) has actually improved productivity numbers or even spurred innovation, even as this year's budget heralds a reduction of PIC payouts going forward. This is relevant, as even the Government has acknowledged that some companies have used their PIC credits to buy equipment they do not need. Fiscal sustainability would also require accounting for the extent of such leakage and unintended consequences as well.

The lessons learnt from the shortcomings of the PIC scheme should be transferred to the Budget's announcement of the three-year \$400 million Automation Support Package, specifically with regard to grants, which assist in the roll-out of new automation projects and investment allowances. This would ensure that the technologies introduced actually improve productivity as envisaged.

Moving forward, and specifically on the Budget's announcement of the \$4.5 billion Industry Transformation Programme with more than 20 sectors earmarked for development, it would be worthwhile to consider how companies and sectors that do the most to raise productivity, improve skills and innovation as well as promoting internationalisation can benefit more from taxpayer dollars than those who do not.

One way to effect this differentiation is to consider a higher cap on corporate income tax rebates than the current \$20,000 cap for companies that record real productivity gains. For example, the cap can be progressively lowered or even removed completely for companies that do not meet the policy objectives of the scheme.

It would also be important for any exercise in fiscal prudence to distinguish and incentivise activities that actually create something tangible that have a real trickle-down effect as opposed to economic initiatives that just "rotate around the high-finance microcosm enriching the 1% as they buy and sell existing assets to one another, bidding up their value, while failing to invest in research, products, jobs or innovation" – an apt descriptive which I read in a recent *TIME* magazine article that reviewed a new US prime-time TV show, titled "Billions".

Madam Speaker, even as our businesses are incentivised to transform, they must keep Singaporeans at the centre of their efforts. To this end, the Industry Transformation Programme should identify and thereafter even prejudice firms that are what the Ministry of Manpower

calls "double-weak firms" – weak in having a Singaporean core and weak in their commitment to fair hiring practices and the development of Singaporeans. Likewise, these companies should be restricted from benefiting from corporate income tax rebates or tapping on the grants that go up on the business grants portal that is to be established in the fourth quarter of this year. An inclusive Singapore must be underwritten by Singapore-based companies that support the employment prospects of Singaporeans.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, in a recent book titled, "Industries of the Future" by Alec Ross, the former innovation adviser to Hilary Clinton portends a future where medical technology, robotics, coding, big data and so forth, will make many jobs redundant, amongst other interesting predictions. In this context, a deeper and more sophisticated public discussion on fiscal prudence, sustainability and accountability of Budget expenditure in a more ambiguous future becomes more and not less urgent. It would also, I hazard, have the parallel effect of engendering a more inclusive citizenry that is rooted to Singapore's long-term success. Madam Speaker, I support the Budget.

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COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
MINISTRY OF  
HOME AFFAIRS

# Terrorism Threat

by Pritam Singh

Madam Chairperson, the scourge of terrorism does not appear to be going away anytime soon. As quickly as Al Qaeda affiliates such as Jemaah Islamiyah faded from the public eye in the decade or so after 9/11, and after the death of Osama bin Laden, the place appears to have been taken over by ISIS-inspired ideologues with shocking rapidity.

It is known that some individuals from Singapore, even our neighbouring countries, have sought to join ISIS in the Middle East and a lot of effort has been put in by Singapore to prevent not just its nationals, but Indonesian citizens, for example, from transiting through our borders to potentially join ISIS ranks.

Unlike the Jemaah Islamiyah movement, there appears to be different opinions with regards to the level of threat posed by ISIS in Southeast Asia. The Prime Minister, in his recent trip to the US, alluded to the fact that ISIS has battalion-size Southeast Asian arm called Katibah Nusantara. An RSIS commentary last year also reported that about 30 different Southeast Asian groups have pledged allegiance to ISIS. The Executive Director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies which organises the Shangri-La Dialogue in a recent Jane's Defence Weekly article was quoted to have said the threat of Katibah Nusantara seeking territory in Southeast was exaggerated even if there is some danger, nonetheless. In addition, Katibah Nusantara does not appear in the media and in the public conscience as often as Jemaah Islamiyah did previously.

Can the Minister share details about the evolution and threat posed by Katibah Nusantara and other groups aligned to ISIS and how it has impacted upon MHA's work and if there have been any differences in approach in dealing with such groups from the Jemaah Islamiyah's experience? How can Singaporeans be inoculated against the deviant teachings of such groups? Has there been a requirement to increase the resources and manpower allocated to MHA as a result of this new wave of terrorism?

Finally, can the Ministry also share how the Ministry's upcoming SG Secure initiative will be different from its predecessor, the Community Engagement Programme to better equip and prepare Singaporeans and foreign workers in this new environment of terrorism?

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# Key Performance Indicators for Ministry

by Sylvia Lim

Madam, first, KPIs for Ministry. The Ministry has set out its Key Performance Indicators in the Budget documents. I would like to highlight and comment on a few of them for the Ministry to review in future.

First, the Home Team has a desired outcome of a safe and secure society where lives and property are protected. One of the KPIs is the number of overall crimes per 100,000 population. I would caution that this figure simply reflects the incidence of crimes reported and recorded by the Police. It does not tell us about crimes that were not reported and it has been found in other countries that reporting rates are especially low for sexual assault and crimes committed by someone the victim knew well. Vulnerable groups such as foreign workers, victims of domestic abuse and others may be reluctant to seek Police help due to a fear of repatriation, retaliation or distrust of the Police.

Official crime rates are also influenced by how the Police may reclassify cases. Furthermore, crime rates cannot be attributed to the Police alone. While Police action can reduce certain types of crime, other crimes are not preventable by Police actions and are a product of social and economic forces.

If the Ministry wishes to have a more accurate picture of the crime situation in Singapore, there needs to be an attempt to uncover unreported crime. This is done in other countries through national victimisation surveys such as the British Crime Survey where the population is asked about their experience with crime. Such a population survey should also cover why the crime victims did not report to the Police, thus helping the Police address any service gaps.

Another desired outcome of the Ministry is secure borders with efficient and legitimate flow of people, goods and conveyances. Under this outcome the stated KPIs all relate to the legitimacy of inflows, for example, the number of offences detected and unauthorised vessels intercepted. There are no measures for the efficiency of flows. Would the Ministry be brave enough to introduce a measure of efficiency, for example, set a desired time limit within which to process an individual or vehicle to Woodlands or Tuas Checkpoint?



One final desired outcome to highlight is the secure and humane custody of business. Again, the indicators emphasised on the security aspect only, for example, number of escapes, number of assault cases. What about measuring humane custody, which is equally important?

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## Manpower for Security/Enforcement

by Sylvia Lim

My cut is on manpower not just in our law enforcement agencies, but also in the auxiliary police and civilian personnel doing law enforcement on behalf of some statutory boards such as the Land Transport Authority and the Urban Redevelopment Authority.

As far as our State law enforcement agencies are concerned, much has already been said in recent years about the challenges faced by the Singapore Police Force. Currently, the SPF is functioning at probably a very low police officer to population ratio of 170 officers per 100,000 population, and it is trying to leverage on technology, outsourcing and civilianising jobs to cope. What about the other law enforcement agencies such as the Singapore Civil Defence Force, Central Narcotics Bureau and the Singapore Prison Service? Do they face similar manpower challenges and how are they coping with them?

Next, I move on to the auxiliary police forces particularly CERTIS CISCO and AETOS who are deployed island-wide. For this industry, only Singaporeans, permanent residents and Malaysians are eligible to apply. In our daily encounters with auxiliary police, we see a large presence of Malaysians in CERTIS and AETOS uniforms. During the Little India riot, quite a number of auxiliary police at the scene were Malaysians. What is the current proportion of Malaysians out of the total police strength in these two auxiliary police forces? Does the Government have any guidelines on the ratio of Malaysians to Singaporeans?

One officer recently told me that the ratio allowed is five Malaysians to one Singaporean and I wonder if that is true. Are there guidelines on any duty or assignments, which must be done only by Singaporeans? For example, at the immigration checkpoints, are there Malaysians checking their fellow Malaysians and what would the risks be?

Lastly, I come to the civilian personnel being recruited to do law enforcement on behalf of certain statutory boards. I understand that CERTIS CISCO is the outsourced agent to do enforcement of traffic violations on behalf of LTA and URA. CERTIS has been recruiting many civilians for such tasks.

Recently, I came across one such recruit, an elderly gentleman around 60 and not in good health. According to him, he attended the recruitment interview and specifically requested that he be posted to do enforcement only for URA carpark violations, as he assessed that there was less risk of confrontation with members of the public as compared with LTA traffic violations. To his surprise, the next day, he was deployed to a team to do enforcement of LTA violations. His worst fears were realised when there was indeed a confrontation with an irate motorist booked by his team who apparently chased after the enforcement team to dispute the booking. The gentleman was so traumatised by the incident that he did not return to work.

I do not know whether this gentleman's experience is an isolated incident or not. However, it raises the issue of how civilians are recruited and trained before they are being deployed to face the public.

Even though such law enforcement has been outsourced to CERTIS, these civilians are exercising law enforcement powers and will affect the public. What role does the Government play in ensuring that such personnel are properly chosen and trained? What oversight role does the Government have?

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## Gambling Outlets & Licenses

by Png Eng Huat

Madam, the ills of gambling addiction are well documented. More often than not, the people who suffer the most are the family members, not the problem gamblers. This is made evident by the rising number of Family Exclusion orders issued for the two casinos. Such orders are initiated by family members to exclude a gambler in their family from the casinos if the gambler is unwilling to address his or her own addiction. The number of such orders issued rose from 149 in 2010 to well over 2,000 in 2015.

As more families are grappling with problem gambling, it does not make sense to see gambling outlets sprouting up in easy-to-access and family-oriented clubs at the same time.

The new SAFRA Punggol Clubhouse will open tomorrow. It boasts five enrichment centres for children aged 3 to 16 years old, the biggest preschool with an enrolment of up to 120 children, children-friendly facilities, and a jackpot facility that opens daily from 10.00am to 1.00am, and up to 3.00am on Friday, Saturday and eve of public holidays. How convenient can one get? You drop off your children for classes and go meet lady luck at the same location.

In a parliamentary reply in 2000 on the proliferation of betting outlets, the then Finance Minister said, “The locations selected are reasonably far away from places where children will gather – schools, places of worship, and so forth. Pools (which is Singapore Pools), will exercise due care and not to place outlets at places where children might be attracted to...”

If Singapore Pools is concerned about children getting exposed to betting activities at a tender age, should the clubhouses not be concerned, too?

Madam, it is one thing to operate a clubhouse with jackpot machines for families with young children to visit once in a while. It is another thing to have children going to the same clubhouse almost every day for preschool and enrichment classes. I urge the Ministry to exercise tighter control and management of jackpot licences for clubhouses, especially those with preschool and enrichment centre under the one roof. Gambling and education certainly do not mix.

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## Keeping NRICs Up to Date

by Png Eng Huat

Madam, in a reply to a parliamentary question, the Minister told the House that there were 61 persons convicted for failure to report a change of residential address within 28 days of the change to the Immigration and Checkpoint Authority (ICA) over a period of three years preceding 2015. In the same reply, the Minister added that such an offence is typically committed in furtherance of other criminal offences.

This is bad news for some new owners, they will find out the hard way when threatening letters, hell notes, paint and graffiti start to appear at the doorstep of their house after they have moved in.

Madam, I do see a need for more safeguards to be put in place to prevent ex-owners of properties from using the old address in their NRICs to commit criminal offence and cause misery and stress to the new owners.

Although the House was told that ICA does work with HDB to inform property owners of the need for timely update of address during property sale transactions, I would like to propose that sellers must update their NRIC by the final appointment date or within seven days after that date to complete the sale of their flats.

For sellers who are still homeless at that point in time, I would like to propose that ICA accept personal representation by friends and relatives who are willing to house these sellers as evidence for reporting of change of address. This will allow the sellers to update their NRIC without the required documentation and complete the sale of their flats without further delay. This will also stop some sellers from using their old NRIC address to commit criminal offences going forward.

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## Stateless in Singapore

by Png Eng Huat

We have in our society over 1,000 stateless people aged 50 and above. Some of these residents would have lived through those tumultuous years of nation-building. Many would have worked and contributed to the economy, and some of their children would have attended public schools. A good number of these residents still live in public rental flats. Some of them may belong to the Pioneer Generation as well, if only the colour of their identification card were pink.

Last year was our Jubilee Year, and I wonder how these stateless people felt living in a country that does not recognise them as citizens despite some of them having lived here for as long as our nation existed.

As SG50 came to a close, I was reminded of the stateless people I met in 2015. There was a resident with mobility issues. He told me his parents and siblings are all Singapore citizens. He also said he has been receiving assistance from CDC since early 2000. For some unknown reason, he remains stateless.

Another father and daughter remain stateless in 2015 despite the father having worked for the Government and was allowed to buy a flat in the early days, according to the daughter. She said her entire family were born in Singapore.

Madam, many of these stateless residents are more Singaporean than the thousands of new immigrants who were granted citizenship each year. Some of the stateless residents have lived here all their lives. Some of their children or siblings have become citizens as well.

I asked a resident if it matters for his ageing mother, who is stateless, to become a citizen after all these years. Without hesitation, he said, "Yes, it will make my mother very happy because she will have a sense of belonging finally."

Madam, could we not exercise a little more compassion as we embark to write the next chapter in our history and grant these stateless residents – 1,411 to be exact – the citizenship they so rightly deserve?

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## Imprisonment with Humanity & Dignity

by Sylvia Lim

Madam, prisoners pay for their crimes by spending time behind bars, sometimes many years and even a life time. Prisoners first have to adapt themselves to prison life. This involves stressful and difficult adjustments to a strict institutional routine, deprivation of privacy, and living in sparse conditions. After the initial phase, prisoners often undergo a personal transformation to adapt to prison life which carries traits, such as hyper vigilance, over controlling one's emotions to avoid showing vulnerability as social withdrawal and isolation. These are well researched. On a personal level, prisoners may feel guilt and helplessness towards their families, and it is not uncommon to see divorce papers being served on inmates.

The Singapore Prison Service has committed itself to being captains of lives. They are doing an admirable and difficult job and should be well supported. As prisoners are incarcerated as punishment and not for punishment, their stay in jail should, as far as possible, be spent constructively for rehabilitation and eventual release and reintegration into society. I have two concerns. The first, on psychological support for inmates, and second, on inmates' use of time.

First, psychological support. What is the policy or approach towards the mental health needs of inmates, whether dealing with pre-existing conditions or issues developed during incarceration? What sort of mental health professionals work full time in our prisons? Is there a ratio of mental health professionals to inmates? Do the prison officers who manage inmates have compulsory training in mental health issues?

There has been an IMH Singapore Prison Service Psychiatric Housing Unit set up since 2011. How many inmates have sought treatment there? And are there patients with pre-existing mental conditions or mental needs that developed during incarceration?

Second, inmates' use of time. According to statistics from the Singapore Prison Service, the number of inmates engaged in training programmes dropped by 345 from 2014 to 2015. Similarly, the number of inmates engaged in work programmes also dropped by 180 from 2014 to 2015. Is there a reason for the drop? The SCORE annual report notes that of the inmates deemed employable in 2014, only 81% were engaged in work programmes. I have a few questions here.

First, what is the status of the other 19% of inmates? Second, how were inmates selected for training and work programmes? Third, how is the employability of inmates determined? Fourth, what other programmes are in place for inmates who are considered unemployable to keep them meaningfully occupied?

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## Tackling Recidivism

by Leon Perera

In the 2016 Budget book, recidivism, the percentage of discharged criminal offenders who go on to re-offend, is estimated to rise to 28% in 2016, from 26.8% in 2015.

When someone who has served their debt to society for a crime goes on to re-offend, not only is it a loss to that person and their family members and their friends, but it is also a loss to society. That re-offender could have become a productive contributor to our economy and society. In Singapore, we have examples of ex-offenders who have become entrepreneurs, professionals and even religious leaders. In this regard, I suggest we examine the role that social impact bonds can play in funding innovative programmes that help rehabilitate ex-offenders into society and keep recidivism at bay.

The idea of a social impact bond can be summarised as follows, at the risk of some oversimplification. Investors put up money to buy the bond. The bond stipulates that a certain social impact target must be met after some years by an NGO or NGO-coalition, perhaps working in concert with public sector partners. If at the end of the bond period the target is met, the Government redeems the bond. If not, then the investors lose their investment, and their investment becomes akin to a donation. If the goal is reached, the state ensures that its funds are impactful and well spent.

Anti-recidivism is a popular subject for social impact bonds because the social impact and the cost to the state can be measured very clearly. In fact, the very first social impact launched by the British government in 2010 was for prisoner rehabilitation. States in Australia and the US have launched or planned to launch social impact bonds around this theme as well.

I urge the Home Team to consider issuing a social impact bond to better target funds and spur innovation for rehabilitation and anti-recidivism programmes. Such a move could also spark more interest in and acceptance of social impact bonds in Singapore, which would benefit the social landscape here and help unlock more innovative and result-focused approaches in tackling social challenges.

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COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
MINISTRY OF LAW

# External Law Degree Holders

by Dennis Tan

The 4th Committee on the supply of Lawyers had been, in 2013, recommended at the 3rd Law School at UniSIM offer a conversion course for external law degree holders or holders of law degrees who are not on the list of approved overseas Universities. I understand that UniSIM will now not offer that course. I understand that these graduates may have to take the J.D. course instead. However, the J.D. course may take a much longer time. Past graduates with similar external law degrees who are qualified to practise as Singapore lawyers can probably testify that they did not need such a lengthy course to make them worthy practitioners. Many are doing well. Moreover, some external law degree holders who have yet been allowed to qualify as lawyers in Singapore are doing well as legal counsel or even practising successfully under a different jurisdiction.

I would like to know what is MinLaw's position on this issue. I would also like to ask the Minister to update the House on the Government's present position on the prospect of these graduates qualifying as advocates and solicitors.

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# New Law School & Employment Issue

by Dennis Tan

As we know in the past few years, there has been an over-supply of law graduates and a shortage of trainee positions. Recently, it was announced that the third law school – UniSIM Law School – is being set up and will focus on Community Law. I would like to ask the Minister, what is MinLaw's position on the likely implication of the additional number of graduates in the labour market, arising from the new law school. I would also like to ask the Minister whether MinLaw expects that the graduates of UniSIM law school will only practise community law, and that they are discouraged from pursuing other areas of law after they graduate.

The reason why I am asking this question is that, as a practising lawyer myself, I find that many law graduates only choose their area of work after they start training or with their first job

after they qualify as lawyers. In fact, many switch areas of work after training or after their initial jobs. My next question is – what if, say, a large number of students at UniSIM decide, in the course of studying Community Law subjects or having done attachments at law firms, decide that Community Law – whether Family, Probate or Criminal Law is not their cup tea. Is it realistic to expect people to stay in the field at this early stage of their legal career or education?

Finally, notwithstanding that UniSIM Law School will focus on Community Law, I would also like to seek the Minister's assurance that better efforts can be made to persuade more students of NUS and SMU to pursue Community Law in their career options. How the law schools communicate their expectation of their graduates may have a positive influence on their views towards different areas of practice.

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COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN  
AFFAIRS

# South China Sea Tension

by Pritam Singh

Mr Chairman, the tensions in the South China Sea appear to have taken a turn for the worse in 2016, manifested most acutely by the timing of China's deployment of an air defence unit on the disputed Woody Island, precisely when the inaugural ASEAN-US Summit in the US was taking place earlier in February this year. In addition, with the Permanent Court of Arbitration's ruling on the case between the Philippines and China on China's claims over much of the South China Sea, defined by nine-dash line – which is expected to be released very soon – questions on the extent and legitimacy of China's claims are likely to come to the fore again, raising temperatures once more. The month of March, in fact, has seen a perceptible rise in the number of commentaries and even editorials in the local press, particularly over the last month, that mirror these heightened tensions.

These developments and many others before it are taking place when Singapore is into its first year as coordinator of ASEAN-China dialogue relations. The role is a significant one as ASEAN's failure to issue a joint communiqué at the 45th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in 2012 was due to developments in the South China Sea. To that end, the Ministry has wasted no time in getting down to work as coordinator, proposing a Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES), in the spirit of Singapore's reputation on this matter as an honest broker and its reputation as a constructive player in the international arena. What has been ASEAN and China's response to CUES?

Separately, in 2013, the Ministry confirmed that ASEAN and China were still at the stage where they were "talking about talks" on the Code of Conduct or COC. Last year, the Minister of Foreign Affairs confirmed that China had indicated its willingness to work on the COC and that Singapore's task is to focus on making sure how parties engage with each other on the high seas. To this end, what progress has been made on the full implementation of the Declaration of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), including cooperative projects between ASEAN and China? What is China's position on the DOC currently and has it changed, given that it has previously stressed that the DOC should precede the Code of Conduct, even if ASEAN's position is that both are not sequential and can be addressed together?

Finally, at the 7th ASEAN Defence Minister's Meeting, the ASEAN partners suggested some measures to promote stable military-to-military relations in the South China Sea, including

a "no first use of force" agreement among claimant states, in line with intent of the articles of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation as suggested by Vietnam. Brunei suggested establishing hotlines to reduce tensions and misunderstandings. Can the Ministry confirm if such proposals have been implemented and whether China has been invited to join these initiatives?

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COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE



# Cyber Defence

by Low Thia Khiang

Madam, I note that the SAF established a centralised Cyber Defence Operations Hub in 2013. Such capabilities are important today given the network centric nature of contemporary society and indeed military operations today. I have three sets of questions for MINDEF on these matters.

First, I would like to ask if MINDEF can assure the public on the readiness of the SAF to handle cyber defence by explaining the types of threats it seeks to address.

Cyber-attacks need not simply be about conventional military operations. They can involve everything from gathering and corrupting sensitive information to disabling vulnerable civilian infrastructure such as public utilities, communications, financial systems, emergency and medical response, business infrastructure, and even transportation management systems. These actions can disrupt society and make it susceptible to pressure. How does MINDEF's cyber defence address these issues?

Second, what further capabilities does MINDEF intend to develop? How does MINDEF intend to ensure that Singapore is well protected? Further, like other military systems, cyber defence capabilities may raise suspicions and tensions with neighbours that can ultimately make the nation less secure. How does MINDEF plan to mitigate this risk as it develops its cyber defence capabilities?

Lastly, cyber defence tools are powerful and hard to detect. How does MINDEF ensure that there is sufficient oversight of its systems to prevent inappropriate use by other individuals or Government agencies? Can MINDEF assure the public on this matter, such as by issuing an annual report or audit on cyber risks, breaches and mitigation efforts?

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# Defence White Paper

by Pritam Singh

Madam Chairperson, over a number of years, the publication of Defence White Papers has become an increasing phenomenon in the Asia Pacific region. China issued its first one in 1998 and Japan in 2005. When informing the members of public about the immediate security environment, its strategic direction of the military and its core mission, such white papers are effective in answering why there is a need to have a strong and determined force that is able to defend the sovereignty of the country.

However, what is not sometimes so well understood is the impact such white papers can have on improving and building confidence and trust between countries. In fact, before the latest 2016 Australia's defence white paper was launched, Australia briefed China and Indonesia – two key partners – about its intention. In the RSIS commentary this year, a local researcher noted that Australia's 2016 white paper sent a strong positive signal to Southeast Asia and potentially contributes to the region's stability and peace.

More than a decade ago, the ASEAN Regional Forum suggested that defence white papers be published and exchanged. It was quite telling that the former Minister of Defence, Mr Lee Boon Yang, in 1995, quoted verbatim a section of the Australia's defence white paper in this House, as a measure of the good relations between the two countries. It is my view that the wider publication of such initiatives through a white paper would serve MINDEF's interest both nationally and internationally.

MINDEF, as the largest consumer of the national Budget, will always be queried about the nature and scale of its defence expenditure. These demands will grow, and are not likely to abate in the years to come. In fact, it is noteworthy that the section on MINDEF comprises only eight pages of the Government's expenditure control document for FY2016. In contrast, the section on the Ministry of Law, a far smaller Ministry budget wise, has more than 40 pages long.

There is no requirement for MINDEF to release any secret information in prospective white paper, but the current state of affairs is more than opaque, especially in an economic environment post-SG50, which ought to be marked by greater fiscal prudence in light of multiple national priorities, all worthy of equal consideration. A white paper will put into

perspective MINDEF's mission and requirement on hand, and its budgetary needs on the other, in the context of the needs of a small state.

Finally, Madam Chairperson. Some years ago, the Taiwanese government even released a comic book version of their white paper to cultivate an interest in military service among young readers. While I am not suggesting a need to do this, the point is that the white paper offers great flexibility for MINDEF to determine how best to get its message out. The Japanese's experience with white papers is quite telling, as it moved from a limited paper in 2005, into a much more comprehensive one last year. A MINDEF white paper can be even used to showcase the seriousness MINDEF takes in its safety regime, something I will talk about in my next cut.

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## NS Training System

by Pritam Singh

Madam Chairperson, the NS training system has come a long way, helped in no small part by MINDEF's readiness to take on board the inputs of NSmen and their families. It is best repeating that NSmen are frontline soldiers and training must be taken seriously. However, for some soldiers, there are some areas of the NS training cycle that can be improved, subject to operational and budgetary exigencies.

One suggestion is to consider how more NSmen can be deployed to the NS units more quickly than before; ideally not more than two years after they are operationally-ready date. This would have the advantage of ensuring that fitness levels of NSmen remain relatively high with the less steep physical training curve and preparing for IPPT or ICTs.

Secondly, I would like to seek an update with regards to the mismatch between high and low-key ICTs for some NSmen. Some clock many low-key ICTs and fewer high-key ones, leading to a long wait before they are emplaced on MINDEF's reserve list. To what extent have SAF NS units been able to implement make-up high-key ICTs as recommended by the Committee to Strengthen National Service (CSNS)?

Finally, MINDEF has been generous towards NSmen over the years, topping up our CPF accounts through our NS journey. However, in view of the renewed impetus towards lifelong

learning and particularly SkillsFuture, can I ask MINDEF to consider, when it next reviews its NS policies, to consider topping up the accounts of NSmen with additional Skillsfuture credits through the course of their NS training cycle, in recognition of their lifelong commitment towards National Service.

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## Training Safety

by Pritam Singh

Madam Chairperson, one of the things that goes under the radar for many Singaporeans is the intensity at which the SAF plans and trains for war, and for operations other than war. This is not surprising as a lot of our training is done overseas in view of the shortage of training grounds in Singapore, with the SAF going to places such as Germany, France, Australia, Thailand, India, Taiwan, Thailand, Brunei, New Zealand, and the US amongst others, in addition to ad-hoc exercises with countries like China.

It is inevitable that with such a high training tempo, accidents and mishaps can happen, in spite of the SAF's best efforts and the best efforts of the commanders. I would like to suggest that MINDEF consider ramping up publicity of its training safety efforts for the general public's information. A section or a part of all open houses and public outreach campaigns can be dedicated for this purpose. While the information may not attract as many viewers as a Leopard tank on display, it would be an important reflection of MINDEF's commitment to safe and tough training in a realistic environment.

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## Compensation for SAF Personnel

by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Madam, I have two suggestions and three clarifications on SAF compensation. First, will MINDEF consider including psychological issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression arising from training or operations in its definition of disability? This condition can be

debilitating over the long term and affect the ability to perform duties or work after leaving the service.

Second, Singapore spends large amounts on defence annually. How do we allocate funds to ensure that our NSF and NSmen are adequately covered? How does MINDEF advise its members on SAF Group Insurance and ascertain that they are adequately insured? Will MINDEF consider covering the full cost of insurance or co-paying private insurance when citizens serve their National Service obligations?

Third, how does MINDEF assess the adequacy of WICA-based compensation model? An injured or disabled person may need long-term care, equipment or facilities that go beyond medical services or prosthetics. This may drain the family financially and emotionally, and may even require a family member to leave work to provide long-term care. How does MINDEF assess if the permanent loss of income and the cost of care for the lifetime of a disabled person are adequately covered?

Fourth, does the compensation framework take into consideration cases where injured service personnel are ineligible for insurance coverage after they leave the service or are forced to pay much higher premiums?

Lastly, what is the total amount MINDEF sets aside for compensation and support for long-term disability or death in this year's Budget?

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## Navy Vessels

by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Madam, I am a strong believer of an inclusive and open SAF that is fair and just to all Singaporeans regardless of race, language and religion. As such, in the COS debate last year, I urged the Minister to seriously consider the possibility of ensuring that all navy vessels are equipped with halal-certified kitchen so that the Malay-Muslim will be able to serve freely in the navy vessels without any constraint. I would like to seek an update from the Minister on whether MINDEF has made any progress on this matter in making navy vessels more friendly to Malay-Muslim. If efforts have been made, how many vessels out of the total number currently in active service have halal-certified kitchen?

I understand that SAF's deployment of our NS soldiers is based on aptitude, abilities and commitment to Singapore. I would like to see the practical issues, such as the installation of halal-certified kitchen on-board a navy vessel, can be addressed and resolved promptly so as not to further deprive and shatter the dreams of eligible Malay-Muslim Singaporeans from serving our nation in the navy on board a navy vessel.

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COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
MINISTRY OF  
TRADE AND INDUSTRY

# TPP & Singapore Businesses

by Pritam Singh

Madam Chairperson, I first spoke on Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and its impact on Singapore's businesses at the opening of President's Address in 2014. Then, I had asked the Government to flash out the opportunities and pitfalls awaiting our local SMEs when the TPP is rectified. I also suggested going at this in the big way, beyond communication with Chambers of Commerce, and Business Federations, so as to encourage greater entrepreneurship amongst our people.

The TPP is likely to remain on the backburner at least until a new US President is sworn into office. However, the reality of not just the TPP, but all future trade agreements should be considered with the launch of the SkillsFuture and the national drive towards lifelong learning. Trade agreements are sometimes conceived of as the domain of larger SMEs, MNCs, tax agents and other specialists.

However, it would be useful if the Government can identify areas of growths in greater access for enterprise under the TPP for Singapore, so that Singaporeans with the passion for enterprise and business can align their careers and skills upgrading plans to reap the benefits of our trade agreements. I hope the Ministry can consider this and organise a webpage or similar public resource for such a purpose.

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# Working Capital Loan

by Leon Perera

Madam Chairperson, there are a number of Government loan risk-sharing schemes. Budget 2016 has set up a new working capital loan scheme with 50% risk-sharing,

I would like to ask: is there any evidence the Government can cite and if not, can a study be done to assess if indeed these loan schemes are effective in inducing banks to lend to SMEs, when they otherwise would not?



Even partial risk-sharing is still a risk to the bank. And when there are other options for the banks to use their capital such as lending to large corporates, risk-sharing may not be enough.

I have heard from some SMEs that even if the bank has to bear less than 50% of the risk, many banks still behave as if that is a significant risk. When applying for loans, many SMEs, even fairly large ones, still face high interest rates, small quantum, request for personal security guarantees, or outright rejection on grounds such as inconsistent revenues.

Is there any survey evidence to suggest that SMEs feel that they are out of the woods in terms of access to finance? There would not appear to be any. In fact, the reverse is true. In an SBF-DP info survey last year, index measuring expectations for access to financing fell to its lowest levels since 2013. The low risk appetite of banks and lack of credit information on SMEs could be one cause.

In Germany and Japan, countries with vibrant SMEs, links between regional banks and regional companies are critical to ensure access to capital. Other countries also have EXIM (Export-Import) banks (suggested by the Economics Strategies Committee in 2010). An EXIM bank with a clear mandate could have provided finance to SMEs to tap on the regional market of over three billion people to grow and become competitive.

The Workers' Party has in the past called for the EXIM bank idea to be re-examined with a focus on SMEs. Access to capital is an issue that warrants more fact-based analysis and review of counter measures, including the EXIM bank idea, if our SMEs, which account for two-thirds of employment, are to maintain and create jobs for Singaporeans.

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## National Robotics Plan

by Leon Perera

Madam Chairperson, the National Robotics Plan is one of the initiatives in Budget 2016. I would like to speak about social robots, which are robots designed for human interaction, company and assistance.

Social robotics is now a recognised field that has spawned industry conferences, global collaboration and much investment. I am aware that social robotics is far from new to Singapore. Late last year, the NTU unveiled Nadine, a life-size robot. A\*Star Social Robotics

Laboratory was launched in 2008. The NUS and other institutes have social robotics programmes but, to the best of my knowledge, Singapore has yet to bring to market a commercially successful social robot product to compete with, for example, Pepper, the iconic social robot, from Japan which is now selling around 1,000 units per month, even though it is not Jarvis.

Madam Chairperson, I wish to speak about the relevance of social robotics to two fields in Singapore where we are facing growing needs and which can provide test beds for new products: our eldercare and our pre-school sectors.

In the eldercare space, I must stress that social robots should never replace genuine and loving human contact from family, friends and care-givers. Having said that, social robots could be designed to interact with older Singaporeans in various languages. They can also monitor vital signs, help dispense medicine, answer questions verbally, help connect phone calls, obtain emergency help and so on.

In the pre-school space, social robots could complement the vital role of teachers in the classroom and provide an amusing and engaging way for children to learn and also receive classroom assistance. This might help raise the productivity and effectiveness of our pre-school teachers. An example is KASPAR, a social robot designed by the University of Hertfordshire in the UK to help children with autism learn responses from the robot through games and interactive play.

Even though the Japanese seem to have a lead in this space, Madam Chairperson, Singapore is well placed to prototype and test bed social robots for the eldercare and pre-school markets in Asia, given the Asian multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nature of our society. I hope that this is an area that can receive attention from policymakers and can be a subject of collaboration between local enterprises and the R&D sector.

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## Nuclear Energy

by Low Thia Khiang

In 2010, MTI published the results from their Nuclear Feasibility Study. In it, they recommended that nuclear energy was currently not yet suitable for Singapore, but that we needed to "keep our options open for the future".

Both Indonesia and Vietnam have mooted plans to build nuclear power plants. If Indonesia builds a nuclear power plant, there is always a possibility that an earthquake could cause a disaster on the scale of Fukushima and the weather patterns and ocean currents would bring the nuclear fallout to Singapore. Even without natural disasters, a nuclear plant located anywhere in the region would produce a large amount of nuclear waste that would need to be disposed of.

This waste is significantly radioactive and would take tens of thousands of years to be rendered safe. Extremely stringent security must be in place to ensure that this waste does not fall into the hands of terrorists. The waste can be used to make a so-called "dirty" bomb, which would be a very effective weapon of terror. Is Singapore prepared for such risks?

This is not a remote threat as Prime Minister Lee has revealed, at the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, that Singapore authorities have intercepted cargo with nuclear material. It is good to know that the Government has tightened its export control regime, upgraded radiation-screening technology at the ports and is building a border lab.

The National Research Foundation created a five-year programme in 2014, to conduct research and education into nuclear safety, science and engineering. It aims to train about 10 people a year to produce about 100 nuclear experts at the end of 10 years.

However, in two years of operation, the research programme has only managed to train nine people, which is far less than the target. Could the Government give an update on the progress of the programme and the results?

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## Energy Security

by Low Thia Khiang

Singapore is dependent on foreign imports for its energy needs. Over the years we have reduced our dependency on oil and have increased our use of natural gas for power generation, from 74.4% in 2005 to 95.5% in 2015.

While gas-fired plants are among the most efficient and gas is the cleanest fossil fuel, with more countries importing LNG, we are going to face more competition for LNG sources.

This heavy dependency on natural gas opens us to risks of spikes in prices and disruption of supplies. In the medium- to long-term, what is the status of other energy options that we are looking at to further diversify our energy mix to improve our Energy Security?

The ASEAN Power Grid (APG) has been mooted in 1997 under the ASEAN Vision 2020, towards ensuring regional energy security while promoting the efficient utilisation and sharing of resources. Would we be able to tap on these energy resources under the programme? What is the current status of the APG project?

Currently, electricity tariffs are calculated based on fuel oil prices. In the past, when the rationale for linking our electricity tariffs to fuel oil prices, was that there was no distinct market in Asia for the price of natural gas, hence indexing its price to fuel oil prices is the next best alternative.

Earlier this year, SGX started up a new index for LNG known as SLInG, which provides an industry pricing benchmark. Should we consider now factoring in the LNG Price Index in our formula for electricity tariffs to better reflect the actual costs of power generation?

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## Energy Market Authority

by Low Thia Khiang

(In Mandarin)

Singapore has progressively opened the retail electricity market since 2001. As at today, there are 890,000 users who can choose their own electricity suppliers, ranging from large-scale plants to small shops.

The Energy Market Authority (EMA) launched the Electricity Vending System as early as 2007. In 2010, EMA launched a trial of the Intelligent Energy System, and in 2012, it rolled out Phase 2 of the trial in Punggol New Town.

During the COS Debate in 2013, Ms Sylvia Lim had enquired about the above trial. She had asked if there are plans to fully liberalise the retail electricity market in the near term. At that time, the Minister only elaborated on the sophisticated technology involved, but did not reveal the results of the trial and the operation of the system.

Mr Iswaran, Minister for Trade, announced last October that Singapore's retail electricity market will be fully liberalised in the second half of 2018. This will allow the remaining 1.3 million users, who are primarily domestic home users, to have the flexibility to choose a supplier according to their electricity usage habits. They will be able to choose the electricity price package, just like choosing a mobile phone service package.

The full liberalisation of the market in 2018 may be good for the domestic users. However, if they do not understand how the retail electricity market operates, they may not be able to choose a price package that will help them save on their electricity bills.

I would like to ask the Minister, if there are any plans to help the public understand the full liberalisation of the electricity market. As this change will impact our entire population, does the Government have any plans to kick-start the publicity campaign earlier, so that people have enough time to digest the news?

The difference between domestic users and commercial users is that – one may need to communicate with domestic users in a language other than English. Are authorities well prepared to roll out the publicity in different languages?

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## Trade Bodies and Chambers

by Leon Perera

Mr Chairman, in Budget 2016, the Government has pledged more resources to our TACs (Trade Associations and Chambers) and it is no doubt good that we aim to level up TACs to play more of a pan-industry role. But I would like to sound one cautionary note.

TACs are generally run by an Executive Committee that consists of representatives from different companies. If there will be much greater involvement in communication with Government agencies, it is the ExCo and staff reporting to the ExCo at the TACs who will be on the frontline of that communication. Those ExCo members also have their own individual corporate interests.

In working with TACs, I urge MTI to take pains to ensure that communication efforts and engagement are as inclusive as possible towards all TAC members. This is so as to mitigate any

risk that the TAC ExCo members will use or will be perceived, rightly or wrongly, to be using any access to Government resources or information for the benefit of their own firms rather than for the whole TAC membership. Promptly circulating minutes of meetings between Government and the TAC staff and ExCo to all members would be one way to manage this.

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## Business Space and Rental

by Chen Show Mao

Sir, commercial and industrial rentals are a perennial issue for Singapore SMEs and have been for quite some time.

In 2013, it was reported that a survey conducted by the Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Singapore found over eight-tenths of respondents wanted measures to reduce rental costs as their number one wish-list items for businesses.

Recently, the economy appears to have hit a bad patch. The Singapore Business Federation in their position paper for a Vibrant Singapore mentioned that even with increased supply and slowing demand for rental premises, rents are still a concern for many businesses. This likely reflects their experience with higher annual increases over the longer term.

Over the longer term, access to low rent premises has diminished, following the corporatisation of JTC assets as well as the commercial pricing of HDB rentals. Commercial and industrial rentals have risen substantially over the years. These now are significant expense items that breed insecurity for many small businesses.

We call on the Government to not only keep commercial and industrial rental increases near or below inflation but also keep their absolute amounts manageable as part of the more serious effort to nurture SMEs as the third pillar.

This may require actions to, first, take a long-term view on reducing business rentals and have JTC pick up, in part, their former approach of building lower cost industrial and commercial property, before many of their many properties were privatised. Based on indications of strong demand for existing low-cost facilities, like incubators, these will go a long way to stimulate the start-up and SME sector.

Second, similarly increase the supply of HDB commercial space and lower the rentals for HDB commercial properties, which have increased substantially over the past 20 years in order to stimulate retail-oriented businesses in the SME and start-up sector and bring added diversity and vibrancy to our heartlands. This would be a welcome investment to nurture the SME sector. The extent by which HDB commercial rentals should be lowered can be calibrated based on available Budget surpluses and other considerations.

Sir, in keeping with the spirit of innovation, if nothing else, I hope the Minister will consider seriously these suggestions and, perhaps, test out the solutions in connection with the development of the Jurong Innovation District or other special entrepreneurial zones made available to local SMEs through SPRING's schemes to promote start-ups.

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COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION



# Ensuring Every School is a Good School

by Png Eng Huat

Madam Chair, the seven neighbourhood schools that received no Secondary one posting from this year were attributed to the following cohort size. Indeed, the 2015 cohort of 38,600 Secondary 1 students is about 10% lower than the previous year. However, if MOE were to divide the 2015 cohort size by the number of Secondary schools, it can easily fill all schools including these seven schools with at least five to six classes of 40 students each. Thus, the reality is – all schools are created not equal, as popular schools will continue to attract more students at the expense of neighbourhood schools. These call into question about the mantra that every school is a good school.

The mad rush to become a parent volunteer, join the RC or even relocate just to secure a better chance in the balloting exercise for admission into popular schools for their children has become a stressful ritual for parents year after year. So, in the minds of parents, every school is definitely not the same. But what do teachers and principals think? I am sure when teachers and principals come together, the issue of funding for their schools will surface somewhere down their conversation. It is my belief that MOE must walk the talk that every school is indeed a good school by addressing the funding issues first.

In a reply to my Parliamentary Question (PQ) on funding for school, the Minister said it is not meaningful to compare funding per school but rather we should look at the per capita funding per student.

Madam, I believe comparing funding for school is meaningful because we are talking about every school is a good school at the school level. So, while we know that every student can be a good student because they are given the same per capita funding, I am not sure if every school can be a good school in the context of funding at the school level.

Popular schools with higher enrolment numbers by default will have more budget to work with. This, in my opinion, creates an unlevelled playing field for less popular schools. I shall confine my speech to primary education to illustrate this point.

Let us compare Rosyth Primary School with an enrolment of 2,000 students with Bendemeer Primary School with an enrolment of 1,200 students. Based on per capita funding per Primary school, Rosyth Primary School is effectively receiving \$7.8 million more than Bendemeer Primary School every year. This disparity is significant and needs to be addressed

because smaller schools will always face a budget constraint by default. This disparity will perpetuate year after year as popular schools with bigger budgets will be able to do more for their students, and at a lower cost due to economies of scale.

And when schools churn out even more top students, it will be a hard sell to tell parents that every school is a good school because neighbourhood schools will be shrinking in size and disappearing overtime.

Madam, we are living in a social media world. We do not need the mainstream media to publicise anything anymore. The popular schools will get more popular through the grapevine. Does the Minister not agree that it makes a world of difference for principals and teachers of smaller neighbourhood schools to have comparable amount of funding, as those popular schools, to run their programmes each year?

For a less popular school with a smaller cohort, the extra funding will come in handy to compensate for the lower economies of scale in the procurement of products and services for their students. These schools will also be able to do more in sports and enrichment programmes with I strongly believe are important activities for small neighbourhood schools to build character and instill a sense of belonging and pride in their students. I urge the Ministry to release such funding data so that all stakeholders can have a meaningful discussion over this mantra that every school is a good school.

Next, I wish to suggest a fundamental change to the Secondary 1 posting in the context of every school is a good school. I propose that graduating students finishing in the top tier of their Primary school based on PSLE results, to be given a direct admission to the secondary school of their choice. Currently, Primary schools are already recognising their top PSLE students, so the chances of top students from neighbourhood Primary schools going to popular schools like Dunman High, Hwa Chong or Raffles Institution are no lesser than their peers from popular Primary schools now, and still based on merit at the school level.

This will ensure a good mix and spread of students from all spectrum of Primary schools going into the Secondary schools. This will also prevent elitism from entrenching itself in the feeding Primary schools and the popular Secondary schools.

This new posting exercise will make every primary school a good school as the top graduating student in each school will have a direct entry to a school of their choice. For parents who want their children to attend a popular Secondary school, every Primary school is a good school to start the journey now.

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# Equitable Funding for Schools

by Dennis Tan

Madam, in FY2013, the per capita funding per student for Secondary schools was \$11,400, and for independent schools, it was \$14,100. That is a 24% disparity. In FY2015, the disparity decreased to about 10%. This is a step in the right direction but the Ministry needs to commit to 100% equitable funding for all schools.

Equitable funding means levelling the playing field for neighbourhood schools so that they will have additional funds to invest in varied arts, sports and enrichment programmes. This will help develop students more holistically and improve overall quality of schools. Currently, neighbourhood schools have less disposable funds than independent schools, putting them at a distinct disadvantage.

The Ministry has a long-standing position that schools are resourced on a needs-basis, depending on programmes offered and enrolment of the school. I have two concerns on this.

One, if a neighbourhood school has lesser funding to begin with, how can the school even start to invest in, say, a niche elective in the first place to justify for additional funding?

Two, neighbourhood schools do not enjoy the privileges of independent schools like higher school fees and a wealthy alumni. How does the Ministry take this into account in schools' funding criteria to ensure fairness?

As we see more schools merge due to lower enrolment, it is a good opportunity for the Ministry to redistribute funding across neighbourhood schools to equalise this disparity.

Yes, resources may only be a part of the solution, but it is nonetheless a basic and critical component. I believe that equitable funding is a realistic and worthwhile objective that the ministry should seriously consider. Improvements have been made in recent years. It is possible.

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# Assistance Schemes, Awards & Funds

by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Madam, first allow me to declare that I have a child who is receiving education in a private institution.

Madam, the Ministry has put in place good and comprehensive financial schemes and funds to assist Singaporean students from needy and lower income families who are receiving their education at a Government-funded institution. These schemes and the relevant awards are significant in motivating students who display excellence and commitment during the course of their educational endeavours.

Members in this House would be familiar with some of these schemes. These include the Financial Assistance scheme, Edusave scheme, and the Opportunity Fund scheme. In their respective ways, these schemes go a long way in helping and supporting needy students in their educational, enrichment and personal pursuits.

The Ministry took a big step forward by extending Edusave contributions to all Singaporean students. Upon deliberation and discussion, the national examination fee waiver was also extended to all Singaporean students in 2015.

It is in this spirit of lending a helping hand to our children and fostering their respective development, where every child is an invaluable asset to the future of this country, that we should further assess the feasibility of extending all MOEs assistance schemes, awards and funds to all eligible Singaporean students including those who are receiving their education in private institutions.

As a Ministry that is tasked to nurture the holistic development of every precious Singaporean son and daughter, the extension of its schemes to all eligible Singaporean students, regardless of their choice of school is a bold act of inclusivity that will motivate our children to aim for the horizon and pursue the rainbow before them. Let's partner our children and lead them down the many unknowns in their educational life with anticipation, hope and joy.

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# Cultivating Non-Academic Attributes

by Leon Perera

Madam Chairperson, good KPIs make for good outcomes. The MOE KPIs in the 2016 Budget Book are still heavily skewed towards academic credentials, stressing the number of passes and so on. These are important but in the 21st century, we will increasingly need qualities like leadership, initiative, confidence, creativity, communication skills and altruism.

While we have stopped publishing PSLE top scorers and the like, I fear credentialism is still deeply entrenched among parents, teachers and students, and we need to break this self-reinforcing loop. For example, in Singapore, parent-teacher meetings (PTMs) often take the form of the teacher explaining the gaps on the child's performance without the child being present, with the view to the parent helping to remedy those gaps at home. Many of us are familiar with this. I do not blame our teachers at all for this. They are doing their jobs as defined by the system, and usually they are motivated by genuine care for their children.

But contrast this with the PTM held at one western international school here that I learned about. The PTM was run by the children themselves. It was the child who led the PTM by explaining to their own parents in front of the teacher what they have done that term, what they will try to do next term, and so on, with the teacher's facilitation. Would this not be leadership? Would this not be confidence?

I suggest that MOE gives some thought to designing and measuring KPIs for such softer but critical qualities. There are a number of international measures of such qualities that could be surveyed each year without recourse to mass standardised testing and which warrant further study by MOE.

One such KPI that I would like to suggest is the number of students' self-initiated projects which enjoy positive peer and teacher reviews, and can sustain a critical mass of student participation, encouraging our students to initiate their own projects in an entrepreneurial way and breed these kinds of qualities.

Initiating one's project, like setting up a new club, a new sports activity, a charitable project, informal business activity and so on, both reflects and nurtures just the kind of qualities that we need in the 21st century.

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# CCAs in Schools

by Chen Show Mao

Madam, schools widely have encouraged the active participation in various CCAs in order to promote more well-rounded and holistic education. We believe CCAs inculcate values such as perseverance and help students develop transferable skills in organising, planning, self-discipline and other areas. CCAs also foster integration and deepen the students' sense of belonging and responsibility towards the community.

However, CCAs may have increasingly become more exclusive in two respects: the cost of taking part in them and the push for deliverable results. There are stories of students turned away from certain CCAs because the students have no reasonable prospects of winning trophies for lack of prior training or natural ability. In fact, it appears that the further students progress in their education, the more difficult they find it to participate in CCAs and sports or in the performing arts. This is even more so if the CCA is known to be a niche CCA that the school is supposedly good at, where presumably, you have more teachers and fellow students with much to share.

There are stories of schools that have closed down popular CCAs because they have been unable to deliver quantifiable results. I would like to call on the Ministry to look into how CCA participation may be broadened and made less exclusive. CCA participation, I feel, should importantly be based on students' keen interest to take part in addition to their demonstrated competence. Allowing students to follow their interest will keep them motivated to remain in the CCAs for the long term and reap the rich educational benefits that CCAs in schools have to offer.

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# Teach for Singapore

by Daniel Goh

Madam Chair, no matter how meritocratic our education system is, no matter how well trained our teachers are, there will be inequality in two areas. There will be students coming from under-privileged backgrounds who will need closer attention and motivation, and there

are teachers who are by nature more caring and motivated to go the extra mile to change the lives of their students.

I ask that the Ministry consider establishing a Teach for Singapore programme to match exceptionally motivated teachers to under-privileged students. This will be modelled after the US Teach for America and the UK's Teach First programmes, both of which have good track records in improving educational outcomes for under-privileged students. We should, of course, make specific adaptations to the Singapore context.

Practising teachers could apply to join Teach for Singapore with a select group chosen each year to train in a one-year diploma programme in counselling, cultural sensitivity and teaching for social mobility. Graduates could then be deployed as Teach for Singapore fellows for three years to schools with high numbers of students on financial assistance.

Teach for Singapore alumni are then free to develop their teaching career. The aim is to create a national core of dedicated alumni who will continue to inspire and improve each other through conferences, courses and retreats. This will seed and grow the pursuit for educational equality and social mobility among our teachers as well as close the school quality gap in an organic way.

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## Teacher-Student Ratio

by Daniel Goh

Madam Chair, the average class sizes at Primary and Lower Secondary levels in OECD countries are 21 and 24 respectively, while MOE's planning parameters are for 30 students per class at Lower Primary and 40 at Upper Primary and Secondary levels. Only in the Gifted Education Programme (GEP) are class sizes kept at 25 to promote better teacher-student engagement.

I understand that the pupil-teacher ratios for Primary and Secondary schools are equivalent to OECD averages. But teachers in Singapore are deployed to provide support and extra classes for low-progress students rather than to reduce class sizes. However, reducing class sizes would remove the need to provide these extra remedial classes, which reinforce the stressful tuition culture in schools. Nothing beats the close attention paid to students by the primary teacher in class and only a smaller class size can facilitate this.

In line with falling student enrolment numbers and instead of closing down schools and merging them, I ask the Minister to again consider reducing class sizes to the OECD and GEP equivalent.

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## Civic Consciousness in Schools

by Png Eng Huat

Madam, we have spent the first 50 years of our nationhood trying to clean up the country in every sense of the word. I must say we are making some progress albeit not to the level of civic consciousness like in Japan or Switzerland.

We all know we need to cultivate a mind-set of civic consciousness and we need to start young. We all know that but, for some reason, these mind-sets get reset rather easily each time we are out in the public. We are taught to clear our own trays from pre-school to university, in the army camp and at home and yet we have so much problem doing that in our hawker centre, food court, and even in this Parliament, Madam. I always wonder what is impeding our effort to become a gracious society after 50 years of nationhood. Perhaps, we need to refocus, reset and re-double our effort to achieve that in the next chapter of our history.

Last year, I urged the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources to bring back the spirit of the Keep Singapore Clean campaign. This Committee of Supply, I would like to urge the Ministry of Education to plant the seeds of civic consciousness into our young again.

Not only do we need to teach our young about ownership and responsibility, we also need to make them appreciate how hard our cleaners are working every day, and that keeping Singapore clean is not just the job of the cleaners but everyone else's responsibility as well.

Madam, after 50 years of nationhood, we need to make civic consciousness a way of life soon. It has to begin at home and in the school. We have to constantly work to get the mind-set right in our young, so that they will lend themselves readily to acts of kindness, volunteer work and philanthropy for the betterment of society when they grow up.

While I urge parents to do their part at home, I urge our schools to teach our children well, so that together we can make civic consciousness a way of life.

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# Sugar in Schools

by Chen Show Mao

Madam, the great harm done to our bodies by the unchecked consumption of refined sugar and other types of sugar is increasingly clear. Research has also shown that eating habits and food preferences are acquired when young and are more difficult to change after adolescence. Our schools, therefore, have an important role to play to help foster healthy eating habits and food preferences in young Singaporeans.

I wish to commend MOE and the Health Promotion Board for their efforts in the area, resulting in the "Healthy Meals in Schools" programme in 2016. I would like to learn about other proposed efforts in the area and look forward to the testing of innovative policy solutions in this area, perhaps, developed in partnership with the private and people sectors. I hope these will enable the Ministry and the Board to further cut the amount of sugar allowed in the food and drinks sold in our schools – be they juice drinks, carbonated drinks, or other types of drinks – for the further promotion of health among our school children.

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COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
MINISTRY OF MANPOWER

# Fairness in Employment

by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Madam, it is recognised that MOM has taken a couple of steps towards ensuring fair employment within Singaporeans' workplace with TAFEP and FCF as two examples.

However, there are two key problems with existing schemes. First, a lack of enforcement measures. While the Government has, in the implementation of FCF, recognised the existence of "double-weak" firms, firms that are found to have flouted the rules will only have their work pass privileges curtailed.

A second problem is the low take-up rates of voluntary schemes. To-date, 4,439 organisations have signed the employer's pledge by TAFEP but with 9,106 manufacturing establishments and another 58,784 services establishment in 2014, TAFEP's coverage does not seem substantive.

More can be done in pushing for an agenda in ensuring that the Singapore core is able to contribute competitively, but still ensuring a competitive foreign labour force to be engaged by employers.

In order for the Government to effectively manage manpower policies in ensuring the Singapore core and to enshrine the importance of fair employment practices within Singapore, I propose that a National Employment Framework (NEF) be developed and instituted. This would unify all the current frameworks which loosely contribute to the Singapore core drive into a single coherent framework to ensure minimal overlaps in policy.

To enforce the framework, additional enforcement powers to penalise double-weak firms for discriminative hiring practices should be implemented within the framework. Even then, such a framework will take time to be debated and hammered out. Transitional measures should be put in place to further the incentives for taking up fair employment practices.

I propose a fair employment contribution fund where firms can contribute to help fair employment efforts. In return, firms can enjoy incentives such as corporate tax rebates or a CPF employee credits. The fund can be used to fund the agency overseeing any NEF activities.

# Flexible Work Arrangements

by Daniel Goh

Chairman, according to the Minister, the proportion of employers with at least 25 employees providing one form of flexible work arrangements (FWA) stands at 47% in 2014. However, the actual number of employees who utilise FWAs appears to be very low. According to the Minister, the FWA incentive under the Work-Life Grant has covered about 900 Singaporean employees in two and half years.

Incentives alone are insufficient to encourage the utilisation of FWA. The current FWA set up is entirely dependent on employers' voluntary initiative. Giving employees the right to apply for the Work-Life Grant to fashion and take up FWAs in their companies, with their employers incentivised by the Government grant to accept, can overcome employees' inertia to FWA adoption. After employees initiate such applications, employers can refuse a request on reasonable business grounds, but must discuss options available with the employees, with the Ministry acting as facilitator.

Another thing that the Ministry could consider under the Work-Life Grant is to promote All Roles Flex for larger Singapore companies. Last year, PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) Australia extended flexible working to all 6,000 employees. In All Roles Flex, employees' performance rather than actual face time and hours spent working become the most important criteria for work evaluation. Vesting employees such flexibility allows them to be at their best, fosters happy families so that employees can focus on their work, and therefore positively impacts productivity.

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# Under-employment Indicators

by Sylvia Lim

Chairman, as mentioned in my Budget speech, I believe the Government should put in more effort to track under-employment. Let me highlight three areas.

First, the Government could put into its headline numbers not just the employment and unemployment rates but two other indicators it is already gathering. For some years, the Government has been publishing some statistics on “time-related under-employment”, showing the hours worked versus the hours that the employees are available and willing to work. The Government also gathers data on “discouraged workers”, namely, those who have given up the job search. Headlining time-related under-employment and the numbers of discouraged workers will focus public attention to these two important statistics that are not captured in the employment and unemployment headlines.

Secondly, while I accept that measuring under-employment by time is probably the only internationally-accepted measure, we know that working less hours is just one aspect of under-employment. How can we measure under-employment where a person is being under-utilised in terms of his earning capacity? Could we consider collecting data on income earned versus median income for that qualification and age, or perhaps compared with previous income?

Thirdly, it has been noted in the United States that in the last decade, the growth of temporary and contract jobs has surged with the proportion of Americans working as independent contractors soaring. In Singapore, according to the Ministry's report on the Labour Force 2015, there were 202,000 contract workers. Does this figure capture all those who are on contract, freelance or ad-hoc work arrangements? Can we expect such alternative work arrangements to increase, given the uncertain economy, the need for employers to manage costs and the automation of jobs? If so, there will be more Singaporeans facing issues such as poor job security, intermittent CPF contributions and little or no medical benefits. Are we adequately measuring the number of Singaporeans who are under-employed in this way?

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# Silver Support

by Chen Show Mao

Sir, come July, the first Silver Support Scheme payouts will be made to some 140,000 Singaporeans above the age of 65. The payouts are meant to provide “a modest but meaningful supplement to their retirement incomes” in support of the bottom 20% to 30% of Singaporean seniors. I welcome this support.

I would like to reiterate our earlier calls for Silver Support payments to be made monthly instead of quarterly. With monthly payouts and the more consistent liquidity that they provide, the elderly will be able to better manage their day-to-day expenses. Would behavioural economics suggest that making the payouts monthly could even nudge the seniors to use more of the payouts to pay for those significant living expenses that are incurred monthly, such as utility bills and others? If they were to do so, it will help them better manage their limited cash flow.

I hope the Minister will also consider adjusting the amounts of future payouts for inflation, perhaps at the start of every term of Government, to ensure that the support our needy seniors receive keeps up with the rising cost of living.

As other Members have said in many different ways, I hope that a degree of flexibility can be built into the eligibility considerations of the payout scheme, involving the three criteria of lifetime wages, housing types and household support. I appreciate that clear-cut rules and a high degree of administrative efficiency may be required to deliver Silver Support to needy seniors in large enough numbers. However, balanced against that consideration is, of course, our hope that specific needy seniors who deserve support do not fall through the cracks of rigid eligibility criteria. Some use of resources, time and effort in making discretionary assessments in exceptional cases would be well spent.

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COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
MINISTRY OF FINANCE

# Government Procurement

by Chen Show Mao

Madam, I would like to call on the Government to look into encouraging the increased use of price-adjustment clauses or escalation clauses in government procurement. These clauses provide that should some key costs in government contracts rise significantly from the time of tender to the time of performance or over a long period of performance, then the contract price will escalate in accordance with some pre-agreed formula, typically with reference to an index. This would protect the contractor from having to assume the risk of sharp increases in key costs. This will also benefit the Government in that their contractors will be under less pressure to over-budget when they bid for a contract and build into their bids their estimates for future cost increases.

Escalation clauses need not be used only to protect the contractors when the costs go up. They can also be used to favour the Government when key costs drop, say commodity or oil prices. They can provide that in such cases, the contract price to be paid by the Government will decrease accordingly.

In this way, escalation clauses remove some financial risks for government contractors and may enable or allow SMEs to punch above their weight in more public tenders. To me, this would be in keeping with the spirit of this year's Budget, in the various forms of financing and tax incentives proposed to support the scale-ups of our SMEs.

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# Tax Credits for Caregivers

by Daniel Goh

Madam Chair, more than 200,000 people is estimated to be providing regular care to family and friends in Singapore. This number is expected to rise as the number of elderly more than doubles by 2030.

A Duke-NUS Medical School survey found that fewer than 5% of care-givers interviewed used individual support services such as home nursing and respite care programmes. Care-



givers are becoming a vulnerable group themselves while they care for their vulnerable loved ones. They face emotional stress, lack of social support and immediate and long-term financial burdens. This is worst for specialised care-givers who have to care for loved ones with specific illnesses, for example, care-givers for elderly with dementia, care-givers of people with mental illness and parents of children with special needs.

I understand that some of these specialised care-givers will qualify for tax reliefs such as Handicapped Parent Relief or the Grandparent Care-giver Relief. However, tax reliefs are only meaningful for working Singaporeans with large enough incomes as to pay taxes. Many specialised care-givers either cannot work or work part-time due to the nature of the specialised care-giving.

I also understand that some Government subsidies are available at the point of service, for example, for Singapore Programme for Integrated Care for the Elderly (SPICE) and also the Foreign Domestic Worker grant. However, there are also specialised care-givers who feel that taking care of the dependents personally is the best care that they can give them.

I ask that the Minister consider giving means-tested refundable tax credits for specialised care-givers, meaning that some of these care-givers who do not work or work part-time would get the cash refund, a portion of which would go into their CPF. This will lessen their financial burdens, improve their retirement adequacy, give them flexibility to use Government aid and empower them to seek individual support services for a better quality of life for themselves and their loved ones.

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COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
MINISTRY OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
& INFORMATION

# Withdrawal of 2G Phone Services

by Pritam Singh

Madam Chairperson, the withdrawal of 2G phone services by April 2017 will affect up to 250,000 individuals, in particular the elderly who seek a basic device for their use and foreign workers who rely on the cheapest handsets. Customers are also likely to pay more when they transit from 2G pre-paid plans after April 2017. It is known that seven out of 10 of the 250,000 affected individuals are on pre-paid plans.

Can the Minister share how many elderly Singaporeans are represented in this group? Can I enquire if IDA will consider working with the three telcos to consider a special upgrade or rebate voucher for elderly Singaporeans on pre-paid plans who would likely see higher bills after April 2017? What is the anticipated percentage of the rise in their bills after the withdrawal of this service? Can the Minister also explain how the Silver Infocomm Initiative has been rolled out and implemented to assist elderly Singaporeans who would be affected by this transition?

In addition, are the outreach efforts available in Chinese dialects and the vernacular languages such as Malay and Tamil as well, since our elderly comprise a very diverse group?

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# Public Service Broadcasting (PSB)

by Png Eng Huat

Madam Chair, the arrival of digital broadcasting in Singapore and the adoption of the DVB-T2 broadcast standard, which boasts higher efficiency, robustness and flexibility, will free up some valuable spectrum when the analogue broadcast is finally switched off.

I called upon the regulatory authority to relocate some of this spectrum to support the schools and the arts community under the Public Service Broadcast framework. The programming for this dedicated free-to-air channel should be supported and managed by the respective stakeholders.

The local theatre and performing art scene could use a fully funded free-to-air arts channel to help artistes and performers promote their work and labour of love beyond the limited coverage given by the state-owned media.

National Arts Council said on its website that it celebrates excellence in the arts and it will work to make it accessible to all. DVB-T2 will allow the vision to become a reality because everyone can have access to free-to-air channels using the mobile device in his or her hand.

Madam, how many times have you seen sports events in our school covered in our free-to-air channels in the course of an academic year? The sports scene in our school will certainly breathe a new lease of life and excitement if such competitive events are covered and broadcast on free-to-air public service channels. Such programmes can be produced and directed by the many arts and communication students in our Polytechnics and Universities as part of their curriculum and training. I believe our students would love to take on the challenge to produce such programmes and have their production carried on free-to-air channels. The experience these students will acquire in the course of doing that is immeasurable.

The arrival of digital broadcasting in Singapore presents a wonderful opportunity for regulators and policymakers to deepen the skill-sets of our own talents and broaden the scope of our expertise to become a media hub in the region. It also presents an opportunity for regulators to widen the Public Service Broadcast Framework to include areas which were not given much attention to in the past.

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COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
MINISTRY OF  
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

# Mitigating Homelessness

by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Madam, one case of homelessness in Singapore is one too many for our collective comfort. Deprived of a permanent shelter and essential human needs, it has a direct negative impact on the well-being of the affected individual, as well as our society at large.

To date, I have, on several occasions, raised the problem of homelessness in our midst. MSF, on its part, has stated in the previous reply to my parliamentary question that it has, on average, rendered assistance to 300 homelessness cases each year.

I, like many Members in this House, have also personally attended to a number of cases and it is certainly a heart-breaking process to see our fellow Singaporeans being left without a place where they can call home. I understand that this issue of homelessness is a multi-faceted and complex one, a problem that requires the assistance of several stakeholders, including the affected individual and his family.

As a Member of this House, I would like to share my observations and put forward proposals to better mitigate this issue and bring some comfort to our fellow Singaporeans.

In a previous reply by the MSF to my parliamentary question, the House was informed that in 2014, a study on families in transitional housing was conducted and it was found that these families often experienced occurrences such as divorce and financial difficulties. In fact, many had sold their flats and spent their monies to clear existing debts or for other purposes, prior to becoming homeless.

Madam, under existing policies, a home-owner who has sold his flat, regardless of the circumstances behind the sale is not allowed to rent a flat under the Public Rental Scheme within 13 months of the sale of their last flat. It is argued that home-owners will benefit from the sales proceeds, but as many Members of this House would concur, some home-owners are left without much cash proceeds after clearing their personal debts and arrears, arising from personal circumstances or legal rulings.

As such, we need to have a more strategic and systemic manner, in which we can capture the most vulnerable in our midst, especially those who potentially, face a higher risk of being homeless after the sale of a flat, such as the elderly and families with young children.

As such, I would like to urge MND to consider a more flexible and accommodative approach to the implementation of the 13-month rule, with scope for greater deliberations and discussions with affected families. A pro-active and flexible approach to the implementation of the 13-month rule would certainly be comforting to many, akin to the spirit – as expressed by the Chinese proverb "sending warm coal in the midst of a harsh winter".

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## Elderly Subletting Facility

by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Madam, retirement adequacy is a major issue for many low- and middle-income Singaporean families. As the family nucleus in Singapore shrinks in size, help should be given to elderly owners to use their flats to supplement their retirement income, without requiring them to move out.

Currently, there are two options – one is the Lease Buyback Scheme, a monetisation scheme to help elderly households in 3-room or smaller flats, unlock their housing equity, and the other one – often suggested by the Ministry – is the sub-letting of a bedroom in the existing household. There are many issues involved in the execution of the latter option. It could range from: the infringement of personal space to elderly owners facing difficulties obtaining tenants without the engagement of a real estate agent.

Engaging a real estate agent could constitute an added financial burden to our elderly, when in the first place, they already do not have much for retirement to begin with. As such, I would like to propose an Elderly Subletting Facilitation (ESF) Scheme where HDB connects elderly flat owners who would like to sublet rooms with potential tenants.

This could encourage up to two-fifth of elderly owners to sublet their flats to support their retirement. Furthermore, the ESF could be combined synergistically with the Public Rental Scheme so that there is no need to turn away over 10,000 applicants to the Public Rental Scheme yearly. We can, and must do so much more for our elderly Singaporeans who have toiled to transform Singapore to what it is today.

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# Lease Buyback

by Chen Show Mao

Madam, I believe the Lease Buyback Scheme (LBS) has an important role to play in providing for the retirement adequacy of our seniors. Since last year, the Ministry has enhanced the scheme in various ways to improve the take-up rate. I welcome these efforts.

Today, I wish to reiterate an earlier call for LBS to be enhanced to give the children of the deceased, the option to buy back the portion of the lease that has been sold, provided, of course, that they qualify to own an HDB flat. And significantly, to allow them to buy this back at the price of the unit, valued at the time the LBS was executed by their parents.

I believe this will help address the concern on the part of elderly parents that their children will not be able to inherit the flat from them, and hence, would not enjoy that financial benefit to help them cope with the higher property prices in the future.

These seniors worry that property in the future may be unaffordable to their children, especially those who do not currently own flats. They wish to pass on to their children, as much as possible, the value that has accrued to their flats over the years, less, of course the amount of financial support that the seniors expect to receive from the lease buy out.

This could well result in their children acquiring their property at below-market rates in the future, but this is no different from parents passing on their property to their children – an accepted principle.

All that changes here is that those seniors who are in need will get another option to monetise their flats now, while their children may be unable or even unwilling to provide for them in full. But still, as parents, they wish to offer better protection to their children from future property price inflation, a concern that may now be holding them back from taking up the LBS.

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# Lift Upgrading Programme Designs

by Png Eng Huat

Sir, the Lift Upgrading Programme (LUP) is coming to a close. Many residents in Hougang welcome the new lifts. Although for some elderly residents, it came too late. For others, the LUP introduces a new set of problems and issues they never had to content with before.

For example, many would have thought that the installation of privacy louvers for the new LUP lift lobbies is a standard feature and a simple process as these are nonstructural installation. However, some privacy louvers serve no purpose whatsoever because the gaps between the fins are too wide. Some are not even angled correctly to achieve any effect. In the same block of flats, some lift lobbies have louvers and some do not.

The flow of water along the common corridors is also affected by LUP. Water ponding and flooding became an issue for some residents as the original path of the water flow along the common corridor has been altered or rerouted.

One major bugbear of LUP can be found at Block 314, Hougang Ave 5. Residents living at lift lobby C found out to their disappointment that a new 1.2 metre lift landing bridge was built right beside one of the two benefiting units on each floor without factoring in the proximity of the affected unit and the dry riser.

While the new bridge may comply with the statutory requirements, the cement base of the dry riser effectively reduces the clear width of the entrance to less than 950 millimetres at the base level. With the landing valve of the dry riser sticking out substantially, the clear width of the entrance of the lift landing was further reduced at about the shoulder height level. Taken as a whole, the lift landing bridge at Block 314 does not comply with SCDF's requirements as the entrance does not have the 1.2 metre clear width.

I thank the HDB team for trimming the cement base and reorientating the landing valve of the dry riser to widen the width of the lift landing entrance at Block 314, but the fact remains that such measures were needed goes to show that some LUP designs need to go beyond just meeting statutory requirements.

In the case at Block 314, the new lift landing bridge meets the requirement but it is located right next to a dry riser and a resident's flat. Affected residents can no longer leave

their gates open or leave their shoes outside their doorway as that will also cause obstruction at the entrance of the lift landing. These residents do not even have any space left to put a simple shoe rack any more.

The Town Council has no issue to enforce its bylaw to ensure that these passageways are not being obstructed indiscriminately but we are looking at a situation where the design of the landing bridge is being forced upon the residents to such a point where anything left outside their units will cause obstruction, no matter what.

The LUP is a comprehensive \$5.5 billion programme. Is there any room for HDB to make good the bad designs as residents have to live with the consequences, day in day out? And it does not help that LUP designs for similar flats in an estate can vary depending on the contractor who is doing the job. I must stress that I am not talking about defects but design anomalies.

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## Lift Maintenance

by Low Thia Khian

The Aljunied-Hougang Town Council currently manages 1,760 lifts in HDB estates, out of which 470 are new lifts installed under the Lift Upgrading Programme (LUP) being turned on from 2012 onwards. Based on the figures gathered for lift breakdown in FY15/16, there were 3,683 breakdowns in total or 7.84 breakdowns per lift on average.

This is a relatively high breakdown rate considering these new lifts are barely three years old. I am not sure whether this happens only in Aljunied-Hougang Town or across the board. I would like to urge MND to take a look at the quality of the LUP lifts.

Next, with the growth in the numbers of lifts contributed by the LUP, the expenditure on lift maintenance for each year is also rising. In the case of Aljunied-Hougang TC, the latest revision in maintenance contracts by the original lift manufacturers will result in a cost increase of between 4.08% and 8.52%. The projected upward revision in maintenance rates beyond 2017 is even higher, estimated to be between 8.66% and 10.72%.

I believe that moving forward, lift maintenance will be a heavy financial burden on all the Town Councils. Hence, I request MND to consider providing a special grant for lift maintenance.

Finally, new lifts are designed by different lift manufacturers with their unique features and parts, especially the motherboard. This gives rise to maintenance issues, as the original manufacturers control the parts and pricing.

I suggest HDB considers a standardised lift design for HDB estates to require manufacturers to produce lifts based on a standard design and make the standardised lift parts, so that both electronic and mechanical parts will be readily available. This will ensure competitive pricing in the manufacture and maintenance of lifts.

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## Pneumatic Waste Conveyance System

by Low Thia Khiang

Since 1997, we have heard about the idea of pneumatic conveyance systems for waste disposal in our HDB estates, brought up in this House by the then Minister for Environment, Mr Yeo Cheow Tong. In 2013, I filed a cut noting that a pilot project under the Greenprint Initiative was slated to be carried out in Jurong East in 2013 and 2014.

I would like to seek an update on this, as pneumatic waste conveyance systems would be a huge productivity improvement over having to manually empty individual bulk bin inside each bin chute every day. Such a system can afford all Town Councils not only in better productivity but also savings in manpower costs. It is environmentally sustainable and gets rid of the problem of foul smells during refuse collection.

In June 2015, HDB said it would test-bed this pneumatic system in Yuhua. What has been the Ministry's assessment of applying the system to an existing HDB estate? Can the Ministry comment on how feasible it will be to roll out the system to other HDB estates, especially the older ones?

It appears that upcoming HDB projects at Tampines North, Bidadari and Punggol Northshore will also have the same system. However, the modernisation of waste collection is a

benefit that should be experienced by as many HDB estates as possible, including the older HDB estates.

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## HDB Goodwill Repair Assistance

by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Sir, HDB provides assistance through the Goodwill Repair Assistance Scheme where HDB arranges for the repair works and co-pays 50% of the cost. The balance 50% is shared equally by the upper and lower floor flat owners who shared the joint responsibility for the repair of ceiling leaks due to wear and tear.

Many residents I have spoken to welcome this form of assistance rendered by HDB and it lessens their financial burden. However, concerns persist and I would like to reflect my residents' sentiments in this House. For instance, if the ceiling at the lower floor unit faces a leak or has signs of leakage such as distinct watermark or a blotted patch, no repair works would be done to the damaged ceiling. Only the source of the leak located at the upper floor would be rectified but upon the completion of the repair works, both flat owners, the upper floor as well as the lower floor, will each be billed 25% of the total repair cost. This is not fair to the lower floor home owners.

As a Member who represents a mature estate, I have regularly received feedback on the wear and tear to the ceiling in the unit. In fact, a resident who is staying in the lower floor unit said to me that in order to make repairs to her unit, she had to fork out additional costs. She is of the view that the repair of this damaged ceilings and its consequent repair costs should be included in the GRA scheme as the damage of their unit's ceiling should be the joint responsibility of both owners in accordance to the spirit of this particular policy.

I am in agreement with her on this. The present policy has good intention but we must be careful not to allow one set of family feeling short-changed and left out.

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COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT

# MRT Breakdowns

by Dennis Tan

Two years ago at the Committee of Supply debates, my colleague Mr Png Eng Huat spoke about the reliability of our train services. Two years on, the regularity of train disruptions, the reliability of our MRT system remain a disconcerting issue. In the past 13 months, we have seen at least 50 incidents of MRT disruptions reported and almost half of such delays exceeded 30 minutes. There were 14 major MRT disruptions last year, up from 10. The most recent major one was a four-hour disruption on the East-West Line on 19 March. Just last Friday, there was another train fault on the Circle Line.

In December 2015, the LTA started a new method of measuring service delay. Last week, LTA reported that the average distance clocked between overall breakdowns had increased. This was cited as a statistics for rail reliability.

*The Straits Times* article of 7 April stated that "it is hard for anyone to reconcile an improvement in reliability when major breakdowns have spiked". Indeed, whatever statistics that LTA may use, commuters who use the MRT everyday can attest for themselves the frequency of disruptions.

Singaporeans should not have to get used to this regularity of disruptions. We expect our system to have far fewer disruptions. We should also be greatly concerned with the loss of productivity to all our workers and our economy arising from the man hours lost to all delays over the last few years.

I would like to ask the Minister to let Singaporeans know what steps are being taken to affirmatively abate this unacceptable regularity of disruptions.

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# Safety Protocols for MRT Operations

by Dennis Tan

On 22 March this year, two SMRT staff were killed when a MRT train collided into them while they were on the tracks assisting with repair work. Our MRT system is not new. I am surprised that such a simple accident can be allowed to happen here. Not all reputable MRT operators in the world allow workers to effect repairs on maintenance on tracks while trains are in operation.

On the morning of 30 March, I filed my present COS cut on Safety Protocols for MRT Operations. Later that day, LTA and the Ministry of Manpower issued a press release requiring SMRT to carry out the following measures if maintenance work are carried out during train service hours. This is to take effect from 31 March: (a) train running on sections of the track where personnel are working on must operate on manual, not automatic mode; (b) trains to cease operating on the relevant section of the track before repair personnel is allowed on it; (c) robust authentication between personnel on track and the operations control centre to verify track isolation; (d) measures for isolation to be in place until staff have left the work area and track site; and finally, (e) watchman to be deployed to alert personnel of incoming trains.

I am surprised by this press release. I had expected these measures to be in place and to be so-called SOP. If they were, the press release would not have been necessary.

I would like to ask the Minister:

- a) Before the accident, what were the obligations for LTA to check on the MRT operators' observance of safety protocols for maintenance and operations?
  - b) After the accident, will there be any new measures for LTA to check and ensure that MRT operators follow the requisite safety procedures?
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# Autonomous Vehicles

by Png Eng Huat

Sir, the potential for autonomous vehicles to play a key role in our public transport service is exciting. In a press release by LTA last October, autonomous vehicles are touted to radically transform our land transportation, especially in two key areas of constraint – land and manpower.

The Committee on Autonomous Road Transport (CARTS) in Singapore was reported to be looking into some key roles for autonomous vehicles to complement our transport system in the hope of reducing road congestion during peak hours and manpower requirements.

While I am not sure how autonomous vehicles can help Singapore ease its constraint on land use, the technology can certainly ease the manpower crunch in the public transport arena. I do see the potential for autonomous vehicle to complement our public transport system, especially in the area of feeder bus service where the route is short and fixed and standard fare applies. I do see the potential for autonomous feeder bus service to take over from OMO bus service at night when the traffic is light and to stay operational longer as well.

Sir, I wish to ask the Ministry to share more on the roadmap for the autonomous bus service to play a key role in our public transport system. In the same, transport by CARTS, there was no mention of allowing private autonomous vehicles on our road. May I ask the Minister if private autonomous vehicles are also in the same roadmap to introduce self-driving vehicles on our road?

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# Public Transport for Persons with Disabilities

by Leon Perera

Mdm Chairperson, our public transport system will not be truly public until it is fully friendly to Singaporeans with disabilities, and I would like to make a few suggestions in this regard.

Firstly, do we have enough lifts at our MRT and LRT stations? Currently, there is at most one lift per path. These lifts are typically small and accommodate up to two wheeled mobility devices. With an ageing population, there will be more pressure on these lifts. A single lift also means a single point of failure. The priority queue system by itself cannot address all these points. Can the MOT look into building at least two lifts for all stations as a long-term goal.

Secondly, on taxis. SMRT, Comfort and other firms now provide some taxis that can ferry wheelchairs. However, the fare they charge is generally at least \$50 per trip. This is a burden to wheelchair users with modest means who need to travel regularly to locations less accessible by public transport.

While transport allowance schemes are in place and some VWOs have programmes in place to address this, these are not always available to those in need. Could the MOT work with taxi companies to find ways to address the needs of this group, a group which will grow as the population ages?

Lastly, can we do more to ensure safety for wheelchair users on our public buses? The current practice on buses is just to place the wheelchair rear facing back against the vertical wall and apply the brakes. This will not ensure the safety of both the wheelchair user and other passengers who might be injured by a flying wheelchair, so to speak, should an accident occur. There is a worldwide standard known as the Wheelchair Tie-Down and Occupant Restraint System (WTORS). WTORS defines different securement systems including the four-point tie-down system.

Vehicles provided by some VWOs to ferry wheelchair users already use the four-point tie-down system today. I propose that our public buses be required to conform to international

standards to ensure safety. Some of the new buses on display have a seat belt system to improve safety but this is still below international safety standards like WORS.

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## Change of Rules for Bicycles

by Dennis Tan

Recently, the Active Mobility Advisory Panel made its recommendations regarding the use of bicycles and mobility devices. It recommended that bicycles and PMDs should be allowed on footpaths. Although it is not presently allowed, we often see bicycles on footpaths. If introduced, steps should be taken to ensure that cyclists use the footpaths in accordance with any new rules and also with good practices, such as giving way and keeping left.

I agree with the recommendations for speed limits, use of helmet and use of standard bicycle lights. Bicycle lights are important safety devices, especially in the evenings. It is often difficult for motorists to spot a cyclist riding at night without any lights until one is almost caught up with the cyclist. Whether it is bicycle lights, use of helmet or cycling on footpaths, and any new measures which the Ministry should choose to adopt, I feel that if there is no effective public education and effective enforcement, especially early on after the introduction of the new measures, such measures will never be adopted by many cyclists. I would also like to suggest that for reasons of safety, there should be a rule for keeping left, whether on footpaths, connectors or on the roads.

Next, personal mobility aids (PMAs). An example of PMA is the motorised device used by the elderly or people with some form of mobility constraints. But for the suggested ban on the use of PMAs on roads to work effectively and reasonably, there must be user-friendly pavements along every road; otherwise such a ban will not be practical or fair. PMDs include electric skate scooters and kick scooters. Such scooters are regularly seen on the roads now. Again, public education, coupled with effective enforcement, will be important.

On electric bikes or e-bikes, I agree with the Panel's recommendations regarding maximum weight of 20 kg, maximum speed of 25 km/h and the devices' width. In fact, with these safety measures, it may be suitable to let e-bikes to be used on park connectors. We can often see people with illegally modified e-bikes on the roads or connectors. Presently, the onus is on the manufacturers to apply to the LTA for their e-bikes to be authorised by the LTA. However, unauthorised e-bikes are still available for sale. Many e-bikes which are in use are

not authorised models. Would the Ministry consider only allowing authorised e-bikes to be sold in Singapore?

In respect of the existing unauthorised e-bikes which may technically comply with the new proposed rules, may I suggest that the Ministry consider, at least on a one-off basis, to allow owners of such e-bikes to apply directly for authorisation and registration? It would be harsh to expect them to stop the use of their bikes when they can comply with the new rules. On the issue of registration of e-bikes, I think this is a good method of ensuring bike owners use their e-bikes responsibly.

The Panel has also recommended against allowing e-bikes which are powered by throttle. I have received feedback that throttle may be more suitable for some users, such as the elderly, as they do not need some strength to paddle and kick in the electric power required in current authorised models. Control of speed by throttle is also more precise. As long as the maximum speed of the bike is limited, the throttle does not make the bike unsafe. Currently, PMAs, or even PMDs like e-scooters, are powered by technology which is similar to throttle. But, unlike e-bikes, safety may not be an issue.

In conclusion, the Panel has made many good recommendations. However, whatever measures adopted may only work if there is sufficient public education and effective enforcement, especially at the onset. There must be sufficient resources and the willingness for all authorities responsible for enforcing the use of bicycles on roads, cycling paths, footpaths and connectors to make the proposed new cycling rules work.

Last but not least, may I compliment the good efforts and determination of members of the Panel led by Parliamentary Secretary Assoc Prof Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim. The ball is now in the Ministry's court.

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## Enforcement of Bicycle Rules

by Pritam Singh

Madam Chairperson, three years ago, I spoke on increasing cycling and pedestrian safety in this House. I rise to make the same call, in light of the recommendations of the Active Mobility Advisory Panel and the frequency of feedback from residents – especially elderly

residents – about accidents and near accidents between cyclists and pedestrians on footpaths, zebra and pedestrian crossings and near bus stops.

I would like to ask the Ministry as it assesses the recommendations of the Active Advisory Mobility Panel to also look at how such rules can be enforced in light of the demographic shift taking place in our society with more elderly and senior citizens using walkways and footpaths.

Just a few weeks ago, I stood near the junction of Bedok Reservoir Road and Jalan Eunos to assess the flow and egress of resident's vehicles from Bedok Reservoir Road and complaints of cyclists who dash across the zebra crossing to catch the flashing green man across the Jalan Eunos pedestrian crossing. In the hour or so I was at the junction, not a single cyclist, either a foreign worker, Singaporean or PR stopped to dismount from their bicycle. Rather, there were quite a few glares from drivers towards cyclists and vice-versa. Members may have also had residents complaining about cyclists who zip by, just as they are disembarking from buses at bus stops.

Madam Chairperson, while a code of conduct to alter behaviour is a start, I am concerned that it will not go far enough, even with an intense educational effort that would be required to compel a fundamental change of behaviour on the part of errant cyclists.

I believe it must be compulsory for cyclists who use footpaths and pedestrian crossings to dismount from their bicycles and walk across these areas, which are more prone to accidents and see heavy pedestrian traffic. In practice, the Ministry could consider how the stop line works for drivers in the US. Regardless if there is traffic or not, every driver stops at the stop-line or risks a fine. Likewise, we should implement a dismount and push rule for cyclists at critical areas and enforce it. In view of our crowded shared spaces during peak hours, such a clear rule is likely to make our footpaths, bus stops and pedestrian crossings safer, especially for our elderly.

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## Uses of ERP 2.0

by Leon Perera

Madam Chairperson, the new GNSS-based ERP 2.0 will allow real-time tracking of traffic and road usage. I would like to put across several questions and suggestions.

Firstly has the MOT done any simulations to show the net impact of the ERP 2.0 on total revenue collection? If not I would urge them to do so and to design the charging model to ensure that the net revenue collection remains neutral relative to the current distances travelled and current vehicle population. The purpose of the ERP system should be to ease congestion and not to raise revenue.

Secondly, the MOT has said that the data collected will be made available to motorists so that they can easily see what are the congested roads and avoid them if possible. How will this be done?

I suggest that the aggregated and anonymized data be made accessible in real time and in a user-friendly manner to the private sector so that third party app developers can provide innovative solutions to motorists, making Singapore a test-bed for such innovation.

Thirdly, the government has provided assurances that data privacy will be upheld. I would like to ask if the government can conduct a Privacy Impact Assessment or PIA, to give the public transparency that Personally Identifiable Information (PII) is collected, used, accessed, shared, safeguarded, stored and discarded in a proper manner. The US Department of Homeland Security conducts PIAs for several programs.

I would also like to ask if government agencies will have limitless access to this data or will there be safeguards against executive over-reach. For example if the Police want to access information on someone's travel patterns, will they need a Court order or can they do so without one.

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## Equitable COE System

by Daniel Goh

Madam Chair, as we move towards a car-lite Singapore and improve our public transport system to make it as cost-effective, reliable and comfortable as it was before, more individuals would choose to travel by bus and train rather than drive. However, it would take a generation to wean cars from our culture. For some, owning a car would remain an aspiration or a status symbol. For many others, owning a car is felt as a necessity, especially young families.

In a car-lite Singapore, cars will become even more a scarcity than it is today. Therefore, the socio-economic inequality and wealth gap between Singaporeans will become reflected in car ownership. The Government created Category A for social equity reasons and had to re-categorise it recently to keep the Category for mass-market car buyers after luxury car buyers swamped the category and drove up prices. This will become a cat-and-mouse game between the re-categorisation of Category A and the re-engineering of luxury makes to fit Category A, especially in car-lite Singapore.

Therefore, for a fairer COE system, would the Government consider adding a surcharge to the COE for cars owned by a single-generation household beyond the first car, and a multi-generation household beyond the second car. Like the Additional Buyer Stamp Duty for the property market, a carefully calibrated COE surcharge would help to reduce over-consumption on the part of the wealthy and help achieve some equity in the car market, especially in favour of young middle-income families. I understand a version of such a proposal was considered and rejected in 2013 by the LTA after public consultation due to the belief that it would be difficult to implement. If this is to be the reason again, would the Ministry explain the difficulties in implementation.

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## COE for Motorcycles

by [Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap](#)

Madam, I have previously made the call to review the COE for motorcycles and to abolish it for motorcycles in the class 2B category (engine capacity not exceeding 200cc). Another colleague of mine had also touched on this issue during last year's COS debate. Many Singaporeans utilise their lower capacity motorcycles for work and to feed their families. As such, an abolition or review of the COE will be a much-needed boost to them, especially in a weakening economy. Presently, a class 2B motorcycle will cost an estimated average of \$11,000 with a Category 'D' COE costing an average of \$6,106 in 2015. This is three times higher as compared to the average in 2011, which was \$2,098.

The then Minister of Transport, Mr Lui Tuck Yew said in a response to my question on whether LTA will consider splitting the COE for motorcycles into three categories according to the engine capacity of the motorcycles which correspond to the Class 2, 2A and 2B licenses that "splitting would result in a much smaller quota in each sub-category and this may lead to more volatility in quota and prices."

As such I would like to propose that the available Category 'D' COE quota for class 2B, class 2A and 2 motorcycles to be allocated in accordance to the percentage of these vehicles on our roads. This means to say that if the average Class 2B motorcycles population on our roads is 75%, then 75% of the available Category 'D' COE quota will be allocated for Class 2B motorcycles, adjusted according to the demand. I believe this move will address many of the concerns as expressed in the Minister's reply to my parliamentary question.

Secondly, I would like to touch on the present COE renewal term for motorcycles. An estimated 40.1% of the total renewal in 2015 chose a 10 years renewal term compared with an estimated average of 63.4% between 2010 and 2014. Due to higher COE prices, more motorcycle owners are compelled to renew their COE every five years instead of ten. I would like to propose that motorcycle owners who have earlier chosen a five years renewal term to be offered the option to renew their COE for another five years, which I understand the present policy do not allow. Madam, these measures to improve present policy will address and mitigate the financial burden of our fellow Singaporeans who rely on their motorcycles to make a livelihood. I hope the Ministry will consider them.

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COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
MINISTRY OF THE  
ENVIRONMENT AND  
WATER RESOURCES



# Climate Change Fund

by Pritam Singh

Madam Chairperson, climate change and the reality of rising sea levels are upon us. Just a couple of months ago, a friend shared with me a video clip of how far the tide had reached at an area of East Coast beach close to the old Big Splash. Madam Speaker, with your permission, I would like to show that clip.

*[A video clip was shown to hon Members.]*

Members will notice the waves breaking at the very edge of the foreshore with the backshore inundated with sea water.

In late 2014, it was reported that the new Changi Airport was being built on higher ground to guard against rising sea levels and that it will be able to withstand more than the projected 18-inch or 46-centimetre rise in sea levels. Separately, the minimum level for newly reclaimed land went up in 2011 to 2.25 metres above the highest recorded tide from 1.25 metres. Early this week, it was reported that Nicoll Drive was being elevated by 80 centimetres.

Can the Minister share what are the plans to protect our beaches and mangrove areas and other existing coastal areas from rising sea levels? Can the Minister update the House on the progress of the Government's Coastal Adaptation Study that was announced almost three years ago? Does the Minister foresee the raising of a Climate Change Fund akin to the Changi Airport Terminal 5 Fund, to build a sizeable financial buffer over a few Budgets, so that Singapore can be better ready from a fiscal point of view to address the very real debilitating effects of climate change?

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# Dengue

by Sylvia Lim

Madam Chair, I am filing my annual cut on dengue as it continues to plague Singaporeans and my residents in Serangoon ward of Aljunied GRC.

In February, the Government reported that the number of dengue cases in 2016 may exceed 30,000, higher than the record of 22,170 cases in 2013. The main reasons are the warmer conditions due to El Nino and a change of the main virus serotype from DEN 1 to DEN 2.

History has shown that a change in the predominant dengue virus will cause a spike of cases during the earlier periods. The Aedes mosquito population in our community has also increased since November with NEA's gravitraps and inspection checks showing a 50% increase in Aedes mosquitoes and breeding.

The Ministry's priority is source eradication and I must convey my residents' gratitude for the tireless NEA officers and contractors who visited estates and homes to do inspections and misting and to provide advice.

At last year's Committee of Supply, we were told that NEA had 850 staff in the regular vector control workforce. To what extent have additional resources been needed this year? Some locations are not accessible for inspection. And since 2014, NEA has been trying out radio-controlled aerial inspection crafts (RAIC) for the surveillance of roof gutter conditons. The RAIC is able to deposit Bti larvicides to kill larvae in roof gutters. Has the trial been successful and will it be fully implemented?

The Minister has also said that \$300 million is being put aside to develop the Wolbachia bacteria to fight dengue over the next three years. When are we likely to see the results of this?

Finally, concerning the dengue vaccine, several countries including Philippines have registered the use of the Dengvaxia vaccine developed by Sanofi. The vaccine apparently works against all four serotypes, so its efficacy rate is not uniform. Is the Government in a better position now to comment or commit to a dengue vaccine?

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# Food Waste Recycling

by Daniel Goh

Madam Chair, the NEA reported that in 2014, less than 13% of food waste was recycled and over 680,000 tonnes had to be incinerated. This number is only going to grow with our increasing population and given the prosperity of the population and the Singaporean culture of eating out.

Recently, NEA announced the launch of a two-year onsite food waste recycling pilot at two hawker centres at Ang Mo Kio and Tiong Bahru. This is a good move. But for an urgent problem, it is insufficient.

I have two suggestions to accelerate food waste recycling. First, food waste recycling in hawker centres is a long-hanging fruit as NEA is in charge of the space. However, hawker centres do not seem to account for large amount of food waste. The Ang Mo Kio and Tiong Bahru markets together produce an estimated 1,800 tonnes of food waste a year but the markets occupy a central place in the town centres and the NEA could extend the pilot projects to a wider catchment area to cover nearby private coffee shops, food courts and grocery stores. This makes food waste recycling readily accessible at town centres.

In fact, the NEA could also experiment with getting the surrounding HDB households to bring down their food waste to the recycling centres. This will gauge the readiness of households to adopt food waste recycling and allow the NEA to test different methods to get households to recycle their food waste correctly and cleanly.

Second, the NEA should begin simultaneous pilot projects to encourage food waste recycling at clusters of F&B joints such as those in shop house rows or shopping malls across the city. This may present more challenges than hawker centres due to diverse stakeholders and configuration of space. Therefore, the pilot should start earlier. There is more time to evaluate and test the recycling methods.

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COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
MINISTRY OF  
SOCIAL AND FAMILY  
DEVELOPMENT

# Kindergarten Fee Assistance Scheme (KiFAS)

by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Madam Chair, all children are unique as are the methods that are most effective for them. They are naturally eager for knowledge and some children require a very structured teacher-led style of learning while others learn better in a child-led environment that emphasises individuality and creativity. It is the responsibility of parents to assess the temperament and learning abilities of their children and to select the most appropriate school and curriculum for their children's growth and development. However, the unevenness of KiFAS means that the choices that they make for their children's education are limited, especially for the less well-off.

Kindergarten education is extremely important as it sets the foundation for skills that will build on later in life and plays an important role in the social and emotional growth of the child. KiFAS can currently only be used in about half of all registered kindergartens which are in the centres run by anchor

Madam, I am repeating my earlier calls for KiFAS to be expanded to all kindergartens so as to create more quality choices of learning and development.

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## Informal Caregivers

by Chen Show Mao

Madam, many Singaporeans provided regular care to family members or friends who are disabled, elderly or physically or mentally ill. Our dependence on this group of Singaporeans is real, is substantial, and is often unacknowledged. In many ways, informal or unpaid care-givers enable other Singaporeans to carry out the economic activities reckoned in our GDP, while their own care-giving is not. As of now, the burden of informal care-giving falls disproportionately on women.

As noted in this House before, it is well-documented that care-givers often suffer declines in their own financial circumstances, and mental and physical health. If they work, their performances suffer too. Often, these care-givers pass up opportunities and stay at home, and can find themselves with little support and resources for their own retirement or care.

In recent years, we are starting to acknowledge and provide assistance to these informal care-givers, with several Members of this House having spoken on the issue.

I hope the Government will look into CPF top-ups for full-time informal care-givers in low-income households to reduce the pressure of being under-employed and under-prepared for retirement, as a result of taking on their informal care-giving responsibilities.

Other examples of a much-needed acknowledgement and support for care-givers could include the leave for care-givers – that several Members of this House have called for – or greater support for working informal care-givers when they exercise their rights to ask for flexible work arrangements.

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## Single Parents and Child Benefits

by Dennis Tan

Madam, currently single parents are not entitled to certain benefits or Government schemes which may be available to other parents. I would like to urge the Government to consider allowing single parents and their children to have the same benefits. I will discuss three examples.

One, same maternity leave as married mothers. It is important for a mother to recuperate physically and emotionally from child bearing. The time a mother can share with her child is especially precious and when managed well, can strengthen the psychological and emotional bond that a mother shares with her child. Working mothers often have to quickly get back to work while they are still struggling to find infant care assistance for their child. At the end of the day, a mother's marital status is irrelevant when it comes to the struggles I have just described.

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Two, Baby Bonus and CDA support. The Baby Bonus Scheme was designed to help families defray the costs of raising a child. It comprises a cash gift and a Child Development Account (CDA). Children born out of wedlock are not entitled to this. The CDA account will certainly come in handy to help the single parent manage early childhood expenses.

Last week, I asked the Minister for Finance during the Budget debate to confirm whether CDA First Step Grant is available to children of single unwed parents. The Minister did not answer this question, preferring to leave this to MSF to deal with in the Committee of Supply debate this week. Perhaps the Minister can clarify.

Three, shelter. A single parent below the age of 35 and their child does not form a family nucleus when applying for a new HDB flat or rental flat. They are also not eligible for housing subsidies. Single parents need to provide themselves and their children a roof over their heads too. The current housing policy puts a heavier burden on single parents. They are often compelled to rent or purchase from the open market. With hefty rental rates, they may have to cut back on other expenses. Or they have to stay in an over-crowded flat with other relatives. The children suffer when there is less money for their own well-being or less desirable environment for them to grow and learn.

May I ask the Government to look at this issue from a new angle? The Government may think that they are just penalising single parents. But actually, the Government is making lives harder for the innocent children of single parents for they have to grow up with more challenges and fewer resources.

This should be about ensuring better and fair support for their children. These children are Singaporeans, sons will serve National Service and daughters will continue to bear and nurture future generations for Singapore. See the value, not the cost. We should acknowledge the value that these children will bring to our country, our people and our economy. When one sees the value, then the cost becomes insignificant, the stigma becomes unnecessary. Give these children the same opportunities as others, without the stigma.

The Government allows singles, whether men or women, to adopt children. If MSF thinks that it is fine for singles to adopt children, then these adoptive parents and their children should be entitled to the same relevant benefits as married adoptive parents and their children. I would like to urge the Ministry to seriously consider equalising the benefits for all children.

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# Financial Counselling for Families

by Chen Show Mao

Sir, my experience with families in financial need seems to suggest that quite a number of them would have benefited from financial assessment and counselling at the time of selling their HDB flats.

I would like to suggest that the Government look into instituting, at some point in the selling process, mandatory checks to ensure that certain groups of sellers, say those aged 55 or above, are fully aware of the specific respective amounts of proceeds that will be used to pay off outstanding mortgage loans, HDB resale levy, required CPF refunds, and all the restrictions relating to the transfer and use of monies.

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# ComCare Graduation

by Daniel Goh

Chairman, Sir, Ministry's ComCare Annual Report reported that the number of recipients of ComCare Short-to-Medium Term Assistance increased from over 11,000 beneficiaries in Financial Year 2012 to over 27,000 beneficiaries in Financial Year 2014. I believe this is due to the expansion of the eligibility for Short-to-Medium Term Assistance in 2012 and 2014, and also the greater outreach effort by Social Service Offices.

It is good that ComCare is reaching more Singaporeans in need. Nevertheless, all else being equal, the effectiveness of Government's efforts to help Singaporeans in need should be reflected in a decline of the number eligible for assistance. We should be worried if the number of beneficiaries continue to climb when the eligibility criteria stays the same.

I would like to propose the Ministry set up a Mentoring Programme for the recipients of ComCare Short-to-Medium Term Assistance. Recent studies show that asset and cash transfers to the poor are more effective when the recipients receive two years of counselling and training to use the assets and cash in ways that will help them to graduate from poverty.



In the Singapore context, it could be to enrol in skills training, so that the person could land a decent job or to leverage existing skills to start micro-businesses. The Mentoring Programme would also encourage recipients to persevere and break out of the poverty cycle.

We should not be so judgemental as to tell the recipients what they should consume with their cash assistance, but the little mentoring advice and encouragement will go a long way, especially with the needy who find themselves socially isolated.

This Mentoring Programme need not and should not be as intense as the handholding for the Fresh Start Housing Scheme but the underlying principle is the same. The ComCare Annual Report should also show the number graduating from ComCare through the Mentoring Programme, not just the number of beneficiaries, so that we can be confident our fellow Singaporeans are being uplifted from poverty.

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## Social Mobility

by Leon Perera

Mr Chairman, a critical measure of our successes of society is social mobility. This is the part of the glue that binds Singapore. I have heard from a friend in the social work profession that he has begun seeing clients in need of social work help who are the children of the clients that he saw 20 years ago. So, no one is cheered by stories like these.

MOF Occasional Paper published in 2012 and updated in 2015 suggested that the 1978-1982 cohort and 1974-1978 saw an inter-generational mobility measure of around 0.2 which is relatively good by international standards. Other studies suggest different results. For example, Prof Irene Ng's study based 2002 data concluded that 58% of the income advantage of Singapore parents was being handed down to their children – a level similar to the USA at that time. And there are methodological limitations to both these studies, as both authors have acknowledged.

I suggest that we commit to at least one social mobility study every 10 years to the best available global standards. If we cannot measure how well we are doing, we cannot know how to make things better.

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# Waiting Time in Polyclinics

by Leon Perera

Mr Chairman, in business where the target is surpassed by a wide margin, sometimes, it is due to good performance; sometimes it is due to good fortune; and sometimes, it is due to the target being set too low.

In the 2016 Budget book, the KPI for polyclinic waiting time is set at a maximum of 100 minutes. By this standard, over 95% of cases consistently met the KPI for the last few years. I urge MOH to review this performance indicator. One hundred minutes or one hour and forty minutes is not an acceptable time for our patients to wait, especially the elderly. I suggest that we change this time to 45 minutes to provide a more meaningful KPI for good performance.

The MOH publishes median and 95th percentile waiting times for polyclinics. In February 2016, total waiting time for registration plus consultation was roughly half an hour for the median, which is not bad, but closer to a shocking two hours for the 95th percentile. It was two hours and 16 minutes for the 95th percentile at Bedok Polyclinic, for example.

This points to what is probably the huge difference in waiting time between those who make appointments and those who walk-in. I suggest that waiting times be published separately for those who had made appointments and those who walked-in.

I am aware that Internet phone and mobile apps are available for making polyclinic appointments. However, in SMU's recent customer satisfaction survey, satisfaction with polyclinic waiting times fell in 2015. What is the reason for this? Is there more we can do to cut waiting times for those elderly Singaporeans who tend to walk-in? I suggest we explore several options.

Firstly, can we provide real-time data for the expected waiting time, not just on the Internet but also by an automated phone as well as on digital signboards outside the polyclinic? I believe this is done at some polyclinics but not all. And secondly, can we deploy staff fluent in different Singaporean languages to engage walk-in patients and convince them to try to use their phones or other means to set appointments in future?

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# Waiting Time for Specialist Consultation

by Low Thia Khiang

Sir, normal waiting time for appointments and medical investigations at Specialist Outpatient Clinics (SOCs) for subsidised patients has been a long-standing problem.

I asked about this during a COS debate three years ago and was assured by the Minister that MOH adopts a multi-pronged approach to address the queue at our SOCs. However, three years have passed and the situation does not seem to have improved. I have received feedback from a patient who needed to wait for six months to see a lung specialist and another three months for the biopsy result.

During this long wait, a patient's condition could deteriorate and he could develop complications which will be harder and more expensive to treat. Can the Minister share from the time the appointment is made to the consultation with the specialist, what are the average range, median and 95th percentile waiting times for consultation at SOCs for subsidised patients? After the consultation, what are the average range, median and 95th percentile waiting times for the conduct of investigations and tests like MRI or CT scans and for elective surgery? How do these numbers compared with three years ago? Has there been any improvement?

Moving forward, to help benchmark SOCs' performance, will MOH publish SOCs' appointments' waiting time regularly on its website for the median and 95th percentile, like it does for waiting times for admission to wards and registration and consultation at polyclinics?

The long waiting time seems to affect subsidised patients much more than unsubsidised patients. Are these long waiting times the way SOCs regulate subsidised patients' demands for their services or they due to insufficient resources being made available to meet subsidised patients' demands?

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# Patient Downgrade from Private Care

by Dennis Tan

Thank you, Mr Chairperson. I understand that currently, there are two ways for patients to upgrade their outpatient status from private tertiary care to being patients in public care at the Specialist Outpatient Clinics (SOCs) at the restructured hospitals. One, the first is by being referred to a medical social worker who will do a financial assessment for the patient. Two, second is for patients to get a referral letter from the doctor at the hospital which they are instructed to take from polyclinic. This letter will provide that the polyclinic should refer the patient back to the hospital.

The first method may not be suitable for patients who do not need a financial assessment from a medical social worker to justify a downgrade. For the second method, the patient needs to see the doctor at a SOC first to get a referral letter to the polyclinic. The patient then sees another doctor at the polyclinic. At the polyclinic, such patients have to wait in the same line as other patients who are genuinely sick to see the doctor. The polyclinic doctor then directs patients to the referral counter for a letter referring them back to the same hospital. The polyclinic doctor may charge the consultation even though the patient did not actually require a medical examination for the referral.

What is the basis for requiring two consecutive referral letters from doctors both at the SOC and at the polyclinic? Does the polyclinic doctor really have to do any medical consultations since he will know from the specialist's referral letter the purpose for the visit?

From my description of the typical scenario, it would seem that much time is wasted on the part of the patients by way of waiting and transport and on the part of the polyclinic doctors having to attend to what seems essentially an administrative task. The whole process becomes unnecessarily inefficient and bureaucratic.

It also involves unnecessary expenses on the part of the patients. One would have thought that their request to transfer from private to public care can be dealt with adequately by an administrative staff at the hospital. At most, perhaps the patient only needs the attention of the doctor at the SOC who can even handle this outside his clinic hours as an administrative task done without requiring the presence of the patient. The doctor can always ask to see the patient if he has some questions for the patient.

I have described the details of the process to try and highlight inefficiency and endless bureaucratic of the process. Will MOH consider allowing patients to downgrade from private to public tertiary care to avoid to seek a medical social worker to recommend the downgrade or to skip the step of obtaining a polyclinic referral if patients are willing to go to the back of the queue and have their appointments pushed back to the end of the doctor's appointment schedule?

The process could be done in a hospital itself. This would help to relieve some of the workload on the polyclinics and the medical social workers and reduce unnecessary waiting and travelling times for patients. It will also reduce queues at hospitals as well as the polyclinics. It will be a win-win situation for patients, doctors, hospitals and polyclinics.

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## MediShield Life and Overseas Singaporeans

by Sylvia Lim

Madam Chair, MediShield Life provides Singaporeans and Permanent Residents some coverage for hospitalisation bills and certain outpatient treatments, without age limit and for life. While the scheme benefits those of us based here, requiring all overseas Singaporeans to pay for compulsory coverage does not seem fair to some of them and merits a review.

MOH has stated that overseas Singaporeans should contribute to the national risk pool as “part of collective responsibility”. The Ministry says this will also enable them to benefit from MediShield Life protection, anytime they choose to return to Singapore.

This stand makes sense for those overseas Singaporeans who know that they expect to return to Singapore to live. However, there are Singaporeans who have made their home in other countries for decades. These include Singaporeans married to foreigners and raising children overseas, sometimes, because the foreign spouses are not able to find suitable work in Singapore. They enjoy high standards of healthcare in these countries, which they pay taxes for. Others have emigrated as families, and now have access to healthcare at prices more affordable to them. Some chose to live abroad because they could only obtain adequate

coverage for their serious health conditions there. These Singaporeans are better-covered overseas, and will probably never tap on MediShield Life.

Will the Government review how it could allow such overseas Singaporeans to opt out of the scheme? Is there a compelling case that no opt-out should be allowed at all?

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## Integrated Shield Premiums

by Pritam Singh

Madam Chairperson, the prospect of rising healthcare costs is a cause of concern, especially for the middle-income or the sandwiched class. In fact, rising MediShield Life premiums will be a reality for many Singaporeans as the subsidy threshold is progressive reduced from this year up to the year 2019, when MediShield Life subsidies come to an end.

MediShield Life means coverage for all, including the most vulnerable among us. In fact, when MediShield Life was introduced, it was expected to account for a bigger chunk of Integrated Shield payouts. However, this prospect was quickly put to rest with the announcement by the various insurers that any rise in the top-up portion of premiums would only be frozen for 12 months. As this moratorium will only last until November this year, what are the prospects of higher premiums next year? Can the Ministry consider informing the insurer that the moratorium should also include a freeze on riders as well, since this would have been a backdoor to work around the moratorium, insofar as keeping healthcare costs affordable as a whole?

Secondly, while the reality of rising healthcare costs for a number of public reasons – larger bills, greater healthcare consumption and costly procedures – are a reality, can the Ministry share how it intervenes, if at all, to ensure that any rise in premiums from the Integrated Shield providers are audited by the Government? How does the Government work with the insurers to check on any unjustified rise in premiums and to what extent can the Government intervene, if and when premiums are unjustifiably raised?

In view of this new environment of data analytics, will the Ministry release more data in conjunction with the insurance companies so that the public will be in a better position to track and appreciate the rising trend of claims and specifically identify areas of over consumption. What does the Ministry do to ensure that private hospitals and doctors do not

take maximum advantage of private insurance plans? Does the Ministry consider this to be a growing problem and how does it plan to mitigate it?

Finally, details of the standardised B1 plan were recently made public. Prior to launch, the plan was framed as an affordable Integrated Plan, providing greater choice to consumers. To this end, will the Ministry consider increasing the Medisave withdrawal limit amount (MWL) for Singaporeans of all ages, especially older Singaporeans who choose this plan, so that they can be paid for completely through their Medisave account?

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## Mental Health

by Low Thia Khiang

Madam, as our society ages, we have been paying close attention to our healthcare costs as an ageing population. It is also time for us to put more focus on mental health.

Mental illness, while perhaps less understood, is no less real than physical illness. There is also the stigma and lack of understanding which patients and their loved ones combat daily. Some studies estimate that one in six of our population would suffer from mental health issues at some stage of their lives.

Currently, our 3Ms framework allows support for mental illnesses, but it is limited. For example, Medisave has a withdrawal limit of \$150 per day for inpatient psychiatric treatment, with an annual cap of \$5,000. Compare this with daily limit of \$450 for other patients who have been hospitalised.

For MediShield Life, the difference is even greater, with a daily coverage of \$700 in a normal ward, but \$100 for a psychiatric ward. Mental illness is as real and debilitating as other illnesses. Funding from the 3Ms and other insurance plans should be on-par with coverage for other conditions. Companies, too, need to be encouraged to provide equal levels of support and coverage for employees who suffer from mental health issues.

Another equally important issue is how prepared is Singapore to deal with rising numbers of patients with dementia. It was recently estimated that 10% of us aged above 60 suffer from dementia, with a rise in younger patients being diagnosed.



This may not always be classified as a mental or even physical illness, but the strain to our healthcare costs and infrastructure could be massive. Can the Minister give an update on what has been done in the last few years to ensure our care systems are able to deal with the future increase in the number of dementia sufferers, and if there are plans to expand pilot projects such as "dementia-friendly" town.

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## Community Nursing

by Daniel Goh

Madam Chair, it is expected that the demand for palliative care at home will double by 2020 to more than 10,000 patients. However, some reports suggest that the current supply of nurses providing home-based care may not be sufficient to meet the expected increase in demand. Several providers of home nursing care are employing foreign nurses on foreign domestic work permits. This could compromise the quality and development of home-based care in Singapore. Furthermore, the 10,000 patients only refer to those needing palliative care.

I would like to raise two suggestions for the Ministry to consider in their efforts to expand home-based care service and raise standards.

First, there were over 5,700 registered and enrolled nurses who were not active in 2014 comprising over 15% of the total number of nurses. This is an existing pool of qualified nurses that can be tapped on if appropriate flexibility, allowances and incentives are given to encourage them to provide home-based healthcare within their neighbourhoods and communities.

I ask the Ministry to consider developing a community nursing core to attract retired, inactive or underemployed nurses to return to active nursing, and to cater to existing active nurses who need job flexibility due to family or other reasons, so they do not leave active nursing. These nurses can be provided with the right training to become professional community nurses attached to hospitals to provide home-based care.

Second, will the Ministry consider developing a comprehensive Hospital and Home Programme modelled on the programme in Australia? Under the Hospital and Home Programme, hospitals will provide inpatient treatment for acute care patients whose conditions allow them to receive treatment in their own homes. This is not limited to seniors or

the terminally ill. The community nurses could then act as key care providers, conducting medical check-ups and providing portable medical services to the home-based patients. The community nurses could also make use of telehealth technology to engage in non-site consultations with hospital-based doctors in the homes of the patients.

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## Hospice

by Low Thia Khiang

Madam, inpatient hospices and palliative care facilities charge patients on a day-by-day basis, and it has been estimated that a month's stay at a hospice will cost about \$7,000 before means testing. I understand that patients whose families have a per capita monthly household income of \$2,601 and above will not receive any subsidies for inpatient hospice care.

With one in four Singaporeans estimated to be over 60 by 2030, the demand for such specialised care will increase. The additional factors of increases in healthcare material costs and remuneration for healthcare workers will also drive the costs of hospice and palliative care up.

I would like to know what the average length of stay in the hospice was from 2012 to 2015. How many people have benefited so far from the last increase in the income ceiling? And how many have written in to appeal for subsidies for the high costs of inpatient charges at the hospices? In light of the gradual increase in gross monthly income and the increase in cost of living, I would like to know if the Ministry is considering raising the income ceiling so as to allow more families to benefit.

I would also like to propose that ElderShield be extended for the use of hospice and palliative care. A thorough review of the ElderShield scheme is long overdue, and it is perhaps the right time for the Ministry to not only include hospice and palliative care under the scheme, but to also review the adequacy of the subsidies and payout period of the ElderShield scheme.

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# Enhanced Primary Care

by Daniel Goh

Madam Chair, primary healthcare at general practitioner clinics should be seen as a form of preventive healthcare to arrest the development of illnesses before they escalate to the needs for costly hospitalisation. Costly, that is, to the public purse and the public, given universal hospitalisation insurance or MediShield Life.

The monthly household income per member capped to qualify for Community Health Assist Scheme or CHAS subsidies should be raised from \$1,800 to the prevailing median monthly income from work for an individual which stand at \$3,900 in 2015. This is so that retirees who live with their working children, who are themselves parents, are not excluded. This would also provide some relief for the children of the retirees, who belong to the sandwiched middle-income group. Another benefit is that this would provide support for and promote multi-generational households, where the elderly would not be disincentivised to live with the children and grandchildren.

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# Sugar Content Labelling

by Daniel Goh

Madam Chair, the harmful effect of excessive sugar consumption has led to Britain recently introducing a sugar tax. Singapore, like the UK is experiencing an ageing population and the prevalence of obesity and heart disease. There are also local characteristics to the problem as Asians are at a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes and in fact over 10% of adult Singaporeans are currently diabetic and is the second highest proportion in the developed world. It will therefore appear that we should seriously consider a sugar-tax.

However the effectiveness of the sugar-tax is questionable, at least in Singapore as it will likely turn out to be a requisite tax on vulnerable Singaporeans. We should focus instead on empowering Singaporeans towards making healthier choices and adjustments to their lifestyle. I request the Government consider mandating the labelling of free-sugar content in processed

foods where the calories and percentage of daily intake of free-sugar need to be prominently displayed on food packaging.

The sugar content should also be colour-coded with green, amber and red. Labelling should be in line with WHO guidelines of cutting free-sugar consumption to less than 10% of daily calorie-intake. This can be rolled out in phases, starting in canned and packet drinks, for example a can of *Coca-Cola* contains added sugar amounting to 80% of the current WHO guidelines and should be labelled red.

Health warnings that read "Drinking beverages with excessive added sugar contributes to obesity, diabetes and tooth decay" should be attached to drinks that are labelled red. Studies to track whether labelling has resulted in consumers making better choices should be conducted to improve the labelling and gauge in success before we even consider a sugar-tax.

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COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

# Anti-Corruption Reputation

by Sylvia Lim

Madam, according to the CPIB, Singapore is one of the list corrupt countries in the world. The number of corruption cases registered for CPIB investigations is at 30-year lows. This, the CPIB says, is testament to Singapore's continued vigilance, commitment and zero-tolerance approach in our fight against corruption.

While CPIB's low case load is one thing, it seems that internationally, there are some doubts as to whether we have been as vigilant and intolerant towards corruption as claimed. In particular, it has been suggested that we have a certain double standard – intolerance towards corruption within Singapore, but permissiveness towards corruption committed abroad.

One of the main factors is Singapore's position as a global financial centre, and its reputation for having strong banking secrecy laws that could shield those who have broken laws overseas. Articles have been written, mostly abroad, accusing Singapore of "asking no questions" or "turning a blind eye" to sources of funds being managed from here.

Since about 2009, the Government has progressively implemented regulations requiring more vigilance, increased reporting and exchange of information with other countries. These are guided by international standards set by the OECD and FATF (Financial Action Task Force). For instance, Singapore now has in place some anti-money laundering measures. But how effective are they to prevent the inflow of corrupt monies?

The 1 Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) is a case in point. It was reported that the MAS is currently probing into 40 banks operating here, for possible money laundering offences linked to the 1MDB. Concerns have also been raised about locally-based firms such as Portcullis Trustnet, which purportedly specialise in setting up offshore companies and trusts and hard-to-trace bank accounts in Singapore and other offshore financial centres.

Another weakness in Singapore's fight against corruption from abroad seems to be our lack of extradition treaties with other countries. Is the Government concerned that Singapore's anti-corruption reputation has thus been eroded?

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# Total Fertility Rate

by Leon Perera

Madam Chairperson, our total fertility rate (TFR) has been declining for several decades and remains low by global standard of 1.24 in spite of the billions spent on Marriage and Parenthood Packages over the last 15 years or so. The reasons for this and, hence, the policy tools to address this are necessarily complex and multi-faceted.

Madam, while some East Asian developed countries have low TFRs, some other developed countries have fared much better, including most of the Nordic countries and the USA at around 1.9. Even Japan and Switzerland are doing better at 1.4 and 1.5 respectively.

There is only so much we can and should do to nudge Singaporeans to marry and have babies. Perhaps, our focus can be on encouraging those parents who do have one or two children to have more. In this regard, I think policies to ease the difficulties of having more children when one already has some, infant care and access to childcare, in particular, may be crucial. When a family already has one or two children, the logistical issues of having a third child or fourth child tend to weigh heavily.

Other countries do have programmes where the states sponsor some parents in a particular neighbourhood to provide quasi, informal child and infant care to their neighbours, as in Denmark; or sends part-time helpers to help mothers with new-borns to cope for a month or two, as in France.

In the Singapore context, the key may be to ensure there is enough infant and childcare capacity in the estates and towns with many young couples, building infrastructure ahead of demand, as it were. While there may be sufficient childcare capacity nationwide, it is unevenly distributed, as has been discussed in the House this year. This should be tracked very closely.

There is also scope to experiment with the Danish model of private child-minders in specific blocks, precincts or estates. I hope this is something we can look at seriously, taking a whole-of-Government approach.

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COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY  
MINISTRY OF CULTURE,  
COMMUNITY AND YOUTH



# Malay/Muslim Community Development Fund (MMCDF)

by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Sir, in Malay.

*(In Malay):* In his reply to my query in this Chamber, on whether the Malay/Muslim Community Development Fund (MMCDF) can be extended to the mosques, the Minister said that this cannot be done as mosques are not considered to be Malay/Muslim bodies. However, he added that mosques can receive this fund if their social programmes are run in cooperation with government bodies or other Malay/Muslim organisations.

I really admire the efforts of the Muslim community in Singapore in the administration of mosques. The Management Board and staff of every mosque work hard to run these mosques, while the Muslim community also plays a role to achieve stability for the mosques by contributing their money and energy. As we know, mosques welcome contributions from the community in any shape or form, especially financial contributions. This is because, as I understand it, all the expenses incurred in running a mosque like utility bills, payment of monthly salaries and so on are also funded with money contributed by the community.

This Spirit of Partnership is born out of the intent and sincere effort to achieve a shared objective that is to help mosques in Singapore prosper. The stability of mosques, which is built on this Spirit of Partnership, will turn mosques into one of the important and main contributors, not only in spiritual development, but also in the social development of our Muslim community.

Sir, one of the themes of this year's Budget is the Spirit of Partnership. In the name of this Spirit of Partnership, I would like to ask that the Minister and the Government consider the proposal that this fund be extended to the mosques, so that this MMCDF can bring further benefits towards the development of the Malay/Muslim community in Singapore. This will also strengthen the Spirit of Partnership between the Government and Malay/Muslim bodies.

Sir, I have two questions for the Minister: first, can the Minister clarify what is the criteria that is being used to categorise an institution or organisation as a Malay/Muslim body (MMO); and secondly, who decides this criteria?

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# People's Association

by Sylvia Lim

Sir, the People's Association (PA) has evolved since its inception in 1960. Its original role was countering communist activities and fostering social stability and national security. PA has gone from community centres to community clubs, from providing TV sets and simple sports facilities to holding courses and large scale activities. I am concerned with two aspects – the PA's ever-increasing budget, and whether the PA has in some respects deviated from its mandate.

First, the budget. While we understand that the FY 2015 budget was much larger than usual due to the SG50 activities and building residents' facilities, the FY 2016 budget is still very high at nearly \$900 million. This is a significant 34% increase from FY 2014. How is the high expenditure justified?

Second, it seems to me that some PA activities have exceeded its mandate. To recap, the People's Association Act states that the PA is incorporated for the purpose of promoting community recreation and incidental matters. Its objects are stated to relate to fostering cohesion and bonding, and to promoting group participation that transcends sectional loyalties. The PA's role then is to unite – receiving heavy taxpayer funding for such.

An unhealthy culture seems to have developed within some quarters of the PA who sees its role to include advancing the Ruling party politically, and undermining the work of Opposition Members of Parliament. PA activists being mobilised to campaign for PAP candidates at elections is just one aspect. As Opposition Members, when we try to advance our residents' welfare through infrastructure projects, we learn that Government agencies like MND and HDB will only recognise PA organisations such as CCCs and RCs as "the proper channels". When I tried to simply get information from MND on the plans for private estate upgrading projects within Aljunied GRC, the Ministry referred me to the CCC. I then wrote several times to the CCC, but it seems that my letters do not even merit a reply.

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# Interpreting Singapore's History

by Low Thia Khiang

Sir, I believe that learning and understanding of Singapore history can contribute to having a stronger national identity and of being Singaporean. This is especially so when young minds in schools are exposed early to the history of Singapore.

I am of the view that this can only be achieved if history is presented to encourage students to consider multiple perspectives and engage in critical thinking. This will also reduce students' and parents' perceptions of using history as Government propaganda.

I believe the same should apply to the representations of history in exhibitions curated by the National Heritage Board. This would include exhibitions at museums such as the National Museum and interpretive centres such as the Malay Heritage Centre and Nanyang Memorial Hall.

It is time we move away from representations of a "standard" or "official" history. We should allow different interpretations of history with the goal of encouraging critical thinking and promoting citizenship education to guide NHB exhibitions.

For example, the recent Parliament in Singapore History exhibition could take on different interpretations as seen from the multiple perspectives of the Pioneer statesmen, Ruling party backbenchers, Opposition party Members, women members, minority Members and so on.

NHB now provides grants to organisations and individuals keen to conduct historical research and curate exhibitions on history. An independent commission made up of professional historians and heritage specialists from different institutions should be set up to oversee the grants with the mission to encourage critical thinking through different interpretations of history.

An independent commission would signal to the public that the Government is not here to control and censor history. The historical exhibitions will have more legitimacy with the public and therefore promote citizenship education.

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# Heritage Impact Assessment

by Chen Show Mao

Sir, local heritage is becoming increasingly important as Singapore matures and our national identity develops. Our heritage is key to understanding who we are and where came from.

In the past few years we have seen several public debates over heritage and what we should preserve. We have also seen several archaeological excavations, for example, in Fort Canning, St Andrew's Cathedral, Adam Park, Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, the site of the National Gallery Singapore and most recently, Empress Place.

These excavations are signs of our interests in our past and the Government's efforts to support heritage awareness. Sir, we can do more.

Strengthen the existing legal framework over heritage impact assessments, or HIAs, and over artefacts from archaeological excavations. Currently, the URA Planning Act does make it mandatory for persons seeking to develop land to carry out HIAs. Without these assessments we would not know if such development would put historically significant buildings, structures or artefacts at risk. We should make HIAs mandatory, these are assessments, they will help us, help the URA or the Minister make better informed decisions over development.

Another crucial gap in the legal framework is the issue of ownership of artefacts that are discovered in the course of archaeological excavations, the law is currently unclear who owns the artefacts, the landowner or the state, with different implications for their protection.

I call on the Government to establish an inter-Ministerial working committee to develop HIA requirements and review the current state of heritage protection, in consultation with civil society groups like Singapore Heritage Society, Nature Society and ICOMOS Singapore.

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