

The Workers' Party in Parliament

Budget Debate 2018

— Speeches and Cuts —



The Workers' Party
工人党 Parti Pekerja ເມືອງໂລກມະນຸດ

Foreword

This publication marks the third issue of the Workers' Party's Budget Compilation. Budget 2018 is also the first Budget that the Workers' Party (WP) MPs voted against.

Our MPs voted "no" to the motion that Parliament "approves the financial policy of the Government for the financial year 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019" for the sole reason that WP was unable to support the announcement of a GST hike from 7% to 9% in 2021-2025 at that point in time. Although we support the Government's strategy and measures for the Financial Year, the GST hike was an announcement and not a budget measure. We are unable to support the announcement for three reasons:

1. the lack of clarity on long-term projected Government income and spending;
2. the lack of consideration of alternative revenue streams and whether there is scope for the reserves to better support and invest in Singaporeans;
3. the lack in details on the effect of the future GST hike on low-income and middle-income Singaporeans and the Government's permanent GST offset packages.

We asked the Government to consider other options for raising revenue to meet increased spending. These options included raising the Net Investment Returns Contribution cap and using a small, capped fraction of land sales proceeds for Budgets. However, the latter was brushed off by the Government.

WP MPs intended to vote "yes" on the budget measures for the Financial Year 2018/2019. However, Minister Heng insisted that voting "yes" would mean WP supports the announced GST hike in the next term of Government in 2021-2025 and called for a division. It is unreasonable for us to vote for a drastic future tax hike that will financially affect Singaporeans based on inadequate information and justifications on the need for the hike. We therefore voted no.

This compilation showcases all the speeches made by our six elected MPs and three non-constituency MPs during the Budget and Committee of Supply (COS) debates from 27 February to 8 March 2018. WP MPs raised a variety of issues, but at the heart of it, it was about Singapore and Singaporeans' future. Inequality, ageing, cost of living and bread-and-butter issues were the focus of our speeches.

The Worker's Party will continue to be a responsible and rational voice for you in Parliament. Our MPs welcome any feedback you may have on their speeches or suggestions.

Enjoy reading!

The Workers' Party Media Team

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BUDGET DEBATE SPEECHES

Women and Ageing in Singapore

by Daniel Goh

The Gender Dimensions of Ageing in Singapore

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Budget marks a significant progress from a wait-and-see posture to strategic and integrated planning to engage three major shifts affecting Singapore's future. I focus on ageing here. I highlight that ageing is not uniformly experienced, and that men and women experience ageing and are affected by ageing very differently. There are therefore gender inequalities we need to tackle if we are to meet the challenges and opportunities of ageing successfully. Our policies targeted at ageing must factor in the gender differences for them to be effective. I focus on three sets of issues, namely, issues related to the gender income gap, issues with supporting care-givers, and the economic and health security of seniors.

Let me start with issues related to the gender income gap. A study using data from the Ministry of Manpower last year showed that the gender pay gap has not improved in the decade from 2006 to 2016. The gap in median monthly income between male and female has remained at around 18% to 19%, with women earning some \$610 less than men.

It is unacceptable that we have not made any progress in closing the gender pay gap in 10 years. We need to tackle the gender pay gap because it will affect our future senior women and their retirement security. Already, women are living longer than men and CPF LIFE is structured in such a way that discriminates between gender, with women paying a higher premium and getting less pay-outs. The gender pay gap has therefore a compounding effect on the retirement security of women. Using the CPF LIFE Pay-out Estimator on the CPF Board website, my estimate is that on the average men will be getting 25% more income than women from CPF LIFE due to the gender pay gap.

The gender pay gap varies across sectors. There has been some attention on the gender pay gap in the finance sector and in senior management, but I think we should actually pay more attention to the majority of our women workers who are labouring in other sectors. Health and social service is still a sector that has one of the largest gender pay gap, with women earning around \$1,540 a month less than men. The health and social service

sector impacts ageing and our seniors the most. It is also a sector that is arguably the most susceptible to what Minister Ong Ye Kung has noted as a key factor underpinning the gender pay gap, that is, the social norms and expectations placed on women. Minister Ong called for a mindset change. But this is also a structural issue.

The crux of the matter is nursing. Nursing makes up the bulk of the health and social service sector and most nurses are women. Nursing is also in high demand because of ageing. A strong professional body of local nurses is essential for us to successfully meet the challenges of ageing. For many decades, there has been an erosion of status and value attributed to nursing, which culminated in the 2013 Population White Paper footnote mistake in classifying nursing as a low-skilled job that is difficult to offshore. The apology and correction from Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean then was swift and right and I believe there has been a narrowing of the prestige gap between nursing and other professions since 2013. But there are still two other associated issues.

First, while wages for nurses have been improving, there is still a lag. Based on mid-2016 data from Ministry of Manpower, the median gross monthly income from work of all full-time employed residents is \$4,056, while the figure for nurses is \$4,300. This is a ratio of 1.06. This is not too different from similar ratios for OECD countries.

However, when compared to small countries with similar demand profile for nurses, we are behind. For example, the ratio in Israel is 1.4. In Australia, where ageing is also a major challenge for society, the ratio is 1.2. Given the high demand for nursing because of our ageing society, there is scope to further increase the wages of nurses.

Second, it has been a longstanding fact that most nurses are women, which has entrenched the perception that nursing is a female occupation. This gendered composition and perception of nursing will continue to exacerbate the supply shortage of trained nurses. Increasing the wages of nurses will kill several birds with one stone. As most nurses are currently women, increasing the wages of nurses will help close the gender pay gap.

It will also signal the increased social value and respect that is attached to nursing; that nursing is far from being a low-skilled job; that on the contrary, nursing is an especially precious skillset for the ageing society.

We all know that nursing is a very demanding job. It is emotionally straining, time consuming, especially with the shift work and overtime, and also physically draining.

Increasing the wages of nurses will make the remuneration more commensurate with the passion that is demanded of nurses.

Increasing the wages of nurses will also help to shift the mindset over time, so that more men would take up the calling and not be put off by the opportunity cost of higher pay for men in other professions.

Another issue related to the gender pay gap is the income security and prospects of women who have become mothers. Part of the reason for the gender pay gap is linked to women returning to the workforce after taking a prolonged break due to pregnancies or childcare responsibilities. Little recognition is given by employers and the Government to the years women spent in service to the family and to the nation to bear and raise children, unlike men who are often given a salary premium for the two years spent in National Service.

The current emphasis on lifelong learning and continuous retraining exacerbates the issue. By the time women try to return to the workforce, they face the triple challenges of making sure their skills stay relevant, discrimination against older workers and wage stagnation compared to their male peers.

Last year, during COS 2017, I proposed the SkillsFuture Mommy Awards to make re-entry into the workforce for mothers less challenging. We have the social and policy infrastructure to resolve this issue. This is an area that the SkillsFuture Singapore and Workforce Singapore should look into.

Let me move on now to the second set of issues related to care-givers, who, like nurses, are at the frontlines of the ageing society. Like nurses, most care-givers are women. So again, we see gender closely connected to ageing. As with nurses, getting our policy right in supporting care-givers is essential for us to successfully meet the challenges of ageing. There are two issues associated with care-givers. If we can resolve these two issues, we will be able to support a strong body of care-givers who would form the bedrock of our silver care system, close the loop between healthcare and community care, and allow our seniors to successfully and actively age in place.

The first issue is recognition and reward for unpaid caregiving. It was estimated that there were over 210,000 care-givers in 2004. The numbers should have gone up by now. This is not a small number, as it represents around 10% of our resident workforce. In a national survey of informal care-giving of older adults aged 75 and above presented in 2013, only 55.6% of the

care-givers reported that they were working full-time or part-time and the care-givers reported they spent an average 38 hours a week in providing care.

Among the three problems of lack of family support, negative financial impact and negative impact on schedule and health, care-givers rated financial impact as the heaviest burden, followed closely by negative impact on schedule and health. This is despite the fact that 49% of care-givers in this survey had the support of foreign domestic workers.

The same survey shows that care-givers living in private property and therefore assumed to have better means experienced lower stress, while care-givers who were working and who were facing more financial problems due to care-giving experienced higher stress. This is only one of the many surveys and studies that have shown consistent results. I think it is time we recognise that the care-giving is full-time work, which prevents care-givers from realising their employment potential and affecting their financial security.

How can we better support care-givers in this respect? Two years ago, during COS 2016, I asked the Government to consider giving means-tested refundable tax credits to care-givers, so that care-givers who do not work or work part-time would get some cash refund. This would lessen their financial burden and improve their retirement adequacy. Senior Minister of State Sim Ann then replied that the Government's approach focused on direct subsidies of services to lessen the costs borne by care-givers, rather than providing cash allowances to people looking after family members. I am of the view that the two do not have to be mutually exclusive. Cash allowances to care-givers suffering from extreme negative financial impact would allow them to access the subsidised services.

If we recognise full-time care-giving of seniors as unpaid work, then it is not far-fetched to consider them as low-wage employees who need income supplement. We should rethink the orthodoxy and provide income support to care-givers. There is already one scheme that is suited for this purpose – the Workfare Income Supplement (WIS) Scheme. WIS is means-tested and with older workers receiving higher payments, it will ensure the benefit will go to needy care-givers. Also, since 40% of the payment is given out in cash and 60% in CPF contributions, this will help take care of the immediate financial needs and enhance the retirement needs of the eligible care-givers.

The second issue is the stress faced by care-givers of seniors, which in the worst case, can lead to depression and anxiety. Studies of care-givers in Singapore have consistently shown high stress levels among caregivers. But, there are important differences. Care-givers of seniors with dementia experienced higher stress. Female care-givers of seniors, namely wives

and daughters, tend to experience a lot more stress than male care-givers. These female care-givers reported feeling rundown and exhausted and experienced restless sleepless nights. Many of them reported the desire to be involved in culturally relevant recreational activities, such as a game of mahjong, but they lack the social networks to get involved.

Our care-givers are a heroic bunch with strong Asian family values. Another study has shown that care-givers often report concerns about the care-giving and much less about the effect of care-giving on their own physical and mental well-being. What this means is that while they know and are driven to care for their loved ones, the care-givers do not know how to care for themselves and tended to neglect their own well-being.

Last year, during COS 2017, I asked the Government to provide better support to caregivers of seniors by setting up caregiver support centres at Senior Care Centres (SCCs). I was glad to hear from Senior Minister of State Amy Khor that the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) started a three-year pilot since September 2015 to embed care-giver support services in five SSCs, and that AIC had also started AICareLinks centres at five hospitals and its office at Maxwell Road for care-givers to receive advice on services and schemes. I think these are great initiatives, but we are starting from a very low baseline of no support for care-givers.

There is a lot more we can do, especially given the general reticence of care-givers to seek help for themselves. I suspect the care-givers are not too forthcoming in seeking caregiver support services at the SCCs and AICareLinks centres. It may well be that we would need to use the Social Service Offices (SSOs) and Family Service Centres (FSCs) infrastructure to bring the support to the care-givers to enhance their well-being.

I understand the logic to integrate health and social support for seniors under MOH and empowering AIC to be the central implementing agency to coordinate the services announced in the Budget Statement. But I hope this integration will not come at a cost to the cross-functional integration between MOH and MSF, and between AIC and the SSOs when it comes to needy seniors and vulnerable care-givers of seniors. In fact, with seniors ageing in place and in their communities, the delivery of services is most effectively achieved by leveraging the community networks of the SSOs and FSCs.

I turn now to the third and last set of issues, which are directly related to the retirement security of senior women. There are two issues here I would like to highlight: economic security and health security.

First, existing cohorts of elderly women and soon-to-be senior women cohorts are experiencing economic vulnerabilities. In 2016, it was reported that for those over 60 years of age, the average CPF balance for women is only 69% that of men. This gap is narrowing for younger cohorts as gender equality improves with better educational attainment by women in recent decades.

However, this problem will remain with us for at least another 20 years, as the gender CPF gap is similar for those aged 45 years and above. Back in 2008, HDB found that just over half of elderly residents living in HDB flats planned financially for retirement, with women much less likely to do so. Many elderly women, much more so than elderly men, are dependent on their spouses and children for financial support, and many continued to work in low-paid jobs to supplement their meagre income.

One study showed that 26% of those aged 55 years and above in 2011 reported they perceived occasional or regular financial inadequacy, with more women reporting this than men. Another study estimated that the relative poverty rate among the working elderly had jumped from 13% in 1995 to 41% in 2011. This means that among the working elderly, 41% had income from work, family members and state assistance amounting to less than 40% of the median income in the workforce. This suggests that many seniors are working past retirement age not just because they want to, but because they had to, and many in this category are women.

It does not look like this issue is going to abate in the next decade. Instead, the scale of the economic insecurity problem will increase due to the doubling of the number of seniors to 2030. I would like to call on the Government to study this issue of the elderly working poor, especially involving women, more closely and adopt urgent measures to tackle the issue. One possible line of attack would be to look at how social service and community development agencies helping to place the elderly in jobs could also help the elderly draw up favourable contracts for service and provide advice and retraining opportunities to improve their income prospects.

In the meantime, the Silver Support Scheme could be enhanced to mitigate the problems faced by the elderly working poor. As many of the seniors are dependent on their spouse and children for their housing needs, we should make sure this housing dependence do not erode the efficacy of state assistance to support the needy seniors.

The Silver Support Scheme pay-outs to needy seniors are currently tiered according to the HDB housing types they are living in. This is unnecessary as the beneficiaries of the scheme

are already means-tested. A needy senior living in a 5-room flat receiving \$300 a quarter and a needy senior living in a 2-room flat receiving \$750 a quarter are already means-tested to be facing low household support, with a monthly income per person in the household of not more than \$1,100. One may be living in a bigger flat, but they are facing the same financial difficulties of meeting their everyday needs.

The 5-room flat is a long-term asset and cannot be simply unlocked to support the everyday needs. How is the size of the HDB flat related to the provision of household support to the elderly poor? Is the tiered pay-out signalling to the family that they should downsize the flat to better support their seniors? I believe needy seniors should receive \$750 a quarter, regardless of the size of the HDB flat where they live.

The second issue is health security. Our seniors are now living longer, fruitful lives and receiving better healthcare. While women are living longer than men, women are also facing more downsides in health security than men. Senior women spend more years in disability than men, and women are two and a half times more likely than men to report difficulties in carrying out typical activities of daily living. The gender-differentiated ElderShield premiums reflect this, but again, this means it compounds the gender income gap and greater financial insecurity faced by women.

Senior women are also more prone to suffering from dementia and higher rates of depression, which are more home-bound diseases that compound the care-giving burdens faced by female family members. The concern is that women are caught up in an inter-generational vicious circle of care-giving and deterioration of mental well-being. We need a more targeted approach to tackle dementia and mental well-being among seniors and the general population at the national level.

Mr Speaker, Sir, back in May last year, I asked a Parliamentary Question on whether the Government practices gender budgeting to determine the effect of policies on women. Gender budgeting involves analysing the Government's annual budget and programmes for their different impact on men and women and then adjusting allocations and programme details to promote gender equality.

Minister Heng Swee Keat replied to the question saying that in the design, planning and delivery of programmes, the Government accounts for the impact of policies on different segments of society, including gender and target benefits at those in need, and that Government policies have over the years enabled the advancement of women in Singapore.

Indeed, they have. I read this reply positively as the Government does do some form of gender budgeting for its programmes though it is not formalised as such.

I especially like the part on targeting benefits at those in need. As I have made the case in this speech, gender equality is not just an aspiration, but a need. It is a need because, whether absolutely or relatively, the financial security of women through their career from young workers to would-be mothers to care-givers to seniors is paramount to the mitigation of neediness among our ageing population. It is a need because gender equality is one of the key upstream solutions to the downstream challenges of ageing and where opportunities for successful ageing of our seniors are shaped and forged. To promote gender equality is thus to be strategic and integrated, as this Budget seeks to be.

On Education, Fiscal Sustainability and Taxes

by Pritam Singh

In his Budget speech, the Finance Minister spoke of three major shifts in the coming decade. The rise of Asia was observed some years ago but the colossal scale of the change only became apparent to many with the conception of China's global One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative.

Technological disruption is mind-blowing, if not downright terrifying for some. The sight of agile robots from Boston Dynamics on our Facebook feeds, driverless vehicles and news of medical initiatives in cloning, herald a world that was considered to be fictional only one generation ago.

The prospect of an ageing society, however, was not sudden. Successive governments have identified it with the second generation PAP leadership establishing the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Ageing which published its report in 1999, and with at least four other high-level committees on ageing, since 1982, putting the issue squarely in the public imagination.

The Workers' Party notes that this year's Budget is one that seeks to prepare Singapore and establish strong foundations for economic growth for the next 10 years. Singapore's situation is unique. Economic growth is at the centre of our existence and an economy that exhibits a certain verve and vitality is critical to the well-being of our people. While the Government has got the headline issues right, as it had with identifying ageing almost 20 years ago, what will matter most is how its vision of looking after Singapore and Singaporeans is translated operationally and executed on the ground. My speech will cover education, fiscal sustainability and taxes.

Driving Educational Transformation

In his Budget speech, the Finance Minister spoke of Industry 4.0, a reference to the technological shift from computer systems to integrated cyber, physical, biological and

intelligent systems. Mr Speaker, as much as we seek to encourage workers of today to embrace the future economy through the Industry Transformation Programmes, the Tech Skills Accelerator and the Go Digital Programme amongst other initiatives, there is another segment of our population for whom the new economy is one they must fit into seamlessly. They are our younger Singaporeans – many of whom are still in school today.

On 19 February 2018, The Straits Times carried a fictional article that sought to imagine what Singapore would look like in 2030 for one young Singaporean. It spoke of the story of Alex, whose life was transformed by the Committee of the Future Economy (CFE) report of 2017. Alex interpreted the report to mean that entrepreneurship was the way of the future. By 2023, his fictitious company was awarded a contract to supply the Ministry of Health with mechanical parts for robot assisted surgery. With a local foothold, he expanded his business into Southeast Asia.

Alex's story was fascinating to me particularly when I contrasted it against the speech of the former head of civil service, Mr Lim Siong Guan, who gave a series of lectures as part of the IPS-SR Nathan Lecture Series on Singapore late last year. Most striking was Mr Lim's observation of how we in Singapore pile accolades on those who reach the pinnacle of success, with others often remaining unnoticed and unmentioned. The call for innovation, a central pillar in this year's Budget requires – in Mr Lim's view – for our people to try more and fail; and to be recognised not only for their success but their effort, and to be proud of trying their best in exercising their talents and abilities.

In a second equally compelling and parallel anecdote, Mr Lim spoke about how Israeli mothers in the past wished their children to be doctors and lawyers. Fast forward 20 years and this scenario has apparently changed completely with Israeli mothers wishing their children to be CEOs of start-ups. The situation is similar in Estonia and Finland. In Mr Lim's words, "Singapore has to get there and be exceptional in our own way".

I have my doubts about whether Alex's parents are ready for him to forget how they changed addresses to get him enrolled into a better school before he entered Primary 1 and how they spent thousands of dollars in tuition fees so that he would be streamed for the best outcomes to secure a stable and lucrative career. More pointedly, unless Alex comes from a rich family, I am not sure he would be in a position to give up an education in accountancy in favour of entrepreneurship, given our cultural biases to what qualifies as a good job, school, university or career.

Mr Speaker, ensuring the readiness of the education system to drive future economic growth is a critical strategy that we cannot afford to overlook. Only last month, the Minister of Education in charge of Higher Education shared that the Government is examining how it can better design the learning landscape so as to ensure that opportunities are available for Singaporeans to succeed in life. However, the Minister said that this endeavour may take a generation.

Without a doubt, the education system has progressively evolved for the better, but do we have the luxury of time to undertake its transformation for the new economy, a transformation that is arguably as urgent as the economic transformation we desire? With our people as the only natural resource, we must begin from the starting point that each and every one of our students, each and every one of them, regardless of race, language or religion, can not just succeed, but excel in the economy of tomorrow. The focus cannot be on acing examinations alone as a means of securing a child's future as is overwhelmingly the case is today. Even as our education system has correctly made adjustments to allow for a minority of students to benefit from aptitude-based entry points across the education system, this may not be enough.

In fact, we continue to have a tuition culture which is alleged to be a billion-dollar industry in Singapore. There are no evident signs of this tuition culture abating. Even PAP Members have raised questions in this House about stress and anxiety levels in our students. Parents naturally equate poor PSLE results with relatively poorer opportunities and outcomes for their children in Secondary school. They fear that poor PSLE results will evince a bleak future, with their children condemned to schools dominated by problematic students, who in their estimation, do not like to study or cannot communicate well, hence setting their own children up for mediocrity. Such fears, amongst others, correct or not, drive the tuition industry and the stress both in parents and by extension, in students.

Mr Speaker, it will take a radical move to energise the cultural shift needed to change mindsets about tuition and early streaming among all stakeholders, particularly parents. But there is another downside and a very important one that requires us to hasten educational transformation. Streaming and ranking serve to reinforce the inequality the Finance Minister warned about in his Budget speech. This is particularly since our educational culture is weighted in favour of parents with means, and naturally so, and those who can pile on enrichment classes and tuition and even consider paying educational professionals to work out long-term strategies to game Direct School Admission exercises.

The Government has previously looked at broad-based schemes like the Productivity and Innovation Credit (PIC) to drive productivity, only to shift now to more targeted measures for specific industries through the ITMs. In similar vein, the Government should start identifying the specific policy changes needed to alter behaviour and drive cultural change in favour of learning. The time has come to squarely look at our tuition culture and ironically, how it may actually be holding us back rather than spurring and motivating our students in a healthy manner.

The tuition industry is an important stakeholder in this undertaking. Rather than spend time and money on tuition, would our students not be better served by an education in various regional languages, more debates, better communication skills, financial literacy, problem-solving and negotiation, and on field trips rather than cramming model answers and methodologies for exam-based outcomes only for them to be forgotten very quickly thereafter? How critical is streaming and even the PSLE examinations for success in life in the future economy? If it is not critical, are there persuasive arguments that remain for their continued existence?

The need of the hour today is different from that of the past. A radical shift in direction needs to take place to set up our future generations of workers and employees for the future economy. Alex's plans to become a successful entrepreneur with an appetite for risk – and for his story and Singapore's economic future not to be a fictional one – depend on it.

Reframing Fiscal Prudence and Sustainability?

Mr Speaker, from a citizen perspective, making deeper enquiries of the Government's Budget is no less important than acquiring deep skills for the future economy. Some very important and healthy conversations are taking place within our society about social protection and the size and use of our reserves, estimated in The Straits Times last week to be in excess of a trillion dollars – I will say that again, in excess of a trillion dollars. How much of it do we need to protect the Singapore dollar from currency speculators is a valid question given that yearly revenue from land sales alone ensures that our reserves continue to grow in size.

Some arguments have been made in public for the Net Investment Returns Contribution (NIRC) to be increased to 60% to stave off the GST hike. Similarly there have been calls to consider only a temporary increase in NIRC to fund non-recurrent, lumpy infrastructure investments such as the high-speed rail, new MRT lines and the Changi T5 terminal. After such infrastructure has been completed, the NIRC can return to 50% and some portion of the revenue earned from such infrastructure can also be returned to the reserves.

Such proposals leave more scope for the Government to hold back from increasing regressive taxes like the GST, which also hit middle income Singaporeans with young children and elderly parents the hardest, mainly because offset packages announced by the Government inherently target the low income and needy more, and correctly so.

In his Budget speech, the Finance Minister made a fundamental distinction to set out the Government's thinking on recurrent spending which directly benefits current generations and that the responsible way to pay for such expenditure is through taxation. However, it is no secret that Singapore's approach to budgeting is highly conservative with land sales excluded from the Government's income even as more resources are required to take care of our elderly population through to 2030 and beyond. Reasonable Singaporeans take the view that there is scope to consider how elderly Singaporeans can be better protected in their twilight years with the burden of additional taxes like the GST held off for as long as possible.

One novel, if not relatively radical approach in view of the current orthodoxy, is to reconsider the role land sales can play in recurrent spending. The Government is by far and away the largest land owner in Singapore. The majority of all land here comprises of 99-year or less than 99-year leasehold properties. Seen in this light, should not the current generations be allowed to benefit from some percentage of today's land sales with the knowledge that such land regenerates itself in value for future generations providing successive Governments with the recurring source of income? Should Singaporeans who are now expected to live well into their 80s reap more benefit from land sales so as to justify better social protection for them?

Even as land is scarce in Singapore, it is also highly valued with land sales likely to be very healthy in the decades to come right until our HDB flats run down their leases and well into the second half of the century. As much as the development of the port in Tuas will cost money, the move of port facilities from Tanjong Pagar will free up prime and valuable waterfront land adjacent to Shenton Way. After 2035, a massive tract of land where the current Paya Lebar airport sits, massive by Singapore's standards at least, will be available for sale to the Government of the day. In between, the Government as the largest landowner, has many sites open for development that will ensure steady growth of the reserves for the foreseeable future.

On the Government's Factually website, the argument against including land sales for budgetary spending is two-pronged, apart from constitutional restrictions.

Firstly, excluding land sales prevents the Government from unnecessarily selling land to meet expenditure needs. However, this argument can potentially be addressed with a cap on

spending revenue from land sales. For example, not more than 20% of the value of average land sales over 20 years, or 20% of land sales for that year, whichever is lower. This would give no good reason for an ill-advised Government to ramp up land sales when in government to increase its own income.

The second argument on the Factually website posits that income from land sales are invested and are already available to the Government for spending through the NIRC framework. While this is a stronger argument and certainly true, not co-mingling the income from land sales with other reserves for investment also brings with it the prospect of greater transparency to the public and of mitigating the consequences of poor investment decisions most dramatically highlighted by the GIC's partial divestment of its stake in UBS and losing billions in the process as reported last year.

Mr Speaker, the Workers' Party is open-minded about looking at different modalities of funding future Budgets with the view to strengthening social protection frameworks. This also promotes a healthier discussion of fiscal issues amongst our population. Of course, the money has to come from somewhere. But there are two ways of framing this conversation. One, is to say that proposals that seek to improve and suggest better social protection for Singaporeans is tantamount to raiding the reserves. The other, is to take a strategic perspective of our reserves position, something only the Government can holistically do in view of the significant information asymmetries, look at how quickly the world is changing and always assess how Singaporeans can be better protected ahead of time.

To reiterate, allowing a portion of the revenue for land sales will also not stop the reserves from growing. They will continue to grow and disproportionately benefit future generations. But looking at using land sales also gives the Government of the day more flexibility to ensure that current generations of elderly Singaporeans' healthcare needs for example are adequately budgeted for, leaving more scope for the Government to strengthen social protection for current generation of Singaporeans. Inter-generational equity is a subject that deserves greater discussion.

The importance and willingness to prepare for the future cannot be underestimated especially since the very technological disruption the Finance Minister spoke of will, like globalisation in the past, have its discontents. Those who cannot be readily retrained to assume higher-value jobs, those who may not be able to build new capabilities, those who, for example, cannot stand for too long and for whom job redesign is only a catchphrase, and those who may not be able to adapt to what they fear is a brave new world.

GST may not have to rise but Singaporeans could be more likely to accept it if the Government considers the pros and cons of moving from the established orthodoxy and consider new approaches that improve social protection thresholds for all, and elderly Singaporeans in particular.

WP Position on the Government's plan to raise GST

As expected, the Budget drew much attention on the Government's plan to raise GST from 7% to 9% sometime in the future. However, there was inconsistency in the treatment of some additional taxes that will no doubt add to the Government's coffers before that. For example, the Government was able to confirm that the imposition of the carbon tax would bring an additional \$1 billion a year of revenue after implementation. However, no estimates were provided on the likely additional revenue that would be added to the Government's income with the inclusion of the GST on imported services.

In addition, the journey to become a Smart Nation, another plank of this year's Budget, is likely to make Singapore more efficient in tax collection. There is also the question on the move to become a cashless society and the impact this will have on sectors which have traditionally been thought to under-declare their income, such as the self-employed hawkers and taxi drivers. This prospect will become less probable with the advent of more electronic transactions and in turn, is likely to have a positive effect on tax revenues.

Furthermore, with borrowing backed by Government guarantees proposed for large infrastructure projects, more spending for such projects can potentially be allocated elsewhere for recurrent spending.

In view of the absence of such details, the Workers' Party is unable to support the announcement of the GST hike at this moment in time. This is because of the lack of clarity surrounding projected expenditure when the Government raises GST in future and the relative lack of information on whether there is scope for the reserves to better support Singaporeans.

In addition, as the Prime Minister told the media some years ago when the GST was raised from 3% in response to initial objections from the Workers' Party, we would also need some understanding of the Government's offset package for the low income and middle income should the GST be raised — information which the Government has not released thus far.

Conclusion

Mr Speaker, the Government has made significant investments in placing Singapore to take advantage of initiatives like One Belt One Road and tapping on the potential of the ASEAN region. These are necessary investments to keep the Singapore economy humming along. However, the people who keep it humming must be equipped to succeed in tomorrow's economy. Equally, the security of elderly Singaporeans, each generation a pioneer generation of an improbable country in its own right, should not be made to feel insecure in their old age, particularly when it comes to healthcare. Instead, they should be respected for what they have done for Singapore and looked after in their golden years.

Mr Speaker, we must never be done making Singapore an even better home for all Singaporeans.

Singapore – the Hub for ASEAN Disruption

by Leon Perera

Mr Speaker, Sir, we live in interesting times. Of course, human beings in every era view their era as a time of modernity and change. But the era we are living through is seeing many fundamental economic and geopolitical changes to the post-World War II status quo, changes that are making the past a less and less reliable guide to the future, changes that underline ever more strongly that the strategies that brought us here today will not be the same ones that enable us to navigate successfully tomorrow.

The world is seeing the emergence of disruptive industries using new technology or new business models, like the sharing economy, industries that may reshape the economy – destroying old jobs and stodgy companies, but also creating new ones.

Geopolitical and economic weight is shifting towards Asia, particularly China, and to a lesser extent, India, while Japan and Korea remain major economies and regional powers including ASEAN have the potential to carry much more weight.

Meanwhile, inequality both within and between countries is adding to the unpredictability, triggering political shifts like what happened in the US with the election of President Trump and in the UK with Brexit.

And climate change marches on, even as the world struggles to cope, using the Paris accords that the US abandoned.

The continued importance of North America and Europe

The first broad point I would like to make in my speech is, while we pay special attention to Asia – and I agree that we should do this – as our home region and the world's fastest growing major economic region, let us not write off the West.

In spite of the structural issues faced by some western countries – which range from fiscal deficits and state debt to low productivity growth to inequality-fuelled populism and chronic crime in some cities – Western countries still have unmatched soft power. In fields such as research and development (R&D), entertainment, academia, and information and communications technology (ICT), not to mention military technology and diplomatic clout, the West still leads the world even if the size of that lead is diminishing.

We should ensure that our efforts to engage North America and Europe are well-maintained, so as to draw learnings and forge partnerships, whether in the public or private sector realms.

We should not assume that Asia will continue to outgrow the West in a linear fashion. Some Western countries have shown a tremendous resilience, an ability to rebound from setbacks. The recent victory of President Macron in France underlines that ability to self-correct and renew.

Disruptive industries

Next, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to talk about industry disruption but, specifically, in the context of Asia and, in particular, ASEAN.

The world economy is teeming with disruption, which both destroys and creates anew. Some emerging technologies and business models that are disrupting the world include Big Data analytics, the Internet of Things (IoT) which collects Big Data, Artificial Intelligence (AI) which is fed by Big Data, drones, autonomous vehicles, robotics including social robotics, 3D printing, virtual and augmented reality, cloud computing, crypto-currencies, genetic editing and renewable energy technologies like cutting edge solar cells coupled with cutting edge battery technology.

Many of these are coming together in interesting ways. For example, IoT could generate vast quantities of data for AI to work on, so as to improve processes. And this is not even mentioning sharing economy industries like private car-hire, whose disruptive effect is already quite mature in some cities. As these technologies become increasingly mainstream, they will transform the economies of Asia. Indeed that is already happening, in both mature and emerging Asian economies.

How can Singapore be relevant to this process of the unfolding of disruption in Asia? There are a number of ways.

Firstly, as a hub for R&D and localisation; secondly, as a test-bed to trial new products; thirdly, as a management headquarters for regional companies; fourthly, as a manufacturing base for high-tech, high-value added exports; fifthly, as a service exports hub for things like analytics, professional and business services; and lastly, as a financing centre.

Our economic agencies have, for a long time, conceived and implemented initiatives to help Singapore develop a role vis-à-vis the Asian region in these respects. These initiatives have helped to create and sustain many good-quality jobs and high value-added economic activities.

How could Singapore position itself to play such roles vis-à-vis the unfolding of disruptive industries in Asia?

Placing ASEAN first

For a start – and this is the second broad point in my speech – we could focus on ASEAN above all. I was glad to note some ASEAN-related initiatives in the Budget speech.

ASEAN has over 600 million people, about 8% of the world's population. It is our region and our destiny is inextricably linked to its. It is also the region where our efforts to make Singapore's economy relevant are pushing on an open door, given the vast size, presence of strong domestic industry players and market barriers that exist in other regions of Asia, such as China, India, Japan and Korea.

A Singapore that is deeply engaged and co-prospering with ASEAN will help ensure that ASEAN will be a fruitful intersection point between the great powers of China, India and Japan, rather than becoming in the future, their battle-ground at some point in the decades to come.

How can Singapore be relevant to the rise of disruptive industries in ASEAN? The example of Grab may hold a lesson.

Grab is a Singapore-based firm, with Singapore being its largest R&D centre. Grab has embarked on growth initiatives in the region. Along the way, it launched a new business model in Indonesia which is uniquely suited to that vast market – motorcycle-hire, which competes with local firm GO-JEK and others. Today, Grab operates in over 50 cities across Indonesia. It also acquired Indonesian shopping app firm Kudo.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Singapore could be a hub for disruptive industry players as they plan and execute ASEAN-wide penetration strategies. As such, Singapore could host data centres, management teams, R&D labs, financing hubs, and so on. Singapore could also produce and supply to the region the most advanced, high value-added and IP-sensitive components, materials and services. Singapore, with its multi-ethnic make-up, could also be a test-bed to trial products.

For a start – and this brings me to my third broad point – Singapore could galvanise our base of Autonomous Universities, think tanks, private consultancies, research agencies and so on, to focus on mapping out the paths which disruption could take in ASEAN. At this point, I declare that I am the CEO of a research and consulting firm which operates in the Asia-Pacific region and global emerging markets.

We could cultivate the soft power of working in a multi-disciplinary fashion to collect and analyse all relevant data on how disruptive industries could rise in ASEAN countries. ASEAN has 10 states of which only two have more than 15% of the total population, meaning it is a rather fragmented region, population wise. Each ASEAN state has a different economic, business, financial, technology, governmental and cultural landscape. Such studies could indicate the alternative pathways down which disruptive industries could evolve in ASEAN countries – leading to outcomes like Grab and GO-JEK's motorcycle private-hire in Indonesia.

Dare to think Big

My fourth point is that Singapore could consider suggesting a bold, visionary project that aims to transform the ASEAN region itself into a test-bed for innovation.

The thing about big projects is that they can serve to galvanise a people and boost the economy. President Kennedy's goal of sending a man to the moon helped galvanise a massive scientific and organisational effort in the US. While the goal by itself served a symbolic, nationalistic purpose, along the way it helped seed an aerospace industry in the US that has, over the decades, yielded many new technologies that US industry has made use of, like the business of launching commercial satellites today and the current US private sector space industry.

In Europe, 22 member countries have come together to create the European Space Agency (ESA) for researching and exploring space, which has registered 82 successful commercial satellite launches till 2018. The Europeans also established the world's largest particle accelerator in 2008, the 27-km long Large Hadron Collider, as well as other particle

accelerators in a complex known as CERN. CERN focuses on high-end physics research. More recently CERN has become a pioneer in grid computing or distributed computing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not suggesting that we launch an ASEAN space effort or particle collider, and I hope my speech will not be caricaturised as calling for that. But the examples of NASA, ESA and CERN show us what ingredients can go into a bold project that has broad economic spin-off benefits.

We could propose a project that would enable Singapore to serve as a test-bed and hub as the project is rolled out across ASEAN. I know that it is never easy or fast to get things off the ground in ASEAN. But such a proposal could build on the precedents that have been set and the learning curve that has been gained from pioneering the ASEAN Innovation Network, the ASEAN Financial Information Network and the ASEAN Agreement on E-commerce.

Possible ASEAN-wide initiatives Singapore could champion

Some ideas for such an ASEAN-wide initiative that Singapore could champion are as follows.

Firstly, an ASEAN autonomous vehicles initiative, some or all of which could be electric vehicles. Singapore could help to test-bed autonomous vehicles, pioneering the establishment and maintenance of refuelling stations as well as the associated regulatory framework. The financing for such an ASEAN-wide project could be raised in Singapore. The know-how and supply of parts and services for refuelling or, perhaps, I should say recharging stations as well as manufacture of critical components for the vehicles could be undertaken in Singapore. One of Singapore's core competences seems to be design, project management and servicing of urban infrastructure, a point I have alluded to in earlier speeches in this House.

Secondly, we could propose an ASEAN urban solar panel initiative where Singapore test-beds new technologies for solar power generation in dense urban environments – I made a similar though not identical argument in this House in 2016. We could pioneer new technologies and processes in manufacturing, deployment and maintenance of solar panels.

For example, though it need not take this particular form, such an initiative could use perovskite technology, which some scientists believe has major advantages over traditional silicon-based solar cells. Some scientists hold that perovskite cells can generate more energy from sunlight on low-light days, which may be helpful, given Southeast Asia's weather patterns.

Though there are also disadvantages of perovskite, like a greater susceptibility to temperature- and humidity-induced instability which scientists are in the process of overcoming.

The point is Singapore could pioneer best practices in the manufacture, deployment and maintenance of solar panels in dense, urban environments in ASEAN's largely tropical weather conditions. These could be used as a model for deployment in major cities across ASEAN.

I offer these suggestions in the spirit of demonstrating the contours that a major ASEAN-wide initiative could take, without asserting that these are necessarily the only or best candidates for such an initiative.

Conclusion

Lastly, and in conclusion – in moving away from the main theme of my speech, Sir – I would like to pose two questions for the Minister for Finance.

Firstly, why the need to lower the tax exemption for start-ups now from 100% on the first \$100,000 to 75%? Is there evidence that we have passed a certain threshold in terms of our effort to cultivate a vibrant start-up landscape? It would be helpful to understand the background to this change, coming at this time.

Secondly, the Minister for Finance did not mention the gig economy in his speech. Could he touch on how the Government views the gig economy and what would be the broad thrust of Government policy towards this sector?

On Elderly and the Maritime Industry

by Dennis Tan

Mr Speaker, in my speech, I will be speaking on two different topics – care for our elderly and challenges for our maritime industry. I will first touch on the area of care for our elderly.

Care for our Elderly

In his Budget speech, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat cited ageing as one of the three major shifts that we must prepare for. We are told that the number of seniors living alone more than doubled between 2006 and 2016 to 47,400. I believe the trend will continue to grow. Together with a projected increase in our elderly population relative to other age groups in the coming years, it is important that we get our policies on elderly care right.

The Government seem to be still finding its way in deciding how extensive the role of the State should be when it comes to care-giving. If it prefers to continue to rely substantially on care-giving through an individual's family care network, it should consider giving more support at every level to the supporting family as well as to care-givers including supporting the care-giver who has to stop work and deciding what is a decent level of support for the care-giver. Further, with the growing number of elderly or elderly singles living alone, the Government needs to put in place adequate resources and the infrastructural support for assisted living.

Government policies often involve drawing a line between competing imperatives. When it comes to policies affecting elderly care and their well-being, may I implore the Government to give priority to the consideration of enhancing elderly care efforts?

The enhancement of the Proximity Scheme Grant for both families and singles will ultimately benefit our seniors as children are encouraged or assisted by the enhancement of the grant. As HDB flats in mature estates are usually more expensive, the enhancement of the

Proximity Scheme grant will hopefully assist and persuade more families to live with or near their parents even in the mature estates.

I am glad that singles who buy a resale public housing flat to live near their parents will now receive \$10,000 under the enhanced grant. Before the announcement, the one-time grant is currently given only to singles who buy a resale flat to live with their parents. The grant for singles buying a resale flat to live with their parents has also been increased to \$15,000.

While it is good that the Government now recognises that singles are often a key source of care-giving support within their families, in my view, many singles end up taking a larger role in care-giving support than their married siblings who may be bogged down with caring for their children. Hence, I think such singles do not deserve a lesser grant than their married counterparts whether they are living near or with their elderly parents. In fact, arguably, many married siblings benefit more from living near their parents than their single siblings as they benefit from their parents helping out in caring for their children. Whatever rationale the Government chooses to use to give married children a higher grant, I hope the Government will consider equalising the grant for the reasons I have given.

Ultimately, when we make things easier for the care-giver, single or otherwise, the ultimate beneficiary is or are the elderly parents of the care-giver. Without the care-giver, the state or the society may also end up having to provide additional resources.

We should always take care that our policies, however well-intentioned they are, do not become too rigid that it becomes a burden or a source of stress for our elderly and seniors or their care-givers.

The Foreign Domestic Worker's (FDW) Levy will be increased in two ways. The FDW levy for the second FDW employed without levy concession will go up from \$265 to \$450. The increase is hefty, about 70%. I am concerned this may affect households employing two helpers, one to handle all the housework and one to look after elderly parents who may be bedridden or even just require attentive care at all times while their children are working. If the second FDW is not allowed levy concession, this increase in levy will add to the financial burden of their children. Can the levy increase be exercised more equitably in favour of families needing two FDWs to look after elderly parents as well as doing housework? Can the Government not distinguish the example I mentioned from the situation of say a wealthy family living in a big house requiring more than one FDW? Again, I hope the Government will regard enhancing elderly care efforts in priority to other considerations on this issue.

A Fengshan resident shared with me his frustration of having to pay the full Singles Premium for his 2-room flexi flat. He is approaching retirement in a few years. To prepare for retirement, he is trying to save up as much as he can from his modest monthly income of \$700. His existing savings are precious to him for the same reason. His excitement at getting a new 2-room flexi flat was somewhat dampened by the burden of the additional \$15,000 Singles Premium he had to pay. It eats into his retirement funds.

While I fully understand the rationale of having the Singles Premium, must it always be rigidly enforced against people of all ages from 35 upwards? I hope the Government will relook how it applies its Singles Premium policy on elderly singles. Elderly singles may require more support from the Government. They will likely have fewer options than their married counterparts insofar as family financial support or family care-givers is concerned. When they are not self-sufficient or cannot care for themselves, the state may ultimately have to step in anyway.

Can we apply a little more flexibility for the benefit of these singles seniors? Can we place greater premium on elderly care and welfare in such a case? For example, the Government can consider helping all singles aged 55 and above purchasing two-room flexi-flats for the first time on a shorter lease by reducing the Singles Premium. A premium reduction of say upwards to \$5,000, based on their income levels and length of lease, upholds the rationale of the Singles Premium, but reduces its impact for our elderly poor singles who can then use their savings for their retirement.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in Mandarin.

(In Mandarin)

在预算案演讲中, 财政部长王瑞杰说人口老化是我们所必须面对的挑战。

从 2006 年到 2016 年, 独居老人的人数增加超过两倍, 达到将近 5 万人。政府 预计 老龄人口 在未来几年 会持续 增长, 我们在照顾年长国人方面, 必须有更完善的政策。

政府在这方面 应该扮演 多广泛的角色, 似乎还没有结论。如果政府的政策目标是年长国人应该继续由各自的 家庭照顾, 那么就应该在各方面为各个家庭提供更多的援助, 包括帮助那些需要辞去工作来照顾年长家人的看护人。此外, 随着 年长人士 和 独居的年长 单身人士 越来越多, 政府也需要提供 足够的资源 和建设相关的基础设施。

政府在拟定政策时，往往需要平衡许多需求。在影响年长人士的政策方面，我吁请 政府 优先考虑 改善照顾他们的政策。

成熟组屋区里的组屋一般都比较贵，近居 购屋 津贴计划(Proximity Housing Grant) 鼓励更多家庭或单身人士选择居住在父母住家附近，或者与父母同住，方便他们照顾父母。

我很高兴知道 单身人士 现在 购买 靠近父母住家的 转售组屋时，能获得 1 万元的 近居 购屋 津贴，而那些购买转售组屋和父母同住的单身人士，津贴的数额也调高到 1 万 5 千元。

政府意识到年长人士往往是由单身子女照顾，这是令人鼓舞的。但我认为许多 单身人士 常常 得负起 更大的责任，因为他们已婚的兄弟姐妹可能忙着照顾自己的孩子，无法分担责任。因此，我认为这些单身人士应该得到 和 已婚人士 相等 的 购屋津贴。不论政府 给予已婚 子女更多购屋津贴的依据是什么，也应该提供相等的津贴给要居住在父母附近或和父母同住的单身人士 。

当看护者得到帮助时，不管他们是单身还是已婚，最终受益的还是他们年长的父母。如果他们无法有能力照顾父母，政府或福利机构 最终 还是 可能得 提供额外 的资助。

在实施 政策时，我们需要有一定的灵活性，如果无法变通，可能会给 年长国人 和他们的看护者 造成 负担和压力。

聘用第二名女佣的女佣税将从 \$265 调高到 \$450，增幅多达七成。我担心这会影响那些聘用两名女佣的家庭。在这些家庭中，可能是一名女佣负责家务，另一名 则 负责 照顾 卧病在床 或 需要 全天候 看护的年长人士。如果聘用第二名女佣时无法获得津贴，这些家庭的经济负担将会增加。政府在征收女佣税的时候，是否能给予有需要女佣看护老年人的家庭 更合理的考量？这些家庭有别于那些比较富有、住家比较大而因此 需要两名女佣的家庭。

一名凤山区的居民告诉我，他在购买 政府二房式 灵活组屋时，必须支付 1 万 5 千元的单身人士 购屋 附加费。他每个月的收入只有 700 元，只好尽可能存钱，因为再过几年他就要退休了。对他来说，这笔附加费是一笔非常大的负担。

我明白征收这笔 附加费 的用意，但我希望政府能够 检讨这项政策。 年长 单身人士 不像已婚，有家庭的人士在经济上可以获得家庭成员的资助，他们需要政府更多的援助。

因此，对于年长单身人士，政府应该有更灵活的政策。那些第一次购买屋契年限比较短的二房式组屋，年龄至少达 55 岁的年长单身人士，政府应该考虑降低附加费。根据购买者的收入和屋契年限的长短，减

幅的顶限 可以设在 5 千元。这样一来，在维持这项政策的同时，也能帮助经济能力 较差 的年长 单身人士 购买一间 可安身的家 安享晚年。

Challenges for our maritime industry: Challenges to the industry and to our SMEs

Mr Speaker, in English. I declare my interest as a shipping lawyer. In his Budget speech, Finance Minister mentioned the launch of the Maritime Transformation Programme (MTP) to enhance the overall competitiveness of Singapore as a maritime hub, accelerate industry transformation and deepen maritime R&D capabilities.

The MTP looks to using automation, digitalisation and artificial intelligence to develop new technologies, designs and operations concept that can be deployed in Tuas and Jurong Port. With emphasis on strengthening maritime traffic management capabilities and enhancing operation efficiency and improving safety and security, it should benefit our port operators and related auxiliary industries in automation, artificial intelligence and robotics.

We have one of the world's leading ports. Thus far, despite our charges being relatively higher than our competitors, we managed to stay ahead through technology and efficiency helped by our favourable location.

How long will we continue to enjoy this location advantage in anyone's guess. Will the proposed deep sea port in Malacca pose any problem for us in the future, especially if Chinese or other players can help to overturn the deficiencies which have long bugged the Malaysian ports?

When will the Northern Sea route start pulling away vessel traffic now passing the Straits of Singapore? With polar caps melting further in future, will technology-enhanced port operational efficiency and traffic management alone, always be sufficient to fight of challenges, such as saving of substantial travel time of 30% with the Northern Sea route.

Minister Heng also mentioned that foreign worker levy increases for shipyards will be deferred for another year. Our leading shipyards are the yards owned by the Keppel and Sembcorp Marine groups are reputable leaders in offshore-related buildings like oil rigs and semi-submersible and FBSOs-conversions. With uncertain offshore market, our leading shipyards should focus on developing new niche areas of ship and offshore building, the way it developed its niche in offshore building over the years.

The industry transformation map for marine and offshore engineering which is launched on 22 February has identified the L&G and offshore renewables as two growth areas. Minister Iswaran said that Keppel and Sembcorp Marine have already ventured into L&G segment. It remains to be seen whether this will become their new niche areas or be able to contribute to the level of growth that offshore building afforded them in the past one and a half decade.

The search to develop new niche areas should not be confined to our leading shipyards. Business has been patchy for our other small players in recent years and the rampant demand for tug building a few years ago has subsided.

While the use of shipyard facilities in nearby Batam has helped some of our shipyards in managing their costs, competition by yards in other countries, especially China, meant that our yards are not in the market for the building of cargo or passenger vessels, with the exception of tugs.

For most of these firms, in recent years, they have been occupied with repairs, conversions and the odd small building jobs. How many of our SMEs are in the position to compete in the L&G and offshore renewables identified in the industry transformation roadmap for marine and offshore engineering?

Besides this area, what are the future options that SMEs should prepare for? Our maritime business community consists of many more SMEs up and down the value chain, beyond ship and offshore building and port management.

I agree with the current push for innovation, building on autonomous system, robotics and artificial intelligence and data analytics, as well as for digitalisation under the current sea transport industry transformation map. But we must not forget those who may not benefit from this development.

Many SMEs are players specialising in certain specific areas of business or capability, unlike Government-linked companies, the size of SMEs may limit their ability to scale up in order to compete for businesses with bigger or established players internationally.

The Straits Times report of the launch of the industry transformation roadmap for marine and offshore engineering cited a pressing need for smaller firms to build up their capabilities so that they can benefit from this trend. Perhaps for some SMEs especially, it is not merely about building up alone, but needing to work together with other players providing different expertise to take on bigger projects.

I would like to suggest Government can help to put different SMEs in our maritime business community together in an appropriate platform, jointly developed products, and two, with the view to pitching for bigger projects internationally at a consortium level. Our local banks can help with the financial support and the Government can consider providing initial funding and support for setting up.

This is different from efforts aiming to help SMEs directly as individual businesses. SMEs with different specialisations, can be integrated to work together, develop products and pitch for bigger businesses and contracts internationally, as a consortium, tapping on each other's expertise and sharing economies of scale.

Such a programme can include both existing SMEs from the maritime industry as well as those who are currently outside the sector. A firm from outside the industry may well bring with them different ideas or different ways of handling comparable projects. Technology sensors for offshore marine Singapore can definitely play a role in providing appropriate support for SMEs.

Belt and Road

There has been much talk about the Belt and Road initiative and potential benefits. How can our shipping and logistics and offshore businesses make use of our relative strengths and resources to work hand-in-hand with our ASEAN neighbours in the Belt and Road initiative around Southeast Asia and beyond?

The Government can use its position as ASEAN Chair to help create opportunities for better cooperation with ASEAN companies. The Government can lead study into the likely opportunities for our involvement in Belt and Road projects in the region, and consider how our businesses can jointly ourselves to complement and value-add to ASEAN companies to take on Belt and Road projects.

Mr Speaker, in closing, we need to encourage SMEs to think beyond traditional categories on maritime businesses to come up with products and services that straddle across or even go beyond traditional categorisations.

My colleague, Leon Perera, spoke about disruptive economy. We also cannot underestimate how the disruptive economy can affect what we do in the maritime and offshore sectors and bring changes. It may not be sufficient fighting today's battle to stay ahead in the current competition by merely being more efficient, by merely being cheaper, faster and

better. Will we be able to ride the wave and think out of box to create new relationships, new opportunities, new products, new niche areas and new ways of doing business?

Inequality or Solidarity?

by Sylvia Lim

I will focus my speech on Inequality.

Inequality and Its Costs

This Budget has as its third plank the fostering of a Caring and Cohesive Society. The concept of Care and Cohesion, though not new, is timely, given the current public discussion of a Class Divide in Singapore.

The Study on Social Capital by the Institute of Policy Studies confirms what we already anecdotally knew. It found, for instance, that on average, Singaporeans who live in public housing have fewer than one friend who lives in private housing. It found that people who study in elite schools also tend to be less close to those in non-elite schools, and vice versa.

This Budget explicitly highlights inequality and social mobility as a concern (para A11). We also see some measures in this Budget in the direction of mitigating the Class Divide. For instance, tax measures such as raising the top marginal Buyer's Stamp Duty (BSD) rate by 1% for residential properties valued at above \$1 million are geared towards requiring the better off to pay more taxes. Another long standing policy to mitigate inequality is that government transfers are generally weighted in favour of those who live in lower cost housing or have lower income, such as the GST vouchers and Service & Conservancy Charge rebates.

But for all these moves made now and over the years, how well are we doing to reduce inequality, and how much do we really know about the inequality that exists in Singapore? What else do we need to look at, or change?

Discussions on the status of inequality have tended to focus on numerical data such as the Gini Coefficient, which measures income inequality. Our Gini Coefficient in 2017 stood at 0.459 before government transfers and 0.402 after transfers, which is improved from 2013 (Source: SingStat). Nevertheless, PM Lee acknowledged in January 2018 that our Gini Coefficient was still higher than that of many developed countries. If one looks at household income from work, in 2017, the household income for the top 10% is more than \$13,000

(\$13,215) per person per month, while that for the 20th percentile at the lower end is about \$1,000 (\$1,093) per person per month; 12 times more unequal. Our national GDP per capita last year was nearly \$80,000 (\$79,697), which means that national GDP when averaged out is \$80,000 per person per year.

However, when we look at median income, or the half-way point for households, the median income per household member was less than half of the GDP per capita, at only \$32,400 (based on median monthly income per household member of \$2,699). All these point to high levels of income inequality. In the report released by the Department of Statistics earlier this month on Key Household Income Trends, it was found that in 2017, there was a slower pace of income growth for the bottom 50% of households, showing a widening income gap.

Beyond numbers, it is also necessary to dig deep into the daily lives of poor Singaporeans, and evaluate the reasons why they do not seem to be able to catch up with the rest of society.

In her recent book, *This Is What Inequality Looks Like* (2018), sociologist Prof Teo You Yenn shares powerful stories from her years of field work with families living in HDB rental housing. She writes:

"I saw how tough it is for them trying to balance wage work and care responsibilities. By hearing their stories about jobs, I saw how hard they have to work and how little they get in return for their labour. By asking them about their children, I saw how much their kids struggle in school and how worried parents are that they will eventually have difficult lives. By listening to them talk about their crises, I heard about their feelings of humiliation trying to access social assistance. In paying attention to their everyday experiences, I saw how little dignity they are accorded in our society."

What Prof Teo observed resonates with what we see. While better-off Singaporeans plan for family holidays with their children, poorer parents feel demoralised that they cannot afford to buy needed items that their children ask for. While wealthy parents are busy at weekends sending children from one enrichment activity to another, poorer parents spend weekends working and worrying about their unsupervised children falling into bad company. Many of our lower income residents work hard, and even work 2 jobs, but may still be unable to pay their bills. Richer children are served and even spoilt by domestic help; poorer children shoulder responsibilities like caring for younger siblings and even being spokesmen for their parents who do not speak English.

In a Parliamentary answer in February this year, PM Lee emphasized that “every citizen, no matter what his social background is, must have the opportunity to do better and move up in society, based on his efforts and talent. Nobody should feel that his social position is fixed based on his parents' income level or position in life.”

Can we say that the lot of our poorer fellow Singaporeans is due to their lack of ambition or talent? Or does the system itself inadvertently make it difficult for them to succeed, and thus perpetuate inequality? Do government policies support poor families with adequate and sustainable care for children? Does our education system penalise those who did not have a leg-up in pre-school? Do housing policies unjustly discriminate against those whose marriages failed? How have children been impacted by their parents' circumstances, and were they supported or facilitated to break out of the poverty trap?

To get answers to these critical questions, it is important to do longitudinal studies to track the fate of families over time. In 2013, the government told Parliament it intends to do longitudinal studies. What has the government done since then? Has the government, for example, started commissioning independent studies on social mobility, using longitudinal data? The government has noted in the past that we must not allow an underclass to form and so the government has to show commitment to this goal.

I should add here that where there is lack of social mobility, it is not only the poorer families that are stressed. Even those higher up the income chain, including the middle-class, have the stress of ensuring that they retain their current positions or climb up. The competition in the education system is high. Just look at the money spent on private tuition and other enrichment classes, which in turns adds to the economic stress that families face.

Why is it so important to show commitment to the goal of reducing inequality and increasing social mobility? Because it is vital to our very existence as a Nation. We pledge to be “one united people”, to build a society “based on justice and equality”, “so as to achieve happiness, prosperity and progress for our Nation”. How can we honestly say these things, if we perpetuate a society where citizens are not equal, where some seemingly have little hope but are doomed for failure, while others zoom ahead? Where is the solidarity we should show to our fellow citizens who are less fortunate? Will there be an erosion of trust, where a class divide makes it harder for people at the bottom and middle identify with those at the top?

We fiercely guard our sovereignty and expect all Singaporeans to defend Singapore. But will the day come when Singaporeans who find Singapore a cold and cruel place have no motivation to defend it? This will be a disaster at all levels.

Inequality in Healthcare

One aspect of inequality that needs to be reviewed is healthcare coverage under medical insurance. If one compares the coverage of private insurance plans with the coverage under Medishield Life, one will observe that there is significant inequality in access to healthcare that affects the poorer and older Singaporeans.

As regards insurance coverage, there are some practises in the health care industry that need looking at.

One such practice is that of some insurance policies providing full coverage for hospitalisation bills. Such insurance policies undertake to fully pay for surgeries so long as they are done as day surgeries or the patients stay at the hospital. All charges will be paid by the insurance company “as charged”. Such policies do not require the patient to pay any deductible or make any co-payment.

By contrast, Medishield Life understandably has deductibles and co-insurance to avoid over-consumption. One feature of Medishield Life, however, is that the annual deductible rises when one passes 80 years old. While the annual deductible for persons aged 80 and below is between \$1,500 to \$2,000, the annual deductible for those aged 81 and above is between \$2,000 to \$3,000. Thus, the most senior of our people, aged 81 and above, who have the least income and most health problems, have to foot bills up to this higher deductible before Medishield Life will kick in.

Has the government analysed how this increased deductible has affected the consumption and delivery of medical services to our most senior citizens? To give one specific example, operating on a trigger finger release usually costs less than \$2,000, so those aged 81 and above cannot claim the expenses for the surgery, but those who are younger can claim part of the expense, as the deductible is lower for younger people. Premiums are already higher for older people; why are deductibles also higher when in general they have less financial ability to pay? Why this reverse discrimination for our oldest citizens?

Coming back to the private “as charged” insurance policies, there is another aspect that needs review. Has the government studied the effect of such full coverage on the behaviour of patients, and its implications? When a person has to undergo a minor surgery, which could be done at an outpatient clinic, does he choose instead to do it as a day surgery or an inpatient in a hospital, so as to be able to tap on the insurance policy for full coverage? Does such insurance result in some unnecessary surgeries, when more conservative treatments

would suffice? Is there inefficiency and a waste of expensive resources caused by such policies? I am not suggesting that patients or the medical profession are doing anything unethical, as this behaviour is sanctioned by the regulators of the insurance industry.

It is important to review the kinds of insurance schemes in the market, so as to discourage over-consumption and inefficient use of resources. There have to be deductibles and co-payments for all medical insurance schemes. Regulators have to direct their attention to this area.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that inequality is a threat to our solidarity as a Nation. We have to drill deeper into the sources of inequality, and take concrete steps to remedy it.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

Public Understanding of Government Bills

by Sylvia Lim

Sir, while Singaporeans elect the Government and their Members of Parliament (MPs) to make laws, there are benefits in consulting outside this Chamber and putting out the Government's intentions well before Bills come to Parliament.

First, policy-makers and lawmakers may not be able to foresee gaps and unintended consequences. Secondly, opportunities to the general public to participate and comment on draft laws will foster greater trust between the Government, Parliament and citizens. It will build confidence that policies were not being rushed and that citizens could participate meaningfully in policy-making.

To this end, I would like to ask if there is a guideline or SOP on how Ministries should approach law-making. I would divide my discussion into two parts: the pre-Parliament stage and the Parliament stage.

First, the pre-Parliament stage. When is public consultation on a Bill a must and when is public consultation deemed not needed? There are many positive examples of public consultations where a Ministry would publicise the consultation and invite public comments on draft legislation after which it publishes a summary of the comments received and the Ministry's responses.

Are there any guidelines about the consultation period? It goes without saying that the consultation period should give sufficient time for people to respond. The recent consultation on the Films (Amendment) Bill illustrates the problem when the consultation period was too short, initially for a period of about 11 days in the month of December which is generally a month where persons may also travel. It was sensible then that the Ministry extended the consultation period after request from the public.

In recent times, there were instances when laws seemed to be rushed. For instance, the Administration of Justice (Protection) Bill was only put up on the REACH portal after it was presented in Parliament for First Reading and a petition filed on this Bill was somehow not sent to the Public Petitions Committee.

While a Ministry may certainly choose to adopt other methods of consultation, for example, closed door focus groups or stakeholder discussions, I would say that this should not replace an open consultation on the actual Bill if the Government wants to have a bigger buy-in especially in controversial matters.

I next move to the Parliament stage. There seems to me some scope for improvement too. Regarding the explanatory statement to Bills, sometimes, we find explanatory statements that simply repeat the wording of the Bill without explaining how the clauses will improve things. On the other hand, we do see some more helpful explanatory statements. A recent example is the Public Sector (Governance) Bill where it was stated that the clause setting out Minister's powers over public bodies was necessary due to inconsistencies in existing legislation and to avoid duplication.

Here, an attempt is made to give a reason for the new law. One useful initiative is the on-going pilot by the Attorney-General's Chambers to show the changes made by Bills in track mode but I believe this is currently only available to Members of Parliament (MPs). I hope this can be available to the public to facilitate greater understanding of changes made.

Finally, Ministers' statements to Parliament at the Second Reading of Bills should be as clear as possible. One recent example is the Protection for Harassment Act (POHA) when in a 2017 court case, the Government tried to claim that it was a person entitled to seek relief under the POHA. This was rejected by the Court of Appeal as invalid because nowhere in the Second Reading speech of the Minister was Parliament told that the Act was intended to apply persons who are not human beings and not vulnerable.

Whistle-blower Protection

by Leon Perera

Mr Chairman, the first cut. Based on a parliamentary exchange in 2012, other than the CPIB and Auditor-General, Public Service officers can direct whistle-blowing complaints to the PSC. I would like to ask what measures are in place to ensure that all civil and public servants know what are the channels available to each of them inside and outside their organisations to report perceived wrong-doings.

I ask this because many whistle-blowers in any organisation may hesitate to complain to a department within their organisation. Is it currently made clear to all civil and public servants that they can highlight problematic acts without fear for their careers provided that the reporting is in good faith? Also, is the PSC the whistle-blower reporting point for ethical lapses for the whole Public Service, including for lapses relating to the recent requirement that a political office holder cannot instruct the civil servants to act with respect to a person or persons and, if so, is the PSC properly resourced to handle such complaints?

Printing of Government Annual Reports

by Leon Perera

Second cut. Mr Chairman, Sir, each year, Government Ministries and Statutory Boards produce annual reports. In some cases, printed copies are sent to various stakeholders, including Members of this House. I am not sure how many of these printed copies are retained by the recipients for long. I would like to suggest that in future annual reports be produced only as soft copy files. These can be posted on the website. Users can print these for their own use if they want to. Since they have to print these themselves, it is likely that they would only print the pages they need. This would save the Government money and it is greener, with few implications for the wider public.

Some other countries have formalised guidelines to minimise the printing of Government annual reports. For example, the New South Wales government in Australia goes so far as to say that government departments and, I quote, "may only externally print hard copies where express permission is granted by the relevant Minister following clear justification on need and demand".

Voting Process and Polling Stations

by Png Eng Huat

Mr Chairman, an e-registration plan for future elections was unveiled last May. The Elections Department (ELD) said it will pilot a system that will scan the barcode on a voter's identity card to shorten the waiting time for voters at polling stations. As I understood from the news, the electronic system is only for registration. Voting will still be conducted using paper ballots with a pen.

Under section 42 of the Parliamentary Elections Act, which describes the manner of voting, subsection (2A)(b) states that "the number, name and description of the voter, as stated in the copy of the register of electors, shall be called out". With the proposed e-registration, the need to call out the voter's particulars would no longer be necessary.

This archaic practice of calling out the voter's particulars, directed at the polling agents, makes sense only if the integrity of the registers of electors is in doubt. After contesting in three elections, I have no reason to doubt the accuracy of the registers of electors to require a line-by-line checking by my polling agent on polling day.

The call-out can also be heard clearly in some polling stations due to the acoustics. Anyone with a mobile phone can secretly record the particulars of the voters as the names and NRICs are enunciated slowly. Some PAP polling agents would echo the particulars in an even louder voice, which is neither necessary nor provided for under the Elections Act.

Next, a new process to let registered voters to go to any counter in the polling station to get a ballot paper and to cast the vote into any available ballot box was also proposed last May. I welcome this change. The votes in the ballot boxes will be mixed in the counting stations so it makes no sense to require a voter to go to a particular line and to use a particular ballot box at the polling station.

It is also about time to replace the antiquated voting booth which was in use for many elections. The existing booth allows four voters to vote simultaneously but, because of its A-frame design, it does not offer much privacy. It is also not very user-friendly for persons with disabilities.

With the proliferation of personal mobility aids of all shapes and sizes, the booth is certainly due for an overhaul.

In conclusion, would the PMO confirm whether section 42 subsection (2A)(b) will be repealed with the introduction of e-registration?

Anti-corruption Measures for Companies

by Dennis Tan

Mr Chairman, recently, Keppel was given a combined total penalty of US\$422 million in US, Brazil and Singapore arising from their acts of corruption in the Petrobras bribery scandal in Brazil.

Presently, anti-corruption policies seem to be something of an afterthought in Singapore Inc. Disclosure of the existence of an anti-corruption policy by public-listed companies is startlingly low.

According to Assoc Prof Lawrence Loh's "Findings on the Singapore Governance and Transparency Index 2017", it seems that out of 606 listed companies surveyed which had released annual reports for their financial years ending 31 December 2016, only 8.7% had disclosed relevant policies and practices relating to anti-corruption. Does this reflect the general attitude of companies towards anti-corruption policies?

It is startling that the existence of bribery contracts and payments somehow seemed to have escaped the notice of Keppel's senior management, board of directors, audit committees and external auditors for 14 years. Could this point to the weaknesses in our current company and auditing regime?

The Code of Corporate Governance requires, among other things, audit committees to review the policy and arrangements by which persons may raise concerns about possible improprieties, and ensure that arrangements are in place for such concerns to be raised and independently investigated, and appropriate follow-up action to be taken. However, only listed companies are required to follow the Code of Corporate Governance. In any event,

SGX rules only require listed companies to comply with the Code of Corporate Governance on a "comply or explain" basis.

It is timely for the Government to review and enhance existing company regulations. All listed companies should set out appropriate policy on anti-corruption measures and other improprieties. The Government should consider having inspections and subject non-compliance to penalties on the shoulders of the companies, directors and audit committee members. The Government should also review and enhance the requirements for whistle-blowing policies in companies.

The Government should also consider enhancing the requirements of the independence of the board. Norwegian company law dictates that where a company has controlling shareholders, the independence of the board is principally intended to protect minority shareholders. This is a principle we should consider. For example, an independent director in our Government-linked company should have no past or present political affiliation to the ruling party or occupational affiliation to the Public Service.

The Government should also review the Prevention of Corruption Act to consider if it is sufficiently adequate to fight modern forms of corporate corruption today. It is not as easy to successfully prosecute corporations, as opposed to individuals under the PCA, due to the way that the legislation is framed.

The OECD Anti-Bribery Convention recommends the establishment of liability of legal persons for the bribery of foreign public officials. Should we not expressly include the offence of bribery of foreign public officials by both individuals and companies in the PCA?

Finally, the Government should consider adopting a "failure to prevent bribery" offence similar to section 7 of the UK Bribery Act 2010.

Such a measure would effectively impose a duty on businesses to enact adequate procedures to prevent persons associated with the business from committing bribery. Jurisdictions, like Australia, are also considering introducing section 7 type of offences into their own anti-corruption legislation.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
MINISTRY OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Shift in Global Economic Weight

by Low Thia Khiang

Mr Chairman, Sir, the shift in global economic weight to Asia was highlighted in the Budget speech this year. We witnessed the opening up of China as an awakening of an economic giant. But China would also face a severely ageing society and rising labour costs over time. In these respect, if it can maintain political stability, India may have the advantage and better growth prospects in the longer term. The ASEAN Economic Community could also emerge as an economic powerhouse if the 10 countries could garner the political will to establish a single market.

This shift in global economic weight to Asia poses new diplomatic challenges for us, especially when the United States is going through a relatively incoherent phase in its engagement with Asia because of domestic politics. Singapore is not caught between a rock and hard place, but between three powers, namely China, India and the United States, while deeply embedded in ASEAN.

The South China Sea threatens to become a great game for the powers. The prime example is India's strengthening military and economic ties with Vietnam, which includes an oil concession in disputed waters of the South China Sea and the warming of US-Vietnam ties in an effort to counter-balance China. ASEAN seems divided and the countries distracted by domestic strife, with ethnic conflicts becoming a major issue for the grouping. Myanmar is an example.

Our ties with ASEAN are deep. We also have strong ties with China, India and the United States. As ASEAN Chair, how can we use these deep and strong ties to help maintain the balance of power in Asia? With our experience in fostering grassroots multi-racialism, what can we do to build deeper ties to the peoples of Southeast Asia and bring diverse communities closer together to build a more resilient ASEAN?

ASEAN Integration – Citizen Engagement

by Sylvia Lim

Chairman, separate surveys completed by researchers in a university and a private polling firm indicate that Singaporeans have greater ambivalence, less interest, and less sense of belonging toward ASEAN compared to our ASEAN partners. According to one of these surveys, only 13% of Singaporean respondents indicated an interest in ASEAN news and information. There is indifference and even scepticism towards ASEAN, even though there is some acknowledgement that the grouping benefits Singapore in terms of economic opportunities and regional stability.

I find these results not satisfactory, since our future is inextricably linked to the success of ASEAN. Given that these views are about how Singapore relates to and interacts with our closest neighbours – countries with which Singapore has to work with closely on various issues. I wonder if such sentiments and ignorance might harm Singapore in the longer term.

I would like to ask the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he thinks that the relatively low opinion of ASEAN among Singaporeans is of concern for Singapore's foreign policy and interests. May I request that he shares with the House the reasons for why he thinks this issue is anything to be worried about or not. I would also like to ask the Minister if he intends to do anything to promote more positive views of ASEAN among Singaporeans, especially given the fact that Singapore is serving as ASEAN Chair this year.

If the Minister wishes pursue such action, I would like to invite him to explain what these initiatives are. I would also appreciate the Minister informing this House about how he expects such plans to continue past Singapore's chairing of ASEAN, and how they relate to the ASEAN Social Cultural Community.

ASEAN Chairmanship

by Pritam Singh

Chairman, Sir, ASEAN commemorated its 50th anniversary last year. As a pioneer founder of ASEAN and as a respected and constructive diplomatic stakeholder, it is apposite that Singapore finds itself as the first Chair of ASEAN after the celebration of its golden jubilee in 2017. It is apposite because Singapore is seen as an important thought leader, both within and outside ASEAN. Singapore has the potential to shape and determine the substance of the discussions that take precedence between our regional partners because of our reputation as an honest broker.

Singapore has chosen the themes of resilience and innovation as its Chairmanship tag line with a view to build a future-ready ASEAN which is adaptable and forward-looking.

In addition to a variety of issues that Singapore would be pursuing under its Chairmanship, is the Model ASEAN Extradition Treaty. The prospect of such a treaty is potentially an important development in addressing some of Singapore's bilateral flash points that have reared their ugly head in the past, at times with certain political leaders in Indonesia. Such an extradition treaty could inject a newfound trust and confidence into the Singapore-Indonesia relationship which, like ASEAN, also celebrated its golden jubilee last year.

Singapore's chairmanship of ASEAN this year presents a signature opportunity for MFA to showcase strong thought leadership to push for an early agreement on the Model Extradition treaty that would support the rule of law within ASEAN and catalyse the signing of bilateral extradition treaties between neighbouring countries. Does the Minister have any preliminary timeline with regard to discussions on the Model Extradition Treaty?

ASEAN has also committed to the ambitious objective under the aegis of the ASEAN Economic Community of doubling intra-ASEAN trade between 2017 and 2025.

Last year, Singapore announced that it was focusing on steps to enhance e-commerce through its National Trade Platform, a one-stop trade information platform for customs clearance, trade logistics and trade finance. Alongside this specific initiative, it would also appear that the prospect of the ASEAN Single Window would allow local Singaporean businesses to connect to more customers throughout ASEAN.

Mr Chairman, all foreign policy begins at home and I request some information from the Minister on the roles the Ministry plays from a whole-of-Government perspective in translating foreign policy initiatives into economic outcomes for enterprises in Singapore, in view of our economic transformation plans.

Finally, the Minister has gone on record in the aftermath of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meeting earlier this month to say that discussions on the Code of Conduct (COC) for the South China Sea are likely to be very complicated even as the situation is a lot calmer.

Mr Chair, one of ASEAN's interests in the COC is to ensure that trade and freedom of movement of sea traffic, particularly commercial traffic, is unimpeded. It would appear that China's interests in the South China Sea are territorial to the extent that it wants a high degree of control of its immediate backyard, behaviour which does not appear to be primarily driven by a desire to bully ASEAN, but rather is consistent with modern big power behaviour in regions adjacent to its immediate borders, regardless of whether such a power is an Anglo-Saxon one or not.

What more can Singapore do to smooth over the concerns China has about the South China Sea, and secure a stable future between ASEAN and China going forward?

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

ADMM and ADMM-Plus

by Pritam Singh

Chairman, Sir, good progress is being made through the ADMM and ADMM-Plus frameworks to increase confidence between member countries and which lower but not eliminate the possibility and prospect of outright hostilities in the region, particularly over flash points such as the South China Sea.

The upcoming ASEAN-China maritime exercise is a good example of the work that goes on to build confidence amongst each of the partner nations. In particular, the adoption of the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES) has raised hopes of its implementation even if an agreement amongst all the Plus partners may prove to be harder to secure than the agreement of the ASEAN nations.

Is there any realistic prospect for a CUES framework for unplanned encounters in the air as intimated by the Defence Minister last month in view of fatal incidents in the past?

As ADMM chair, it was reported that Singapore plans to strengthen cooperation and build resilience among the ASEAN member states and eight Plus countries. These include plans to increase counter-terrorism collaboration and raising capabilities to combat chemical, biological and radiological threats.

Separately, under the "Our Eyes" initiative, senior officials from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Brunei will meet every two weeks to swap information on militant groups and develop a common database of violent extremists. Can the Minister clarify if there is any scope for such cooperation to create economies of scale for the SAF and achieve some savings for MINDEF?

Finally, Minister, in view of the importance of the ADMM-Plus frameworks and the reality of a more multi-polar world, is there any prospect for making the ADMM-Plus a yearly meeting instead of once every two years as it is currently? What has been the reception to this proposal by the ADMM and ADMM-Plus partners?

ADMM-Plus

by Low Thia Khiang

Chairman, Sir, the Minister for Finance mentioned that tensions in the South China Sea could affect investor confidence and therefore stability and growth in the region. It is therefore strategic for Singapore to minimise the tensions and prevent incidents and accidents from escalating into a serious event in the South China Sea.

Singapore is the ASEAN Chair this year and thus leading the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting, or ADMM, and the ADMM-Plus, which involves another eight other powers including China and the United States. We have a timely opportunity here to establish the framework to minimise the tensions. It is timely because Singapore is a non-claimant stakeholder in settlement of the South China Sea disputes and has strong bilateral ties with many of the other stakeholders, including ASEAN countries, China and the United States.

It is also timely because the South China Sea disputes seem to be entering into a more rational phase of negotiation and balance of power, after the initial emotive phase occasioned by the jostling for territory.

In 2013, China and the United States took part in a joint training exercise off Hawaii. In 2014, both countries, along with other South China Sea stakeholders signed the agreement on the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES).

CUES is an excellent platform to work with to avoid the escalation of any incident and to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea.

On 6 February this year, MINDEF issued a press release outlining the ADMM's three areas of focus for 2018 after the ADMM retreat in Singapore. One area is to affirm the importance of CUES on the sea and in the air. This is a worthy goal, but unfortunately the press release was short on details about this area. Would the Minister elaborate on how the ADMM-Plus would be used to reaffirm the importance of CUES?

It was also announced that ASEAN will be conducting an inaugural maritime exercise with China at the end of the year. This is excellent, as the US-China maritime exercise in 2013 fostered trust that led to the CUES agreement in 2014. I would like to ask the Minister whether the ASEAN-China maritime exercise will involve the testing and practice of CUES in the South

China Sea and whether a similar exercise can be conducted under the aegis of ADMM-Plus. I am asking the latter question because 2018 is the beginning of the third ADMM-Plus three-year cycle and there were already four live exercises held in the last cycle which were useful for deepening regional security cooperation.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
MINISTRY OF
HOME AFFAIRS

Unlicensed Moneylending Harassment

by Daniel Goh

Chairman, loan sharks have been turning to online harassment of debtors. The aim of online harassment is the same as the offline mode, to shame the debtor in his community and harass the debtor's associates until he pays up. There is one difference – the loan sharks are innovating to avoid detection and identification, for example, by stealing the debtor's identity and posting it, to utterly destroying his reputation.

The widespread use of police CCTV surveillance in public housing estates and tough enforcement have led to the steady decline of loan shark harassment cases since 2010. But there is a spike in cases last year for the first time, with electronic harassment contributing to the spike. Can the Minister clarify whether this spike also represents a spike in Singaporeans borrowing from loan sharks? Can the Minister also elaborate how the Police is combatting online forms of loan shark harassment so as to assure the public?

Immigration Policy

by Pritam Singh

Mr Chairman, as a country that extends Singapore citizenship to an average of 20,000 foreigners each year and partly relies extensively on immigration to replace and increase the overall population, it remains an anomaly that there are no official statistics detailing the country of origin of new citizens who live among us and who have to integrate together with us as one people.

The Government's long-standing position has been that it does not officially reveal the countries from where these new citizens originate on the grounds of sensitivity of the country of origin of our new citizens and the implications and sensitivities for specific groups of persons.

Previously, it was revealed that about 50% of new citizens originate from Southeast Asian countries, with another 40% from other Asian countries. However, in a similar reply to a

Parliamentary Question (PQ) in 2016, the Government did not give any percentages but to say that the majority came from Southeast Asian countries.

Can the Ministry please elaborate on what sensitivities the Government is concerned about, particularly since Singapore's need for immigration is publicly well-known along with the Government's stated position of keeping the racial percentages as close to their current levels as far as possible?

Secondly, the Government has stated that it would be a plus factor when it assesses whether the spouses of foreigners married to Singaporean citizens who apply for Permanent Residence have children. However, in my discussion with some residents in my Meet-the-People sessions, there is some residual concern amongst such residents that their monthly household income explains why they are having trouble securing Permanent Resident status. I understand from previous PQs that for foreign spouses who were granted PR from 2009 to 2015, around 45% had a monthly income of less than \$4,000.

Can the Ministry provide specific details on the number of successful applications for the same period for applicants who had a monthly income of less than \$3,500, \$3,000 and \$2,500 and confirm if there has been any change to the ICA's evaluation criteria from 2016? The details would provide some degree of certainty for foreign spouses married to Singaporeans when they apply for PR.

Thirdly, can the Government share how many foreigners who are married to Singapore citizens do not meet the LTVP or LTVP+ criteria but are granted short-term visit passes instead? What are the main reasons for the rejection of their LTVP or LTVP+ applications, and what criteria does the Government use to reassess or review such applications?

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
MINISTRY OF LAW

Extradition

by Sylvia Lim

Sir, the rationale for extradition arrangements is long-standing. Offenders who manage to leave the countries where the offences were committed should not escape justice. At the same time, countries that do not have extradition arrangements with others risk becoming magnets for fugitives, which will affect their own security and reputation.

Understandably, one cannot rush into concluding extradition agreements. According to the Government, besides the need for a mutual desire for extradition arrangements, the compatibility of the two legal systems is another consideration.

In September 2016, Senior Minister of State Ms Indranee Rajah told the House that as far as ASEAN was concerned, there was a model ASEAN Extradition Treaty being worked on, which would function as a sort of template to enable ASEAN members to enter bilateral arrangements. While I can understand that ASEAN Member States overall have very different legal systems, does this mean that there is no plan or desire for an ASEAN-wide mutual recognition of arrest warrants?

One only needs to look at the case involving David Roach to illustrate the ASEAN challenge. Roach was suspected of committing a bank robbery in Singapore in July 2016, one and a half years ago. He escaped to our ASEAN neighbour, Thailand, was arrested and convicted of other offences under Thai law, and is only now being extradited from London to Singapore because he was being deported from Thailand to his home country, Canada, via London.

With the move towards greater ASEAN integration, the fact that such suspects can go to a fellow ASEAN country to escape justice does not seem acceptable.

On a more general level, does the Government plan to increase the number of countries which Singapore has extradition agreements with? Currently, Singapore has arrangements with 40 declared Commonwealth countries, as well as bilateral agreements with the USA, Germany and Hong Kong, which makes only 43 out of nearly 200 countries. Does the Government find it an acceptable coverage?

Legal Aid

by Chen Show Mao

Sir, the Legal Aid Bureau currently provides legal aid to needy Singaporeans. Roughly 10,000 cases a year, since I have been a Member of Parliament, if you include legal advice, legal assistance to draft documents, and legal aid in representation in civil proceedings.

In order to qualify for legal aid, Singaporeans will need to pass two tests: the means test to show that they are needy; and the merits test to show that they have a good claim. It is not easy to meet both requirements, and we have all met Singaporeans who applied for, but were found ineligible for legal aid. However, even needy Singaporeans with good claims, who qualify for legal aid from the Legal Aid Bureau, may not be able to press their claims with the Bureau's assistance in the following circumstances.

In many standard-formed contracts that Singaporeans enter into, such as insurance policies, there are contractual requirements that the parties go to arbitration in the event of a dispute. They must go to arbitration. No legal proceedings. There are many good reasons why an insurance company that drafts the policy would want such an arbitration clause, but one effect of such a clause is that it may keep a needy Singaporean from pressing a meritorious claim in the event of a dispute, since legal aid currently does not cover the cost of arbitration proceedings.

I would like to ask that the Minister look into extending aid to eligible recipients, namely, Singaporeans who have passed the means test and the merits test for legal aid, to help them cover the cost of arbitration proceedings, to which they have been mandatorily directed by arbitration clauses in standardised contracts used in large volume.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
MINISTRY OF
TRADE AND INDUSTRY

ASEAN Plan

by Low Thia Kiang

Chairman, Sir, we have been a keen proponent of the ASEAN Economic Community, the AEC. It was during the 13th ASEAN Summit in 2007 when Singapore was last the ASEAN Chair that the blueprint to establish the AEC was adopted.

If integrated as a single market and production base, the AEC will become the fourth largest economic bloc in the world, just behind the United States, China and the European Union. For Singapore, the AEC is not just an aspiration, but also a strategic necessity to mitigate the geopolitical risks of the region being mired in economic under-development and political instability, and the region becoming divided and caught between the great economies of China, India and the United States.

The AEC was to be established by end of 2015, but ASEAN failed to achieve one-fifth of the 506 measures and had deferred them for 10 years to 2025.

Singapore is now ASEAN Chair again and we are in a good position to facilitate the economic integration. In January this year, Minister Lim Hng Kiang said Singapore will focus on the digital economy and trade facilitation. This seems to be rather low key compared to the work that is needed to push forward the already-delayed AEC.

Does MTI have a more concerted plan to develop the AEC while Singapore is ASEAN Chair? What can Singapore do to better integrate the most important sectors in the region, for example, the electronics sector, especially in the context of the other major shift in the disruption caused by new technologies?

Managing Industrial Land Costs

by Leon Perera

Mr Chairman, Sir, developing a vibrant manufacturing sector is important for our economy. In addition to MNCs, we need to ensure local start-ups and Singapore SMEs in

manufacturing, as these may, with supportive policies, be more likely to keep Singapore as a centre of gravity.

Senior Minister of State Mr Koh Poh Koon recently shared data on rental costs in reply to my PQ. The percentage of rental out of total costs may not be high now, but it may rise if technology replaces manpower in the future, as may happen with the advent of AI and robotics. Industrial rentals have also seen volatility in the past. And Singapore does not have low land cost zones on the outskirts as other global cities may have.

Will MTI consider setting a target for industrial rental inflation to stay in line with the CPI and adjust policies accordingly? Will MTI also thoroughly benchmark industrial rentals in other cities with big manufacturing start-up sectors and manufacturing SME sectors and publish the findings?

Business Succession Planning

by Leon Perera

Mr Chairman, Sir. One consequence of an aging society is that many family businesses face the challenge of business succession planning. And it is a challenge, since some entrepreneurs do not have children or professional employees who would want to take over, or they may have successors in mind but those successors are not yet able enough to take over.

In reply to a previous PQ, MTI confirmed that a number of schemes exist that can be used to support consulting to facilitate the business succession planning process.

I would like to suggest that MTI's economic agencies make it a condition, or an advantage in applying for the grant, for the award of all grants for strategy development initiatives, like the CDG, MRA and ICV for example, to the effect that the SME should involve "next-tier" managers within their company, not only the senior management team, in working on the consulting project, so that those next tier leaders can get exposure and training.

This will nudge SMEs to pay more attention to grooming the next tier in their companies. Finally, I declare that I am the CEO of a research consultancy that does work in this and other fields.

PACT and Infrastructure Office

by Low Thia Khiang

Chairman, Sir, the Partnerships for Capability Transformation (PACT) scheme has been operating since 2010. It has been enhanced and extended a number of times to cover more sectors and co-innovation activities. The scheme seeks to support collaboration between large corporations and local SMEs. This is a worthy aim. The question is how successful has the PACT scheme been? What should be defined as success? How do we measure the success?

In my view, as this scheme is oriented towards a win-win partnership between large corporations and SMEs, with the aim of transforming the capabilities of SMEs, the crux of the success lies in whether the SMEs gained in a transformative manner. In answer to past Parliamentary Questions, some figures have been given by the Minister. By mid-2016, over 700 SMEs and 130 projects had benefited from PACT since 2010. But how many of these SMEs saw their capability transformed? What metrics do the Ministry use to measure the transformation?

In a 2014 article published on SPRING Singapore's website. The article looked at how Keppel Shipyard joined PACT to improve the capabilities of its SME vendors and contractors.

Keppel Shipyard gave the example of using PACT to develop a semi-automated system to reduce the operating costs of blasting, cutting wastage by 20% and manpower by 15%. This fell short of the target for cutting manpower by 30%, and Keppel Shipyard said continuous funding from PACT was needed to achieve success. But this so-called success was defined in terms of productivity gains from the view of the large corporation and nothing was said about the capabilities of the SMEs and whether these were transformed.

Capability transformation of SMEs should be directed towards their empowerment to seize regional and international opportunities, rather than to be limited to serve the needs of large corporations based in Singapore.

To this end, it would be good to know the profile of the large corporations benefiting from PACT to date, whether these are largely GLCs or MNCs, and whether more could be done to link up local SMEs to international supply chains through PACT.

Mr Chairman, Sir, next, the setting up of the Infrastructure Office to seize the opportunities being opened up by the One Belt One Road Initiative is timely. I would like to

know what is the plan and scope of the infrastructure office and whether the office will bring together local and international companies across the supply chain to seize the opportunities being opened up by the One Belt One Road Initiative?

Commercial Rental in the Heartlands

by Chen Show Mao

Sir, we learnt from the Ministry that rental costs generally make up a small share of total business costs for SMEs in Singapore, accounting for 8% or less in most services sectors. In some sectors, it is higher, substantially higher. Retail rentals make up 30% of total business costs for SMEs in the retail sector in Singapore. Presumably in the food and beverage services sector, rentals also account for a substantial portion of business costs for SMEs.

Commercial rentals have decreased over the last few years. As the Ministry said, on the back of a decline in rentals, only 13% of some 2,500 SME respondents in a survey cited high rental costs as one of the top business concerns in 2017. Looked at conversely, for these particular SMEs, high rental costs remain a challenge even in an environment of falling rentals.

It would not be far-fetched to think that in this minority of SMEs that remain most concerned about high rentals, many are in the retail and food and beverage services sectors.

Sir, retail and food are among the most important services we find in our heartlands. These businesses have a special importance in shaping our living environment and contributing to our quality of life. Innovation in their service offerings and business processes bring benefits that are felt immediately by the community. Can we encourage that? Could the Ministry consider targeted assistance, for example, rental rebates directed at qualifying start-ups and SMEs in retail and food services, so as to bring added diversity and vibrancy to our heartlands?

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
MINISTRY OF MANPOWER

Supporting Contract Workers

by Daniel Goh

Mr Chairman, Sir, term contract workers make up 10% of our resident workforce. Last year, the Tripartite Standard on Employment of Term Contract Employees was launched. It is a good first step in ensuring better protection of contract workers. When I asked the Parliamentary Question on the compliance mechanisms for the Standard in October last year, Minister Josephine Teo said that in two months, 400 employers, accounting for more than 28,000, or 17%, of all resident term contract workers have adopted the Standard. Could the Minister give an update on how many contract workers are now covered under the Standard?

I have two points to make. First, on compliance. In her reply, Minister Teo said that the Standard relies on self-assessment by companies and engagements with employers based on complaints from employees. I would like to ask the Minister, in the past six months since the Standard was established: how many complaints have been received and what are the outcome of the engagements?

I understand the Ministry's position to calibrate the compliance to give employers the incentive to adopt the Standard. But there is also the need for the Ministry to do occasional audits to make sure that the Standard is meaningful for contract workers. I believe many public agencies are hiring term contract workers, and they should have adopted the Standard. I would like to suggest that the Ministry audit the agencies and survey the contract workers to find out whether the Standard is working, and where the gaps are.

Second, on the coverage of protection. Currently, the Standard covers pro-rated leave benefits, adequate training and the notice period for early termination or non-renewal. The notice period is the same as the notice period for retrenchment of permanent employees. But what is missing in the Standard for Term Contract Workers is the recommendation of retrenchment benefits. Without this recommendation in the Standard, term contracts remain a risk of being the route for employers to avoid the moral and regulatory pressure of retrenching employees responsibly and fairly.

Capability Transfer Programme

by Low Thia Khiang

Chairman, Sir, I am glad to note that the SkillsFuture Leadership Development Initiative is steaming ahead, and that more programmes are coming online under the Initiative, such as the ASEAN Leadership Programme, to help Singaporean executives understand ASEAN business cultures better.

It is important to ensure we cultivate a Singaporean core in leadership positions across the economy. The Capability Transfer Programme is another important initiative to be welcomed because it places Singaporeans at the heart of our economic transformation. The CTP will help to deepen knowledge transfers to Singaporean workers and train up a strong body of highly-skilled and continuously-learning local workforce.

In this light, can the Minister elaborate on the outcomes expected from CTP grants and the metrics that would be used to measure the outcomes to make sure the money is well-spent? I am asking this because we have to be careful that CTP is not used to lighten the costs incurred by companies for routine training for their workers. There must be concrete capability development, and this should be measurable.

I understand that CTP offers funding for industry-level projects, such as company-level projects. My concern with funding for company-level projects is that the capability transfer will be limited to benefiting a single company instead of the whole sector. This means that the Government would end up supporting an uncompetitive situation in a sector.

For example, a large company dominating a sector could use CTP to acquire exclusive training for its staff, thereby enhancing its capability and competitive edge against other companies in the sector. Can the Minister give some examples of company-level projects funded by CTP and how the scenario I just described was avoided? How has the Ministry ensured the capability transferred to a company would benefit the sector as a whole?

Long-Term Unemployment

by Low Thia Khiang

Chairman, Sir, last year, we experienced one of the best years in economic growth in recent memory. However, despite stronger than expected economic growth, long-term unemployment has been sticky.

Long-term unemployment rose to its highest in 14 years in 2016. In September 2016, three in ten unemployed resident workers could not find employment after more than six months. The long-term resident unemployment rate rose to 0.8%. This meant that 17,600 workers were jobless for at least 25 weeks. The spike was mainly caused by older workers aged 50 and above and PMETs experiencing extended joblessness.

In September 2017, according to MOM figures, the rate remained at 0.8%. Older workers and PMETs again had lower rates of finding employment within six months than the overall rate.

Economists and the Government have explained that the issue is caused by job-skills mismatches. New technologies and economic shifts have made many job functions and skills obsolete. Therefore, it is good that the Government implemented programmes, such as the Professional Conversion Programme (PCP) and Place-and-Train (PnT) Programme in the last few years to help workers retrain and re-skill themselves. Despite these programmes, long-term unemployment has remained sticky.

PCP placed 3,300 PMETs in 2017, but only 10% were long-term unemployed workers. PnT placed 1,800 workers, but only 5% were long-term unemployed workers. Why are the programmes not helping enough long-term unemployed workers? What else can we do for the long-term unemployed workers?

CPF for Self-employed Workers

by Chen Show Mao

Sir, self-employed persons account for around 8% to 10% of working residents and, with the rise of the gig economy, may well increase significantly in the future.

The Ministry has indicated it accepts the tripartite working group's recommendation of a contribute-as-you-earn model for Medisave, whereby contribution to the self-employed person's Medisave account of CPF is required as and when a service fee is earned. As the Ministry further studies its implementation, could the Government also look into more ways to encourage gig workers to make further voluntary contributions to their CPF by providing them with strong incentives to do so?

There is substantial evidence from public policy efforts that positive actions can be induced through non-compulsory incentive mechanisms. For instance, could a "default" be established where CPF deductions, beyond Medisave, initially match those of regular-economy workers with the same job profile, but being non-binding, would permit opting into a lower amount? Alternatively, could gig workers receive information in their CPF statements about typical contributions by regular-economy workers in comparable employment circumstances, to encourage them to follow the "social norm"?

Self-employed persons typically face short-term cash flow needs, which may trump their longer term economic interest in saving for future retirement. Could the Government look into offering incentives for self-employed persons who voluntarily contribute to their Ordinary, Special or Retirement accounts, including favourable tax treatment when they do so?

Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

by Dennis Tan

Mr Chairman, in the last few months, the topic of sexual harassment in the workplace has been hotly discussed globally. Many, mostly women, have taken to social media to talk about their experience in facing and dealing with sexual harassment at the workplace.

Minister Lim Swee Say told the House last year that the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) received 800 complaints over the last three years, of which fewer than five were about workplace harassment. It was not clear if these included sexual harassment cases.

This contrasted with the survey done by AWARE in 2008 with 500 respondents where 54% of the respondents experienced sexual harassment at the workplace. But more recently, according to a Straits Times report from 10 December 2017, one in four cases at AWARE's Sexual Assault Care Centre are about workplace harassment. We have also read press reports of such cases in the past year.

Are there sexual harassment incidents happening at our workplaces which are not being surfaced, due to a variety of reasons, for example: out of fear of repercussion at the workplace, affected persons are highly likely to be reluctant to report sexual harassment at their workplace, especially if the perpetrator is a superior? This is especially so if company policies are not explicit on what constitutes sexual harassment, and what standard of procedures are taken when reports are made.

Minister Lim had said that TAFEP works with NTUC and SNEF to conduct regular courses to manage workplace harassment, and has trained a fair amount of company representatives in the past two years.

However, the measures in TAFEP guidelines are not prescriptive, and the ministry does not track how many firms have implemented the recommendations.

At present, the TAFEP guidelines are clear and good in giving specific guides to employers on what they can do to reduce incidences of workplace harassment.

However, the guidelines still place a bit more emphasis on affected persons taking responsibility for their own workplace safety – keeping alert, looking out for signs, and understanding what constitutes harassment.

There is less emphasis, however, on educating staff on how to not harass, and the consequences of doing so. The guidelines also do not illuminate sexual harassment in detail. As seen in recent debates around the globe, it can be sometimes ambiguous to perpetrators what constitutes sexual harassment.

I would like to propose that MOM issue definitive guidelines on workplace harassment. Such guidelines can include clearer definitions of sexual harassment, as well as take into

account the concerns I have raised earlier. MOM should also keep track of companies who have implemented their recommendations made in the guidelines, and whether guidelines are followed through in reported cases.

Finally, may I suggest that MOM consider carrying out a fresh survey to get a more realistic picture on the incidence of sexual harassment at workplace in Singapore? It may provide a better picture so as to help the Ministry, as well as NGOs, take a more focused approach to handle all related issues more effectively.

Silver Support

by Daniel Goh

Chairman, Sir, I have argued in my Budget debate speech that Silver Support pay-outs to needy seniors based on HDB flat type may cause hardship for the seniors, as well as send the wrong signals. Seniors who meet the criteria for Silver Support are already means-tested to be requiring cash support to meet their everyday needs. They are rigorously means-tested to have low lifetime wages, live in a HDB flat, not own large properties and have low household support. The HDB flat type is not part of the means-testing. However, seniors who live in larger flats get less payouts though they are just as needy as those who live in smaller flats.

This does not make sense. The seniors who qualify for Silver Support are already means-tested to be needy. The size of the flat that they happen to live in does not make them more or less needy. Many seniors often do not have a choice of which son or daughter to live with, or the size of the flat could be a legacy. Having pay-outs tiered according to flat types seem to signal two things to seniors and their families. One, it is better for a senior to stay with the child with a smaller flat or to live alone. Two, it is better for the family to downgrade to a smaller flat. These signals go against the thrust to get our seniors to age in place. Can the Minister explain the rationale behind the tiered pay-outs?

I also have several questions to address other specific concerns. What is the breakdown of beneficiaries of the Silver Support Scheme by gender? Since the pay-outs started, how many beneficiaries have lost their eligibility for Silver Support and what were the reasons?

Minister had said that seniors who did not qualify for Silver Support could appeal for a review of eligibility. How many appeals have been received so far? Out of these, how many

were approved? What were the main reasons when the appeals were not approved? On the appeal process, how can a senior make the appeal? What documents or documentation are required for the appeals?

Employee CPF Contribution Flexibility

by Leon Perera

Mr Chairman, Sir. When we discuss retirement adequacy, we speak of replacement rates – the ratio of retirement income to pre-retirement earnings.

Nowadays, many PMETs are finding themselves retrenched, being unemployed for stretches of time, and/or having to take pay cuts later in life. As a result, the replacement rate from just CPF LIFE pay-outs may increase as a result of their income dropping later in life.

In the case of people who are in this at-risk group, who have already reached a CPF minimum sum, and who can show their income has dropped severely, can MOM consider allowing them on an appeal, and for a limited time to contribute a smaller amount in employee CPF, so as to free up more cash for their day-to-day needs? That would mean that their CPF does not grow quickly and they would get less CPF LIFE pay-outs when they retire, but they will still get their CPF LIFE pay-out generated by the minimum sum. And if their working income has dropped drastically, then their smaller CPF LIFE pay-out in the future would still achieve a reasonable replacement rate with less employee CPF paid for some years prior to retirement. I hope MOM will consider this.

CPF LIFE and Women

by Daniel Goh

Chairman, Sir, the gender-differentiated premiums for CPF Life compounds the effect of the gender income gap. This gap stands at 18% and has not changed in a decade. It suggests we have hit a structural limit to closing the gap by improving the educational attainment of

women. To put it simply, this structural limit is that women's participation in the workforce tends to follow the M-curve, leaving employment in their 30s and 40s to provide care-giving for children or aged parents.

In general terms, the current gender income gap means that women will have 18% less CPF savings than men when they enrol in CPF LIFE. With the gender-differentiated premiums, women will get less income per month from CPF LIFE than men.

The argument for gender-differentiated CPF LIFE pay-outs is that it is fair, because women as a group live longer than men. The corollary is that a unisex CPF LIFE with the same pay-outs for men and women will make men “cross-subsidise” women for living longer. I do not know why men “cross-subsidising” women so that everyone can have reasonable retirement income until they pass on is so terrible a notion.

Let us take a step back and consider this. Women are already disadvantaged by the gender income gap and the unpaid care-giving in the middle of the M-curve. Should not women be given the slight advantage at the end of their lives, just in terms of CPF LIFE pay-outs, for the sacrifices they willingly take up during the most productive phase of their lives?

The other argument for gender-differentiated CPF LIFE pay-outs is that it is following the industry norm for annuities. But CPF LIFE is not a commercial product sold by a private insurer. It is a national pension programme that combines commercial standards and the social protection concerns of a progressive Government. The retirement inadequacy of women is a major social protection concern in our ageing society.

Productivity of Older Workers

by Chen Show Mao

Sir, many Members have spoken on the importance of our older workers to our future. I agree with them. I would like to urge that we give importance to raising the productivity of older workers and to job redesign as a means to achieve that, by making it part of the Industry Transformation Maps, in addition to leaving it to the efforts of individual employers.

Could we expressly identify Job Redesign for Older Workers as a key component of each ITM to be set out among the suite of initiatives for improving productivity in any given

industry, so that we may spur the collective thinking that can go into finding better solutions of Job Redesign for Older Workers, and direct some of the industry's efforts at innovation in this direction? Perhaps, resources could be pooled by companies in the industry to develop best practices, to modify tools and equipment for use off-the shelf by older workers throughout the industry?

As businesses in our industries think about how to change, even disrupt, processes in the workplace in order to generate greater value on the back of better-used resources, could we make Job Redesign for Older Workers a required part of the syllabus?

We know Productivity is one of the four pillars supporting the growth and competitiveness plans of an ITM. Could we envision Job Redesign for Older Workers as a key component of ITMs: a third Horizontal, along with promoting Info Comm Technology adoption and Skills development? It can help to support the industries and produce improvements across the economy in the face of an ageing workforce.

Non-discrimination in Employment

by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Surveys conducted over the years continue to indicate that racial discrimination remains an issue in Singapore. These surveys, coupled with personal accounts, showed that racial discrimination is prevalent, specifically in the areas of housing and employment. Despite the publication of fair employment practices by the MOM, accounts of employment discrimination remain.

For example, in the recent survey conducted by One Singapore, 48% of the Malay respondents and 41% of the Indian respondents and respondents of other ethnicities said that they face discrimination when applying for a job. The same survey also said that 20% of the Malay respondents and 18% of the Indian respondents and respondents of other ethnicities said that they very often or always felt discriminated against when applying for work.

Such responses suggest that the current Fair Employment Practices under the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices have not addressed discriminatory employment practices as successfully as it could, even if the number of such complaints has, indeed, gone

down over the past year. If anything, these surveys show a possible under-reporting of discriminatory employment practices.

The issue with discrimination and discriminatory practices is that people can feel and believe that they are not behaving in discriminatory fashion when they actually may be. Discriminatory behaviour can be latent. They can be casual. People often do not consciously try to be racist even when the actions actively marginalised others or, at least, make others feel uncomfortable or unwelcome.

I also understand that Singapore has recently ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in November last year. I would, therefore, like to ask how the Ministry would work and also to better communicate with various stakeholders to fulfil the Government's commitments under the Convention to better deal with discrimination. Would MOM consider working with MCCY to strengthen existing enforcement procedures against discriminatory employment practices?

Employment for People with Mental Illness

by Daniel Goh

Chairman, Sir, in many jurisdictions, there are laws that ban the use of pre-employment questionnaires asking job seekers about their mental health, to reduce discrimination. In 2016, the Minister replied to my question, on doing the same here, that such declarations will not disqualify a candidate from being considered for the job. However, the reality is not so rosy. In October 2016, The Straits Times reported on employment discrimination faced by people with mental illness, in which several interviewees said that they felt the "sense of societal rejection most acutely while job hunting".

I understand that job applicants who think they have been discriminated against could report the case to MOM, which will then investigate to make sure that the employers are conducting fair and progressive recruitment practices. The problem is that hard evidence of discrimination often does not exist, as the discrimination is often not communicated, or is only verbally communicated. Can the Minister please share how many cases of discrimination on the basis of mental illness have been reported to MOM and the outcomes of the investigation by MOM?

Sir, we have done quite well in encouraging employers to hire and integrate people with disabilities into the regular workforce. The culture of inclusive and progressive employment is setting in. The mind-sets of employers and consumers have been changing. I believe the Government could and should extend the same experience to promote the inclusive employment of people with mental illness, and change the prevailing prejudices against mental illness.

The World Health Organisation has estimated that, in developed economies, one in four people have a mental illness some time in their lifetime. Inclusive employment of people will go a long way towards combating society's prejudices against mental illness. Inclusive employment will assure people with mental illness that seeking help for their illness will not prevent them from gainful employment in the future which, in turn, will help them integrate into society and minimise relapses.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Psychology in Secondary School

by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Sir, the topics on building an innovative workforce and caring society have been discussed extensively in this House over the years. Many Members have proposed and suggested measures and steps to be taken to achieve these two objectives.

Sir, in order for our society to strive towards these goals, it is vital to create a system as well as ambience that allows and, more importantly, facilitates individuals to realise and maximise their potentials.

One of the most effective ways to do so is through our education system. I would like to repeat my call to introduce the teaching of psychology in our Secondary school which I have made twice in this Chamber.

Psychology, in its broadest term, is the study of the human mind and behaviour. It has many disciplines – personality, cognitive behaviour, social perception, to name some.

Individuals who have acquired a knowledge of psychology will most likely be able to recognise their own strengths and weaknesses and also of those people around them. By knowing personal strengths and weaknesses, individuals will be better equipped to work on maximising their potential, and this will result in a boosted self-esteem and confidence. Naturally, the persons who are motivated will be the ones who try to innovate and think out of the box.

Being aware of others through the learning of psychology will contribute positively towards our ongoing effort in developing a more caring and gracious society. A person who is aware of the existence of different personalities and perspectives will be able to better apply acceptance and tolerance and respect these differences. These are very important values to embrace in making our society more caring and gracious.

Sir, the learning of the human mind and behaviour should be done at an appropriate learning stage of a child. According to Jean Piaget, a world renowned French psychologist, children between the ages of 11 years old and older, which he termed as the formational/operational stage, are able to use logic to solve problems, view the world around them and plan for the future.

Hence, I would like to urge the Ministry to consider conducting a study to assess the feasibility to introduce psychology in Secondary school as a component of the Science subject.

Diverse Perspectives in Schools

by Leon Perera

Mr Chairman, Sir, from my recent exchange with the honorary Senior Minister of State Dr Puthuchear, on Members of Parliament speaking in schools, and from information subsequently obtained, I am not 100% sure, but it would seem that Government officeholders and grassroots advisers (GRAs) can go into MOE schools to officiate at events, hold dialogues on national issues and interact with students. But MPs in their MP capacity cannot. The Senior Minister of State did not confirm this directly. I would like to ask MOE to now confirm if this is, indeed, correct.

That exchange was headlined in some media outlets as if I was advocating partisan politics in schools whereas the Government wants to keep politics out of schools. That is incorrect. What I am arguing for is that we should balance up the exposure that students already have to PAP MPs wearing their GRA or Ministerial hats. The key phrase in what I said is "both sides". Our students should be able to hear from and talk with Members of Parliament who are not from the ruling Party. Why? For two reasons.

Firstly, students should not be exposed to only one set of perspectives on national issues. Students should be able to hear first-hand in their schools the perspectives of duly elected non-PAP Members of Parliament on issues of the day, be it our ageing society, public finance or social policies. It is not an adequate response to this to say that students can access views on the Internet. Exposing students to only one set of views from speakers in schools is unhealthy for the development of their critical faculties, and their ability to see both sides of an issue. They should be able to pose questions and dialogue with elected public figures, both PAP and non-PAP.

Secondly, this blocks students from understanding the role played by elected MPs other than those from the PAP in our legislative process. MPs from all parties play a role in our legislative process, that is enshrined in the Constitution which our students study in schools. Students should have the opportunity to hear directly from non-PAP Members of this House

about their experience of the role they play in the national institution of Parliament, and about the legislative work it undertakes.

Surely, it cannot be argued that Ministers and GRAs are, by definition, non-political when they talk to students but non-PAP MPs are, by definition, political. The same strictures on speech and behaviour can be applied to both groups when they go into schools. I believe that both groups should be allowed into schools but not to canvass for a Party, not to engage in partisan discussion, not to wear Party symbols, and so on, that is, to be consistent with Education (Schools) Regulations, section 111.

I know that non-PAP MPs can go into schools in their personal professional capacity. Indeed, I have done that before. But in that capacity, they cannot have dialogues about their role in the legislative process, whereas it would seem that PAP MPs can, wearing their Ministerial or GRA hats.

I have a second question. It appears that in the past, MPs could go into schools in their MP capacity. There are public references online to MPs having officiated at school events in the past as MPs. I am told that there are many plaques in schools recording that a certain MP opened a particular school facility. In former PAP MP Assoc Prof Ho Peng Kee's memoirs, he writes on page 18, and I quote, "I have made this call on many of the schools I spoke at during those early years as MP".

I noted that on at least two schools' websites that prior to 2011 or thereabouts schools would acknowledge MPs but, after that, the schools referred only to Grassroots Advisers. Would MOE confirm that this change was indeed made in 2011, and why this change was made at that time?

In conclusion, Sir, firstly: would MOE consider allowing all MPs, including Nominated Members of Parliament (NMPs) into schools to be able to share their perspectives on public affairs, in their role in the legislative process as MPs, all subject to the same strictures on speech and behaviour to keep out partisan politics? And, secondly, can MOE clarify when the apparently longstanding policy to allow MPs into schools was changed, and why was it changed at that time?

Mr Chairman, Sir, we can pin labels that say "PAP is by definition okay"; "non-PAP is by definition partisan and hence not". But does that serve the best interest of our students who will become the citizens of tomorrow? Let us not make this a conversation about labels. That is a circular argument. Let us make this a conversation about what is best for our students.

National Language Proficiency

by Chen Show Mao

Sir, the Budget speaks of plans for economic development to focus on regional cooperation in ASEAN. Many Members have spoken of the importance of our region to our future. I agree with them. Actually, our region is not only important to our future, but also to our past, to our sense of who we are and where we are rooted in the world. Can we take the opportunity to complement these efforts in economic development with an increased focus in our school curriculum on teaching Bahasa Melayu? It is our National language and a regional language. Could we help those students who do not otherwise learn Malay in school attain some basic level of proficiency?

I know our children who do not otherwise learn Malay have a lot to do already in school, including learning English, Chinese or Tamil to even higher levels of proficiency. Many Members have spoken of the importance of that, and they are right. But Bahasa Melayu is our National language. I believe it would be to the good if all our children could learn it to some basic level of conversational fluency. Such learning will be good for the cognitive and intellectual development of our children; it will also protect and preserve our multiculturalism and promote national integration and a sense of identity.

We currently have conversational third language programmes for Malay at the Primary school level as enrichment, but not part of the regular curriculum. As learning languages is best done when young, could the Ministry look into making the conversational third language programme part of the syllabus for our Primary school students who do not otherwise learn our National language? Perhaps, included as part of the regular curriculum for every Primary school student, but without the pressure of examinations?

Stressed Students and Parents

by Low Thia Khiang

Mr Chairman, Sir, I understand that MOE has been retooling the education system to shift the unhealthy focus on academic competition to emphasise holistic education and the love of learning.

But a culture of "academic results focus" has already set in among parents. We cannot blame the parents because they want to give the best to their children. They learned the culture from the old focus on academic competition, believing in the old paradigm of good grades and a linear path from elite Primary schools to the top Universities.

When they are faced with globalisation and technological disruptions, they become even more anxious about making sure their children get the best start in life. When MOE rightly sought to improve pre-school education by setting up MOE kindergartens, some parents saw this as a new first step to academic success.

It was reported that a study conducted by OECD to look at the connection between well-being and Pisa test achievement found Singapore students have higher levels of anxiety, compared to the OECD average. For example, 76% of Singapore students reported feeling very anxious for a test even if they were well-prepared, compared to the OECD average of 55%. The students involved in the study were mostly Secondary 4 students. I hope the MOE could do a study to see whether this kind of anxiety is also affecting Primary school children and even children in pre-school, so that we can learn how to mitigate the problem.

MOE should not stop to complete the transformation of the system despite these die-hard habits. It will take time to change such an entrenched culture. Meanwhile, MOE could also look into communicating and educating parents on the many pathways to success in the new economy, so as to lessen their anxiety and, thus, lessen the transfer of the anxiety to their children.

Nutritional Health

by Daniel Goh

Chairman, Sir, in recent years MOH and MOE have been concerned about the nutritional health of school children in two aspects, namely: healthier food and a balanced diet to fight obesity and to get young people to adopt better eating habits. This is all good. I would like to ask the Minister what percentage of schools have adopted the Healthy Meals in Schools Programme since 2011 to date. Also, how much more are students paying for these healthy meals on average, and are we making sure students from low-income households can afford the meals?

Recently, there has been some public discussion about mealtimes as more schools move to single sessions. Parents are concerned that the children are eating late lunches in the mid-afternoon and not having enough time to eat snacks during recess time due to the scheduling of classes. While nutritionists say that there are no set hours for children to have their meals, they also advise that children should have three main meals and two to three snacks at regular hours. They should be eating every three hours.

I understand that MOE leaves the schools to decide on their daily schedules. Nevertheless, MOE could reassure the public by conducting a survey of all schools on their meal and snack scheduling, and provide an advisory for regular recess and lunch breaks to ensure students will never go hungry during the school day.

Social Mobility Indicators

by Sylvia Lim

Chairman, Sir, in reply to a 2013 Parliamentary Question on measuring social mobility, the Government highlighted only two types of metrics: percentages of Singaporeans who did not complete Secondary education as well as post-Secondary education, and growth in median gross monthly incomes from work.

Some governments, notably the UK, have developed a dashboard of social mobility indicators based on a life-cycle framework. The objective is to make life chances more equal at the critical points for social mobility such as: early childhood development, school readiness at age five, Secondary school attainment, opportunities for tertiary education, and getting into and on in the labour market.

I would like to ask the Minister for Education whether the government monitors indicators of critical points in a person's development that contribute to mobility, such as early childhood development, and how our current indicators compare with countries with comprehensive dashboards, such as the UK.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
MINISTRY OF FINANCE

Temasek Holdings as Shareholder

by Sylvia Lim

Chairman, Sir, back in 2008, GIC was part of the pioneering effort to develop the Santiago Principles, a common global set of 24 voluntary guidelines that assign best practices for the operations of Sovereign Wealth Funds. These principles address concerns about visibility, accountability, and the governing structure of Sovereign Wealth Funds, and include ethics and professionalism in the ability to follow foreign rules.

Though Temasek does not direct business decisions or operations in its portfolio companies, it pitches itself as an active promoter of sound corporate governance in them. As a sole shareholder of Temasek, the Government should naturally be concerned that the entities in Temasek invest in adhere to the spirit of the Santiago Principles in order to safeguard Singapore's reserves and international reputation.

To this end, it was reported yesterday that Temasek has now taken some steps in tackling corruption within its portfolio companies with Chairman Lim Boon Heng announcing a roundtable "in the next few months" focusing on questions of governance and ethics.

Turning to what other countries have done, the Norwegian Government Pension Fund Global has led the way. Through an ethics council established in 2004, companies that are unethical are excluded from its investment portfolio. It appointed a corporate governance advisory board in 2013 to be a more engaged and more responsible investor. The Oil Fund has tackled issues such as high executive pay by voting against pay proposals at Alphabet JP Morgan and Volkswagen in 2017.

While the Santiago Principles require that SWFs like Temasek be operationally independent from their owners, that is, the MOF, how has MOF worked with Temasek on areas such as its investment policies or otherwise to maintain ethics? Will MOF add further accountability for Temasek on the ethics front? I am of the view that reputational challenges to Singapore's integrity as a country should not be left to be steered by what is legally just a commercial entity.

Role of Temasek Holdings and GIC

by Leon Perera

Mr Chairman, Sir, during the debate on bribery probe at Keppel Offshore & Marine, Senior Minister of State Indranee Rajah said "likewise Temasek does not interfere in the business decisions or operations of its portfolio companies".

Do Temasek and GIC not seek to share ideas and experience with their investee companies in ways that may enhance long-term shareholder value? Or are Temasek and GIC totally hands off, as it were? Are they not interfering in investment business decisions or operations at all? Not even offering insights, information or suggestions of any kind on any matter be it commercial or corporate governance related?

If Temasek and GIC are totally hands off in this sense, would this not be a lost opportunity since they have the opportunity to share learnings where permissible across their portfolio companies and from their past experience as investors, not to mention connecting investees to agencies like EDB, which can generate win-win opportunities for investees and Singapore?

Playing such a role if kept within the boundaries of permissible information and idea dissemination could be consistent with the Santiago Principle No 16 on operational independence while advancing Principle No 19 on commercial orientation.

Tax Deductible for Private Hire Car Driver

by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Sir, I have received queries from residents who are full-time private hire car drivers (PHV) who are not allowed to claim tax deductions for the amount they spend on motor car expenses, in particular car rental fee.

A search on IRAS website's FAQ segment provides answer to this query: "the expenses incurred on a private car by private hire car drivers are not tax deductible because of the national policy to restrict the car population".

In my view, the answer provided does not seem to clarify the circumstance well. How does not allowing PHV drivers claim tax deduction correlates to restriction of car population? Is the Certificate of Entitlement (COE) scheme not already there to regulate car population?

The service provided by private hire cars complements our public transport services and anecdotally, I can say, to a certain extent, this service contributes to reducing the number of car ownership rather than increasing it.

I say so because I have friends who did not extend or buy new cars after their cars' COEs expired. The reason is that it is more convenient and cheaper to travel by private-hire car as compared to owning one.

I would like to urge MOF to work closely with the various stakeholders to come up with a framework that would ensure that the full-time PHC drivers are taxed in a fair and just manner.

Water – Harmonisation of Accounts

by Pritam Singh

Mr Chairman, public communication on the way water is priced can be significantly improved. At last year's Budget debate, the Minister in charge of MEWR shared that the numbers in the books of PUB do not lend themselves to a straightforward understanding of what they mean. The Minister observed that while PUB's books are in accruals, the Ministry's Budget is in cash. The Minister also said that he would ask the Minister of Finance to look at a whole-of-Government approach to funding Singapore's water infrastructure because things do not add up if one looks at the books separately. In light of these remarks, can I clarify what progress has been made on this?

Many Singaporeans note that PUB's books record significant surpluses after Government grants and that any increase in water prices should take into account the size of such surpluses. More fundamentally, there is a greater desire to understand the variables and assumptions that go into calculating Long Run Marginal Cost (LRMC), which form the basis of

determining water prices. The Government should attempt to explain this in a simple manner so that the public can appreciate the basis of raising water prices by 15% in 2017, with another hike scheduled for 2018.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
MINISTRY OF
ENVIRONMENT AND
WATER RESOURCES

Climate Change and Coastal Areas

by Leon Perera

Mr Chairman, Sir, as a low-lying nation, Singapore is particularly susceptible to the effects of anthropogenic climate change, chief amongst which is sea-level rise. PCA commenced the Coastal Adaptation Study in 2013 and this was slated for completion in end-2017, but has since been pushed to the second half of 2018.

It is important to consider the impact of rising sea levels, not only beaches and sea walls but also intertidal, coral reef zones, sand and mud floods and mangroves. These zones are not only bio-diverse, but also provide ecosystem services, such as buffering from sea-level rise.

Can the Government confirm whether the study is looking into protecting these parts of our coastal sea level-rise which are themselves sensitive to sea level-rise?

In view of the fact that Singapore is not merely an island nation but also a nation of islands, is the study looking into coastal protection measures on our offshore islands, such as Pulau Tekong, Pulau Ubin and the Southern Islands? Are soft engineering approaches such as planting coastal vegetation where they currently do not exist, being studied?

According to the second National Climate Change study, models reveal that by the year 2100, monthly rainfall total during the northeast monsoon may increase, at worse, by 42.9% under the representative concentration pathway (RCP) 4.5 scenario, and by 67.5% under the RCP 8.5 scenario. Given that rainfall is a major hydrological input, is the Government taking these projections into account, makes plans to mitigate floods in coastal areas?

Water Pricing and Policy

by Pritam Singh

Mr Chairman, Sir, the old mantra of water scarcity and the danger of the tap being turned off as a result of a breakdown in relations with Malaysia are in need of an upgrade. Circumstances have changed – and the desire of earlier generations of leaders to diversify our

water sources has proved to be a boon many Singaporeans are thankful for. The development of NEWater and desalination has contributed to this.

However, the pricing of such purification methods is not totally transparent to members of the public, unlike raw water. While the costs of these new methods of purification can be significant, I believe there is scope to share more details of pricing both upstream and downstream in order to drive home a message of the preciousness of water. I acknowledge that sharing such information with the public requires accounting for the cost of upgrading and building transmission networks because the price of water is only one component while there are other costs including R&D. But that does not mean that it cannot be done. Such an approach will give members of the public greater understanding about why water tariffs need to rise and hopefully even moderate in future.

Water consumption trends for households are on a downward trend. I believe there is scope to lower our per capita domestic water consumption even further than the 140 litres per person by 2030. PUB's water closet replacement project for flats built between 1987 and 1992 for residents in small flats on community assistance provides a foretaste of the significant opportunities available for a whole-of-Government approach to water conservation. While the initiative is provided free of charge, can we not look at extending such initiatives when major HDB upgrading exercises, such as HIP, are carried out in view of the scale of benefits that can be achieved potentially resulting in lower water consumption? A significant number of flats, for example, where toilets are completely renovated, can potentially host a variety of new water-saving features.

Can the Ministry also consider if there is scope to improve, finetune or incentivise the Water Efficiency Labelling Scheme (WELS) with a view to nudge consumers to choose appliances with the highest number of ticks. Mr Chairman, if every drop is precious, can more be done to alter consumption patterns? The opportunity provided by HDB upgrading may be a very useful entry point.

Water Conservation and Water Pressure

by Png Eng Huat

Sir, low water pressure is one of the issues I encountered in my estate visits. One resident shared that her family members have to take turns to shower despite having two bathrooms in the flat. She said that when one bathroom is occupied, the other is unusable due to low water pressure.

I filed a Parliamentary Question (PQ) in 2015 asking PUB to consider setting a minimum pressure for the supply of water to individual HDB flats. The Minister then replied that PUB is reviewing the issue. Last November, it was reported that PUB had finished with the review and concluded that it was not useful to stipulate a minimum pressure requirement across all residential units. It went on to say that setting a minimum pressure, I quote, "may result in fixtures not being able to achieve its water conservation objectives."

Sir, the low water pressure problem only affects units on selected floors with gravity feed water supply. Is the authority saying that we are only depending on these residents who happen to live on those floors to help achieve its water conservation objectives? The rest of the floors are enjoying adequate water pressure. Furthermore, setting a minimum water pressure does not mean people will waste water. There is a water valve outside each flat unit which the owner can adjust to control the water pressure to suit the needs of the household.

Last Saturday, on Singapore World Water Day, one of the pledges to save water was to take shorter showers. When water pressure is low, you end up taking a longer shower. In an answer to my PQ in 2017, the national average water consumption for households for that year was 11% lower than a decade ago and about 60% of households consume less water than the national average. These numbers do say a lot, that most Singaporeans do play their part to conserve water. I urge the PUB to review its decision and set a minimum pressure for the supply of water to individual HDB flats, for it is not right to expect selected residential units to be the poster boy for water conservation only.

Microplastics

by Leon Perera

Mr Chairman, Sir, in marine sediments and waters, microplastics have been detected in four beaches and in seven mangrove habitats in Singapore. They bear potential risks to marine life and human health by transferring persistent organic pollutants (POPs) up food chains and into marine organisms which we may consume.

Some argue that microplastics themselves should be considered POPs. Is the Government studying microplastic prevalence in locally-sourced and imported fish? And the extent to which coastal activities like recreational sports and shipping contribute to microplastic prevalence in coastal areas?

Primary sources include microbeads used in the plastic industry and in care products like toothpaste and exfoliating facial washes. Will the Government consider imposing labelling requirements or a ban on industrially-produced microbeads as in the US and UK?

What are the Government's plans to reduce overall plastic consumption given that the secondary source of microplastics is the disintegration of larger plastics?

Reducing and Recycling Plastic Waste

by Dennis Tan

Mr Chairman, 2018 has been declared as the year of climate action in Singapore. In 2015, 824,600 tonnes of plastic waste was generated but just 7% were recycled, a proportion roughly unchanged since 2001.

Plastic waste is the common type of waste disposed at our incineration plants. It is well-known that single-use plastic disposables pose a serious environmental problem. At present, more than 40 countries tax or limit the use of plastic bags. Evidence shows that even modest policy interventions can have significant impact. In Britain, usage of plastic carrier bags fell by 83%, after the introduction of a plastic carrier charge. It may understandably be difficult to do

away with plastic bags completely – we still need plastic carrier bags for everyday use like bagging our rubbish.

Countries which introduce charges for plastic carrier bags frequently have designated plastic refuse bags which people still have to pay for. Taiwan has just announced a blanket ban in single-use plastics including straws, cups and shopping bags by 2030. Prior to that, there is a progressive plan to make people pay for plastic products like plastic bags, straws, disposable food containers and disposable utensils in the interim.

MEWR has recently carried out a study of the life-cycle assessment of single-use carrier bags and disposable food packaging. Would the Minister share with the House your findings? Does the Ministry have any intention to roll out a progressive plan to reduce the use of plastic disposables in Singapore involving either the restriction or the banning of single-use plastic carrier bags, straws, disposable cups, containers and utensils? Has the Ministry studied the recycling viability of biodegradable plastic carrier bags in Singapore? And if they are viable, will the Government consider encouraging or requiring the use of such biodegradable plastic carrier bags? If so, perhaps the Government may consider asking NTUC Fairprice to take the lead in using biodegradable plastic carrier bags.

Food Delivery Services

by Daniel Goh

Chairman, Sir, there have been news reports about a food delivery app war in Singapore with tech companies Deliveroo, UberEats and Foodpanda ramping up their food delivery services here. It was reported in The Straits Times in November 2017 that Deliveroo created jobs for 4,000 riders and planned to create 3,000 more. Deliveroo and Foodpanda are also investing in delivery-only kitchens to create and meet demand. This is good news for the F&B sector and consumers, but there are environmental costs and possible public health risks we need to tackle.

First, on environmental costs. The rapid growth of food delivery services in China have led to a crisis of mounting waste of food boxes, wooden chopsticks and plastic cutlery. The National Environmental Agency's study of disposable food packaging materials and their environmental impact was supposed to be conducted and concluded in late 2017. Can the

Minister share the results and implications of the study? Further, is NEA monitoring the waste produced by the growing food delivery services?

Second, on public health. Currently, NEA regulates food caterers through licensing and publishes guidelines for consumers ordering catered food for events. Catered food must come with a time stamp and delivered in hot boxes and insulated bags to minimise food poisoning risks. Food delivery services are now reaching a similar scale that could adversely affect public food safety. Is the Ministry planning to regulate food delivery services in the same manner as food catering?

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
MINISTRY OF
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Elderly Poor and Home Ownership

by Dennis Tan

Mr Chairman, home ownership has been a core tenet of the nation ever since before independence. Despite the Government's scheme to assist the elderly in home ownership, such as the Deferred Down Payment Scheme and the Temporary Loan Scheme for right sizing while having shorter leases for elderly owners, some basic flaws remain within our system, particularly for the elderly poor looking for the opportunity to own a home in their retirement years.

The elderly poor enjoy the same level of subsidies as the poor and other age groups, but is likely to have little or less time to earn any further income. Those who work are likely to earn less what they used to do in their younger years.

In line with the Prime Minister's recent message that we should look after the elderly, we should spare no effort in creating a society honouring our senior citizens, empowering every senior with the ability to own a roof over their heads and to live their lives in dignity should be the least we can do as a society to honour their contributions.

I propose establishing a senior support housing grant supporting any individual or family aged 55 and above wanting to get a short lease 2-room flexi flat for the first or second time. This assessment can be based on their marital status, age and income level to determine the level of the said grant offered of, say, up to \$10,000.

For those who are elderly, poor and single, the additional single's premium is yet another absolute hit to their life's savings that they can otherwise spend in their retirement years. The fact that the single's premium remains at \$15,000, even with a shorter lease being chosen, is another loophole that we can address for more affordable housing for our single seniors.

To reduce the heavy burden of the single's premium on our elderly poor singles, we should consider an additional scheme reducing the premium for any individual aged 55 and above purchasing a 2-room flexi flat for the first time on a shorter lease. The premium reduction of upwards to \$5,000 based on their income level and length of lease upholds the rationale the single's premium but reduces its impact for elderly poor singles who can then use their savings for their retirement.

Upgrading Ageing HDB Flats

by Pritam Singh

Chairman, many residents look forward to the Home Improvement Programme (HIP) as it addresses long-time gripes such as pipe leaks, ceiling leaks and spalling concrete, the last of which occurs due to corrosion of steel reinforcement bars over time. While this is a natural wear and tear process, many elderly residents in particular are unable to mitigate the problem with regular painting for financial reasons and a relative lack of mobility for some.

In the course of house visits to homes where HIP works have already been undertaken, it is not surprising for residents to identify a re-occurrence of spalling concrete or a new occurrence in another area of the flat within a few years after HIP works are concluded. Although residents can request for the Goodwill Repair Assistance scheme, the cost for such repairs can come up to a few hundred dollars in some cases.

Would the HDB bear a greater part of the repair cost in view of the fact that the spalling concrete is fundamentally caused by the deterioration of the concrete floor slab in question? This view can be correlated with the point that spalling concrete repair is deemed to be an essential improvement under the HIP. Would the Ministry look to reduce the resident's component from spalling concrete repairs particularly for flats that have already completed their HIP?

Finally, as the HDB winds down its HIP programme, what are its plans going forward for next few years? Does it plan to call for a new HIP programme for flats built after 1986? In addition, can the Ministry share whether it is exploring how it can collaborate from a whole-of-Government perspective with agencies like the Smart Nation Office, the PUB and even MTI's initiatives under the Built Environment ITM to incorporate future technologies with its future upgrading programmes? Is there a possibility of pneumatic waste disposal conveyance systems to be part of future upgrading programmes at older HDB estates?

Reviewing Criteria for Rental Housing

by Pritam Singh

To my second cut, Chairman, public rental housing remains an important feature of our public housing system. The HDB recently announced that from May this year, the maximum number of tenants allowed in 4-room and larger Housing and Development Board (HDB) flats will be reduced to six, from the current nine. One of the reasons for this is to prevent overcrowding in HDB estates.

There are times when rental flat applicants share that crowded conditions at home make family living difficult, complicating already existing problems that are amplified in a low-income setting. Part of the public rental flat assessment process includes an HDB enquiry into whether an applicant has other means of family support. Very often, for rejected cases, the HDB seeks the cooperation of the Family Service Centre to address disputes between family members. However, not all cases can be resolved, with some issues particularly intractable.

Would the HDB in line with a tacit acknowledgement that overcrowding can affect the living environment consider the number of individuals residing in a current place of residence for rental flat applicants as a factor for consideration at the point of application?

Secondly, can the HDB clarify if it intends to raise the income ceiling criteria of HDB rental flat applications in line with rises in real income as revealed by the Budget so that applicants who are in dire straits are not dissuaded from applying for such rental flats if their situation calls for it. Can the Ministry share how many rental flat applications it has approved for applicants whose gross income has exceeded \$1,500.

Finally, can the Ministry update the total number of rental flats it intends to construct or if the current stock is envisaged to be sufficient for the foreseeable future?

Expanding Home Improvement Programme

by Png Eng Huat

Thank you, Mr Chairman. Sir, many residents living in older estates welcome the Home Improvement Programme (HIP) for good reasons. The spalling concrete and water seepage problems I have seen in some of the older flats in Hougang are serious.

In the past, HIP would replace the main waste and soil discharge pipes in the toilets for all units as water seepage usually starts from the joint failure between floors. However, the last two HIPs I came across in Hougang would not touch these pipes unless they leaked. A number of residents I spoke to would like to change the pipes in the toilets and for good reason — their flats are more than 35 years old and the pipes, though not leaking, are due for a change.

I hope HDB can allow residents an option to replace those pipes as part of the essential improvement work.

Next, many residents also wanted to do more for their ageing flats since HIP is going to disrupt their living environment for the next 10 days. The type of additional work some of these residents asked for common home improvement work, things like changing the windows, changing water piping for the entire flat or upgrading the ELCB, to name a few.

I am not asking the Government to subsidise this work but to provide an option to residents under the framework of HIP to change these common items in their flats at the same time. The cost of such improvement work can benefit from economies of scale sourcing if they are included in the HIP tender. While residents can make arrangements on the side with sub-contractors, some sub-contractors may not want to do such improvement works for the fear of breaking any contractual terms under HIP.

Finally, I have spoken about this before. I hope HDB would seriously look into re-designing the clothes drying rack offered by HIP. The current impedes repair and repainting work using gondolas and is an eyesore to see so many metal structures sticking out of a single HDB block. Would HDB be open to tap on Polytechnics and Universities to re-design the clothes drying rack for a change?

Designing Common Space

by Png Eng Huat

The second cut. Sir, the HDB void deck despite its namesake is anything but void in the memories of many Singaporeans. Unfortunately, these open spaces we knew and grew up with are shrinking in many new estates. In its place are rooftop gardens and multi-purpose halls (MPH) about the size of two 5-room HDB flats. Some of the MPH unfortunately were not designed with much thought and consideration for the very activities they were meant to cater for.

At a recent briefing conducted by URA, I shared with the team some of the observations and actual feedback from the ground on the MPH in Hougang Meadow, a relatively new estate with studio apartments. Let me share a few anomalies about the design of the MPH.

First, the MPH in Hougang Meadow is built on top of a car park. To do an event at the MPH, the only way to load and unload equipment and stuff for the event is via a narrow passage way connecting the sheltered compound to the multi-storey car park beside. Next, because of the proximity of the MPH to the nearby blocks, residents living on the lower floor can see the casket clearly from their windows whenever a funeral is held there. In one wake that I attended, the bereaved family shared that there is no place around the MPH for the contractor to place portable toilets. For a start there are no manhole discharge points. Even using chemical portable toilets is an issue as these toilets need to be clean every day, and there is no way for the service crew to do in a hygienic manner on the roof top garden beside the exercise area and children's playground. The only place to locate the portable toilets would be under the block where the bereaved family lives. It is highly unusual for a wake at an HDB estate not to have sanitary convenience located on-site for bereaved family and friends who have to guard the wake throughout the night.

The design of the MPH also makes the sending off procession on the last day of the funeral very challenging. The passage on the MPH at Hougang Meadow to the waiting hearse can barely accommodate the pall bearers and mourners. They would also have to navigate the narrow passage way, pass the lift lobby at the entrance to the multi-storey car park and then make U-turn down a deep ramp to a connecting car park and then to the waiting hearse at Level 1. The alternative route to take would be a longer walk along the same narrow walkway cutting through other void decks and surrounding blocks and to a busy stretch of

Upper Serangoon Road. The same design issues are also present at Hougang Dew Court, another new estate with studio apartments. But the saving grace is that the MPH is located on the ground floor.

I have shared the above concern with URA in the hope that future MPH design for new estates would take into consideration the various requirements of the activities these sheltered pavilions are meant to cater for. As for the existing MPH, I hope HDB can look into correcting the design soonest as the void decks in these estates are too small and not suitable to hold any events like a funeral.

Heavy Vehicle Parking

by Pritam Singh

My third cut. Sir, the issue concerning heavy vehicle parking was brought up a few times in Parliament. We have a strange situation in Singapore in that we have more lots than there are heavy vehicles. But yet drivers are still facing inadequate parking lots in or near their estates. The demand and supply of heavy parking lots on the ground generally follows the movement and turnover of drivers living in an estate and this is something hard to predict or control.

The then Senior Minister of State for MND in 2016 have described ways to address the heavy vehicle parking issues. So, I will not repeat them here. The solution highlighted by the Minister then will take time to bear fruit. In the interim what can the Ministry do to help alleviate the issues faced by heavy vehicle drivers on the ground?

In the development plan for Defu Industrial Estate, is there plan to build a multi-storey heavy vehicle car park as some resident drivers I spoke to continue to face parking problems in the heavy vehicles park along Tampines Road and Hougang Ave 7. A driver told me he has to wait a long time for a vacant lot. Each time when he works late, the chances of finding a lot would diminish greatly. He said he had to resort to illegal parking at times although he did so without causing obstruction or danger to other road users.

Can the Ministry put up some temporary heavy vehicle parks in Defu Industrial Estate in the interim? There are spots of vacant land there and these temporary heavy vehicle parks

require minimal construction works and enforcement as all heavy vehicles have valid parking permits.

I hope the Ministry will continue to take a light touch approach in its enforcement of parking rules and regulations when these drivers have to resort to desperate measures to park their heavy vehicles so that they can go home early to get enough rest to drive the next day.

Noise Pollution from Multi-storey Carparks

by Daniel Goh

Sir, noise pollution is a growing problem affecting Singaporeans who live in HDB flats today. Not only are the flats smaller than before, but also the homes and buildings are closer to each other now, thus it is not uncommon to meet residents troubled with stress from noise disturbances.

In 2010, the Straits Times published an article on ideas to cut traffic noise pollution, where it was reported that some of the measures used included building multi-storey carparks between residential buildings and roads to screen out noise.

I would like to ask the Minister how effective has building multi-storey carparks near HDB flats been in reducing noise annoyances? Or has multi-storey carparks themselves become a source of noise pollution caused by the amplification of loud engines and screeching tires? Has MND carried out studies to analyse the environmental and noise impact to nearby homes, or surveys of residents living in HDB blocks near multi-storey carparks?

Prefabricated Construction

by Daniel Goh

The second cut. The Government is taking big steps to shift towards prefabricated construction and generating lead demand via public sector projects. Some benefits include significant manpower savings and shorter construction times.

However, we have a strong renovation culture in Singapore, with homeowners aspiring to personalise their new homes. With more HDB flats moving towards prefabricated construction, how will this affect home owners' renovation aspirations? Will HDB and BCA provide increased public awareness on the renovation and maintenance of prefabricated homes?

Secondly, buyers currently have the choice to buy non-prefabricated flats. I understand that HDB is aiming for 35% of new BTOs offered in 2019 to be using prefabricated construction. What ultimate percentage of new BTOs using prefabricated flats is HDB working towards? Will this create a price differential for resale flats in the future, given the strong renovation culture?

Lastly, as construction defects might take longer to show up in prefabricated construction, would HDB consider extending the Defects Liability Period beyond one year?

Public Housing for Single Parents

by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Sir, the Government has made policy changes to level up the support for the children of unmarried single parents over the years, such as including them in the Baby Bonus Scheme since 2017. But housing support for such households is still quite lacking. Currently, the HDB exercises flexibility to help unmarried single parents with their housing needs on a case by case basis. But this flexibility is not good enough.

Sir, HDB has a scheme called Assist Scheme for Second Timers. This scheme launched in May 2013 aims to provide assistance to divorced and widowed parents with children below 16 years old who may face challenges securing housing if they sell their matrimonial flat due to a divorce or death of a spouse. Under this Assist scheme, 5% of the 30% of the 2-room and 3-room BTO flats in non-mature estates set aside for second timers are reserved for this group of parents.

Sir, the implementation of Assist scheme is an indication that HDB recognises and is committed to assist and lighten the struggles of single parents who face housing issues. As we are aware, unmarried single parents face similar challenges and struggles, if not more so, than the divorced and widowed parents. However, most unmarried single parents are of young age and also a high percentage of them are mothers.

Some of these unmarried single parents are not getting support from their parents and other family members, due to their soured relationship, and as a result, some experience displacement.

I sincerely urge HDB to take further steps in their commitment to assist single parents by formulating a housing assistance scheme that caters to lighten the struggles of unmarried single parents.

Local Farming Sector

by Leon Perera

Mr Chairman, Sir, I declare my interest as the CEO of an international research consultancy that does work in agri-food and other areas. Sir, nurturing the local farming sector is important for food security, which is a part of national defence, as well as for creating good jobs in what could be a high-tech, high value-added sector in future.

I would like to ask MND what proportion of the Agricultural Productivity Fund has been disbursed to date. When I moved an adjournment motion on indoor farming in Parliament in 2016, only a small fraction of the fund had been disbursed. I suspect good companies and projects do exist, as some have been highlighted in the media and in Minister's speeches.

Secondly, as also touched on in my Motion, is MND looking into using underground space for indoor farming in the future, which London is doing and which could bring certain food security benefits to Singapore.

Thirdly, recently AVA has begun to offer 20-year leases rather than the 10-year leases previously for farmland, which is a welcome move. Can AVA confirm if this will be the trend for future farm land tenders? Also, what measures are being taken to ensure that the tendering process is fair to entrepreneurial start-ups vis-à-vis large international agri-business firms, since we may want to nurture innovative start-ups in this sector with the potential to become globally competitive?

Fourthly, around the world a major trend is the increasing take up of insurance and micro-insurance in the farming sector. However, our fish farmers have faced issues collecting insurance claims from natural disasters in the past. What has the AVA done to help to educate farmers about insurance and the options they have?

Breakaway Works on Landed Houses

by Sylvia Lim

Chairman, Sir, home owners from time to time will re-develop the houses they own. Sometimes, the works on landed property will involve breakaway works, when for example a semi-detached house is re-developed to become a bungalow, or an intermediate terrace house is re-developed as a corner terrace. These works involve breakaways from another house.

I have observed a few cases in my ward where such breakaway works have caused significant difficulties and anguish to neighbours, that is, the houses that are exposed after the detachment. One problem would be water seepage, as a party wall that formerly separated two adjoining houses would now become an exposed blank wall. Another concern that has arisen is whether works done by one party have affected the structural integrity of the neighbour's remaining party wall.

The URA and the BCA have issued a very helpful advisory guide entitled "Be Good Neighbours" that provides useful guidance on how home-owners should go about doing their rebuilding works. It is stated that due consideration should be given to neighbours, such as

doing Pre-construction Surveys of properties nearby and asking a Professional Engineer to conduct an Impact Assessment. The guide understandably spends a few pages on Breakaway works, due to the potential difficulties with newly exposed walls and roof structures.

When problems arise, for example, seepage occurs in the neighbour's home, how will BCA approach the issue? How far does BCA rely on the Qualified Persons engaged by the project owners to ensure compliance with the relevant regulations, or will it actively investigate? While it would be ideal if all disputes between neighbours could be resolved through mediation, much depends on the nature of the problem and whether there are structural issues involved.

It is not my intention to criticise BCA, as I am aware of the good and efficient work it is doing in many areas. The fact is that residents look to BCA to uphold standards in construction works.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT

Zero-growth Car Policy

by Pritam Singh

Chairman, Sir, the move in October last year to remove the car and motorcycle growth rate factor from the supply formula that has been in place since 1990 is a signature transport policy development of this Government.

The previous Transport Minister, Mr. Lui Tuck Yew, had indicated that some growth in car numbers was required to meet the aspirational needs of car-owning Singaporeans. This position has now changed. In line with the Government's move towards a car-lite Singapore and the newly implemented zero-growth car and motorcycle policy, these changes have also provided new opportunities to review fundamental assumptions, beliefs and policies towards vehicle ownership in Singapore.

Decades ago, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew revealed that Singapore's water security made every other policy bend at the knee. Today, raising the TFR is important, if not critical for Singapore. To this end, is there scope to significantly tweak the COE system to support families with two or more Singaporean children with rebates, for example? Smaller families have added mobility needs that are particularly acute when children are young – from birth to around 12-16 years of age. No doubt, there are some families with young children who may not need a car. But each family's circumstances can be very different.

The Government has tried to raise TFR by offering a slew of incentives. However, the zero car-growth policy which kicked in last month also provides opportunities to review the current COE system and to assess how it can be updated to support other national objectives such as population replacement. Would the Ministry look into this prospect to support families with young children in particular?

In parallel, COE growth for motorcycles has also been frozen. However, many Singaporeans who own motorcycles are our low-income citizens, some of whom also use motorcycles for business. For example, couriers and delivery personnel. In light of a zero-growth policy for motorcycles as well, would the Ministry explore a cap on the maximum bidding price of a motorcycle COE, particularly if it is to be used to own a Class 2B motorcycle?

Safety in the Straits of Singapore

by Dennis Tan

Mr. Chairman, I declare my interest as a shipping lawyer.

The Straits of Singapore is one of the busiest waterways in the world. 84,000 vessels passed through the Straits in 2016. Between 2007 and 2017, there has been an average of 9 collisions, 9 sinkings, 30 groundings and 71 contact incidents reported within our port limits and the Straits of Singapore per year. This translates to about one reported maritime casualty every three days. This figure does not include major incidents involving loss of lives, pollution or navigational safety.

I am concerned whether the regularity of such incidents will lead some industry players to regard Singapore as an unsafe port thereby affecting our port's reputation. Is the Government taking any measures to enhance safety and reduce the number of maritime casualties? To improve navigational safety for all vessels, I would like to propose three changes for the current Vessel Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS) in operation in the Singapore Strait.

One, ban crossings over the TSS for ships leaving or intending to enter the Port of Singapore from or to the Straits. Vessels should be required to make U-turns at either ends of the TSS at (i) South of East Johor Straits and (ii) South of Tuas to access the desired directional lane of the TSS or to enter our port waters or anchorages. Without ships cutting across the two directional lanes of the TSS, traffic flow and safety will be enhanced.

Two, review the locations of pilot stations around our port waters or consider reducing its numbers to minimize the risk of ships drifting while lying in or near the TSS awaiting pilot boarding.

Three, require all ships to install and switch on their AIS system while transiting the Singapore Strait. Such vessels should include wooden ships as well as naval and other government vessels; some of which may not currently be doing so.

AIS helps to identify a ship's call-sign, speed and course of vessel which will assist navigators in all ships in the vicinity to avoid collisions. Naval vessels often do not switch on their AIS. But in the interest of the safety of the many vessels passing by this busy waterway every day, there is a case to reconsider this.

Had the destroyer USS John S McCain switched on her AIS in August 2017 when she was near Pedra Banca, it might well have assisted the oil tanker, Alnic MC, to be better able to spot the McCain and take better measures to avoid collision or minimize the damage suffered which included injuries and loss of 10 lives.

The TSS is like a busy highway. If military vehicles using a busy highway are expected to follow all road safety rules, why should naval vessels be any different? Congestion at the TSS or anchorages increases the risk of casualties. The consequences of any oil pollution resulting from a maritime casualty can be even more damaging. We should strive to enhance the safety of the Straits and minimize the risk of any casualties.

We may have to initiate discussions at the International Maritime Organization level for some of the measures I have suggested. But it will be worthwhile doing this in the interest of safety of lives at sea and the reputation of our port.

Bicycle-sharing and Geofencing

by Png Eng Huat

Sir, bike sharing is not a new concept but the advent of mobile technologies has allowed bike sharing companies to go dockless. What is really new about dockless bike sharing is the proliferation of indiscriminate bike parking. These shared bicycles are usually parked haphazardly at void decks, footpaths, lift lobbies, stairways, and I saw two of them parked in the middle of Nicoll Highway yesterday.

The amount of fines collected from bike sharing operators for not clearing their illegally parked bicycles and number of bicycles impounded by LTA, as reported in the news last month, is probably just the tip of the iceberg, due to the lack of resources to monitor the indiscriminate parking and enforce the fine.

In last October, LTA had initiated an agreement with bike sharing companies to implement geofencing by end of 2017 to rein in indiscriminate parking by errant riders. I am not sure if geofencing for bike sharing is in operation already but from the looks of it, I doubt it is.

Geofencing will not solve the problem of indiscriminate bike parking. It just confined the problem to a designated area and the boundary is not even accurate. Geofencing may just turn into geo-dumping over time as the designated area would be flooded with shared bikes, causing severe congestion and safety concerns, especially for elderly residents.

Adding QR code to complement geofencing is an improvement but such codes can be easily copied with a camera and printer, and you will have a list of parking stations to scan on demand to end your trip even if you are not at the designated parking lot. If the authority is going to such length to implement QR code geofencing to ensure bicycles are properly parked within a designated area, why not just implement a docking station? A quick search on the internet for bike sharing services around the world shows that most existing operations in big cities like New York, Melbourne and Paris all come with docking stations.

While I do hope the proposed licensing framework would help to rein in indiscriminate bike parking, I am concerned that geo-dumping would be the next big headache for bike sharing services. Sir, it was reported that there are about 100,000 dockless shared bicycles out there. How many QR code geofencing stations will be required to effectively tackle the indiscriminate parking problem? I hope LTA can share more on this because dockless bike sharing has turned Singapore into one giant bicycle parking lot.

Personal Mobility Aid in an Aging Society

by Png Eng Huat

My second cut. Sir, the proliferation of Personal Mobility Device (PMD) and Personal Mobility Aid (PMA) in our estates and footpaths is phenomenal.

PMD allows users, usually with no mobility issues, to zip from one place to another faster. Some owners of PMD even use them to piggyback their children from schools, bus stops or train stations. PMD basically saves time for the users.

PMA, on the other hand, allows our elderly Singaporeans to get out of their homes to eat, shop, or just watch the world go by. It allows them to continue to do the simple activities of community living, without which, they may be confined to their homes. In short, PMA allows our elderly citizens with mobility issues a quality of life.

I am seeing more PMA in my estate now. I am happy to see these elderly residents living independent lives. However, moving about in a PMA can be challenging on existing footpaths. PMA comes in all shapes and sizes. All of them are larger than PMD and they move a lot slower. The footpaths along the roads are certainly not PMA-friendly. I had seen some PMA moving precariously close to the edge of some busy footpaths and I was worried they may tip over.

The footpaths from the nearest bus stops, train stations, hawker centres, suburban malls, neighbourhood centres and so on, to the nearest HDB block or private estate need to be widened soon to accommodate these mobility aid.

I also urge LTA to do another round of initiative to mop up those remaining spots with barriers so that PMA users can have a smoother connection on our footpaths.

Last, I also hope LTA could initiate a whole-of-Government approach to accommodate PMA in our society, which in my view, has given our elderly a fresh breath of life in their sunset years.

Safer Signalized Junction

by Png Eng Huat

My third cut. Sir, I have spoken about making signalized junction safer in the Committee of Supply debate in 2013, and again in 2015.

Traffic lights are supposed to give all road users a sense of order, safety, and security. Our children are taught from young by their parents and in schools to wait for the green man signal to come on before they can cross the road. When the lights are in your favour, it must surely mean it is safe to cross. But as it turns out, this is not a given, depending on the traffic junctions you are at.

This presumption of safety is lost when signalized junctions are programmed with shared green time. Such junctions allow vehicles to turn when there are no pedestrians crossing during the green man phase. This, according to the Minister, is to ensure smoother traffic flow on our roads.

According to the Ministry, there were on average about three fatal accidents and 40 injury accidents per year at signalized junctions involving a pedestrian or cyclist and vehicles turning right during the green man phase. Although the Ministry did not have the breakdown of whether these accidents happened at what type of junctions, 90% of our signalized junctions are programmed with shared green time. I am sure there are many unreported near misses as well.

Last October, LTA was reported to be taking steps to make such signalized junctions safer after some pedestrians involving vehicles knocking down pedestrians who had the right of way came to light. There were two cases cited in the news, one of which was fatal. It was reported that the fatal accident happened at a signalized junction with shared green time.

Not only pedestrians are not protected at such junctions, they may also be assigned 15% blame as a Court of Appeal ruling in 2016 had shown, even though the lights were in their favour.

Sir, if green man signal at such junctions cannot guarantee safety for pedestrians, then the anomaly must be resolved. The president of the Automobile Association of Singapore was quoted to have said, "Overseas researchers have shown that pedestrians are better protected with the implementation of split-phase lights. Statistics have also shown that there is a larger decline in pedestrian incidents as well as multi-vehicle crashes when green man time is not shared".

I truly believe that ensuring a smoother flow of traffic on our roads will not cultivate a road safety culture. Enforcing a little patience by doing away with shared green time at signalized junctions, on the other hand, will ensure road safety by default.

Safe Use of PMDs and Bicycles

by Dennis Tan

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The introduction of the Active Mobility Act last year brought new laws over the use of PMDs and electric bicycles. However, inconsiderate or reckless usage of e-scooters and its illegal use on roads have continued. Many elderly folks are terrified of sharing walkways with them.

Although electric bikes are now required to be registered and only pre-approved models are allowed to be used and riders are required to wear helmets, we still see illegal or unregistered e-bikes on the road and e-bike riders not using helmets.

Enforcement efforts by the authorities have stepped up last year. We read of publicity of e-scooters being impounded for illegal use on roads or illegal e-bikes being impounded. We see many banners hung on street lamps highlighting the PMD ban on roads.

To be fair, the increase in enforcement against errant e-scooter users is a step in the right direction. If insufficient efforts are rendered at this stage, we will have a long term problem of illegal, reckless and inconsiderate usage. A poor riding culture will perpetuate.

Our cycling culture is a case in point. In my speech during the Second Reading of the Active Mobility Bill, I highlighted the legacy of the lack of enforcement against errant cyclists. Today, we can still see cyclists riding against the traffic or not stopping at red lights on a daily basis. Inconsistent enforcement between errant cyclists and PMD users raises questions of selective enforcement.

Timely and consistent enforcement is important as it sets the boundaries for human behaviour. But law alone is insufficient. We need to create the right culture. In developed countries like Netherlands and the UK, cyclists comply with cycling rules not because they fear a fine but they grew up learning how to put on the right behaviour.

We have a problem with our riding culture here, first with cycling, then with e-bikes and now with PMDs. The lack of political will for enforcement and to create a right cycling culture in our earlier years has made it much harder for us now. In the past year, the problem has been compounded by the popularity of bike sharing.

Enforcement alone without education is insufficient to change our riding culture. I support our current public education efforts. But we can do more as much of the existing efforts are voluntary, not prescriptive and their reach is limited even if targeted at certain classes of cyclists.

I shared with this House previously that as a university student in England, I cycled on a pavement once and got roundly told off by an old lady. As a pedestrian, the old lady was familiar with the rules even if she might not be a cyclist, and she spoke up.

I urge the Government to try and reset our riding culture by having a structured compulsory course in our schools for the legal, safe and considerate use of bicycles and PMDs. The next generation will grow up knowing what is right and acceptable.

The course should cover all basic rules and etiquette governing the use of bicycles, electric bikes and PMDs. Basic road traffic rules applicable to cyclists, PMD users and pedestrians should also be taught. This course can be split up over different age groups over time. For example, start with an introductory course for preschoolers and have subsequent courses in early and late Primary school levels. If a young child can learn to keep left on a skate scooter while riding along the footpath in the park or slow down and give way to an elderly auntie passing by, over time, it will help to engender the right cycling culture in the long run.

Meantime, please step up on our existing public education efforts for all age groups: more banners, posters, exhibitions or even a campaign on social media and television. Do this for all types, not just PMDs. When everyone knows the rights and wrongs, more people will refrain from wrongful or inconsiderate usage.

The Active Mobility Advisory Panel has recommended the registration of e-scooters. It may help to identify users and facilitate enforcement and hence better accountability. However, it alone will not resolve existing problems with our riding culture.

In conclusion, may I implore the Government to work towards creating a culture of legal, safe and considerate use of bicycles and PMDs?

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
MINISTRY OF
SOCIAL AND FAMILY
DEVELOPMENT

Youths in Criminal Justice System

by Sylvia Lim

Chairman, Sir, Singapore has acceded to the Convention of the Rights of the Child, which defines children as persons below the age of 18. Being a signatory, Singapore is obliged to take all measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the Convention.

Our Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA) currently only protects youths up to the age of 16 years. This means that youths between 16 and 18 years old do not enjoy the Act's protections, such as not having their particulars published in the media and having more sentencing options.

In February 2017, an inter-agency committee chaired by the Attorney-General's Chambers submitted a number of recommendations to the Government, including the recommendation to raise the CYPA cut-off age from 16 to 18. One year on, has the Government come to any conclusions on doing so, and when will this be effected? If not, what are some issues the Government is grappling with?

Office of Public Guardian

by Sylvia Lim

Chairman, Sir, according to section 31 of the Mental Capacity Act, the Public Guardian has a total of eleven functions that are geared towards enabling and protecting persons who lack mental capacity. These functions include setting up and maintain a register of Lasting Powers of Attorney (LPAs), setting up and maintaining a register of court orders that appoint deputies, receiving reports from donees and deputies, and investigating any alleged violation of any provision in the Mental Capacity Act, including complaints about the way in which donees and deputies are exercising their powers.

Given the many onerous functions of the Public Guardian, I would like to find out how many staff work in the OPG and whether there is enough manpower to handle the work. To illustrate, the OPG has in recent months written to applicants to register LPAs that it would take

longer than the preferred 15 to 20 working days to review their applications, due to a greater than expected volume of LPA applications.

I know of one case where an LPA sent to the OPG for registration is still pending after three months. Such delays might also have serious consequences, if the donor's mental state is fast deteriorating and he becomes mentally incapable while his LPA application is pending for registration by the OPG.

I am concerned that if the function of registration is already backlogged, how does the OPG carry out the other more difficult functions, such as investigating alleged violations of the Act?

Sir, I also note from the OPG's website that there is a list of Revoked LPAs that is updated periodically. As at 28 February 2018, the number of Revoked LPAs was recorded as 1,841. Does the Ministry know what the common reasons were for the donors to revoke their LPAs? Do these reasons indicate that there is some lack of understanding of how the LPA works?

Eldercare Leave

by Chen Show Mao

Sir, on the subject of Eldercare Leave for employees caring for their parents, the Minister announced last month that the Ministry is prepared to study the idea in consultation with the tripartite partners though we should also give businesses some time to adjust and adapt to recent enhancements in Family Leave.

As the Ministry looks into the matter of Eldercare Leave for caregivers who are also employed in full-time or part-time jobs, I would like to urge that they will also consider ways of providing assistance to those caregivers who are not.

Sir, in many ways, informal or unpaid caregivers enable other Singaporeans to carry out the economic activities that are counted in our GDP, while their own caregiving is not. As of now, the burden of informal caregiving falls disproportionately on women. And our dependence on this group of Singaporeans is real. It is substantial and very often unacknowledged.

Eldercare Leave could well help relief some of the pressure on informal caregivers who also work at other jobs, but almost half of our informal caregivers to seniors do not work at other jobs, often because of the unpaid caregiving responsibilities that they have taken on to their financial detriment and to their reduced retirement adequacy.

Would the Government consider measures, such as CPF top-ups for full-time informal caregivers in low-income households to reduce the pressure of being under-employed and under-prepared for retirement, as a result of taking on the responsibilities of caring for their loved seniors?

Childcare Facilities in New Estates

by Png Eng Huat

Sir, like many residents, I welcome New Estate for its inclusiveness in providing much needed facilities at Senior Activity Centres and childcare centres at the void deck.

Residents at the two new estates in Hougang spoke about the convenience of having such facilities within a stone's throw from where they live. Some young parents told me part of the reason they bought a flat in this estate was predicated on the availability of childcare facilities in the neighbourhood.

However, the number of places available at these childcare centres are limited due in part to high demand and also to the size of the centre. Thus, some residents were disappointed to find out that despite having a childcare centre next door, enrolment is not a given. Some residents shared that they even attempted to apply for a place for their children before these centres were completed or way before the centre opened their doors for registration, but were always met with a waiting list.

In March 2015, the Early Childhood Development Agency was reported to have said that the agency does monitor local demand and works closely with HDB on the issue of childcare places. It said, "the New Estate with more young families, childcare centres are pre-built into new built-to-order development to cater to demand ahead of time". Thus, I would like to find out from the Ministry whether such demand are adequately met in New Estates?

Furthermore, in the planning of such highly-sought after facilities, could the Ministry ensure that residents living nearest to these childcare centres get some priority for admission? This arrangement should apply to anchor operators, especially since they are given subsidies and grant to operate childcare centres for the sole purpose of serving the New Estate and the surrounding community.

At this point, I would like to declare my interest as my wife has an interest in special needs childcare.

Rising Childcare and Infant Care Fees

by Pritam Singh

Chairman, Sir, parents who send their children to anchor operator My First Skool were hit by news of another school fee hike this year of between \$6 and \$33 for childcare; and \$5 and \$20 for infant care. These hikes this year come hot on the heels of similar hikes by My First Skool in 2013, 2015 and 2016, which cumulatively mean that it now costs \$100 a month or more, and more than \$1,200 a year to enroll a child into My First Skool.

Chairman, these hikes hit the middle income the hardest. It may also be a disincentive to some couples who may want to have more children. Even though the absolute increase is below the fee cap established by the Ministry, four fee hikes since 2013 appear to suggest that the fee cap can operate as a shield to raise prices, particularly when parents do not have a clear idea for the reasons behind the price hikes.

In 2015, I asked the Ministry if it would provide a breakdown of the cost components to justify fee hikes at childcare operators, but this was rejected. Ironically, NTUC which owns My First Skool recently called for higher childcare subsidies to help middle-income parents.

Can the Ministry share details on the cost pressures impacting anchor operators in the child and infant care space? How does the Ministry check on the basis and justification of fee hikes, particularly from anchor operators who would benefit the most from economies of scale?

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
MINISTRY OF
COMMUNICATION
AND INFORMATION

National Translation Committee

by Low Thia Khiang

Sir, in Mandarin.

Chairman, it has been four years since the National Translation Committee was established in 2014. I would like the Minister to provide an update on the work of the Committee.

In order to encourage Singaporeans to pay more attention to translation, government agencies should take the lead. Take Chinese for example, currently, the media and the members of the public can check the standard translation of official terms from MCI's database. However, this glossary page was hidden in a remote corner of the MCI website, and people who are not aware of this service cannot find it at all. This database does not contain names of buildings and the streets either.

A reader from Zaobao recently pointed out that there were many translation errors with regard to the Chinese street names in the pamphlet distributed by a certain Town Council. There used to be standardised Chinese translation of street names, and SLA has published a Chinese version of the street directory before.

Currently, if the public wants to find the Chinese name of a certain street, they can go to the website of Street and Building Names Board (SBNB) under URA to check. However, there were few people who are aware of such a service.

To standardise the official translated names is the job of the Committee. However, after standardisation, if the public is still unaware of its existence, it would be such a waste. For the convenience of the media and the public, and to signal the Government's commitment in maintaining the standard of translation, I suggest an independent portal be set up, so that the public can check the official translated government terms easily including Chinese street names.

If there are enough visits to the website, we will be able to collect enough data to develop this website into a machine translation system. This will help improve Singapore's translation standard.

(In Mandarin)

主席先生，全国翻译委员会自 2014 年成立至今已有 4 年，我要求通讯及新闻部提供全国翻译委员会的工作进展报告。

为了提高国人对翻译的重视，我们应该从政府机构做起。以华文为例，目前当媒体和公众人士需要使用官方认可的正式名称的华文翻译时，可以到通讯及新闻部网站的资料库查询 (<https://www.gov.sg/resources/translation>)。但是，这个网页却被藏在网站内的某个角落，不知道有这项服务存在的人根本就找不到。这个数据库也没有收录建筑和街道名称。

日前有读者投函《联合早报》，指出某市镇理事会所发的传单中，华文街道的译名存在许多错误。这些街道名称本来是有统一的译名，土地管理局就曾经出版过中文版的街道指南。

目前，如果公众需要查询街道的正确名称，可以到隶属于市区重建局的“街道与建筑名称局”所提供的网上数据库查询 (<https://www.ura.gov.sg/sbnbWeb/searchsbAction.do>)。可是，同样的，知道这项服务的人少之又少。统一官方正式名称的翻译是全国翻译委员会的工作。但是，如果统一以后公众却毫不知情，那就十分可惜。为了方便公众和媒体使用，同时表示政府重视翻译，我建议政府设立一个独立的网站数据库，专门让公众查询官方名称的正式翻译，包括华文的街道名称。

如果这个网站有足够的使用人数，能够收集到足够的数据，以后也可以把这个网站发展成一个机器翻译系统，这将有助于整体提升我国的翻译水平。

Tackling Cyberbullying

by Daniel Goh

Chairman, Sir, a 2014 study done by the Singapore Children's Society and the Institute of Mental Health found that one in nine adolescents said they have been victims of

cyberbullying. As social media and messaging application platforms become more prevalent, the Ministry must tackle this problem head-on, and fast.

Last year, the Media Literacy Council organised the "Better Internet" campaign to promote responsible online habits and safe Internet use. However, the resources available on the Council website are limited; there is no dedicated helpline, no support network or resources for parents and teachers and no channels for victims to submit cyberbullying reports.

There is much we can learn from Australia, where the Office of the eSafety Commissioner is responsible for promoting online safety. The Office provides extensive resources on reporting of cyberbullying, helplines, online safety programmes and resources for schools and classrooms. The first step we can take is to organise a centralised resource bank, as well as to create a safe space for victims to take refuge in. I urge the Ministry consider this to tackle cyberbullying.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Quality Care and Patient Safety

by Sylvia Lim

Sir, over the years, I occasionally encountered residents dissatisfied with the quality of care received at our public hospitals. Their grievances range from an unexpected death in hospital, to a physical accident while conveying a patient, causing patient injury.

In cases of unexpected death, the coroner and police are likely to be activated, ensuring a strong measure of independence into the inquiry. However, in non-fatal cases, the hospital is usually the one which conducts an investigation or review into the incident.

As the hospitals are investigating their own handling of patients, a question that arises would be: what safeguards there are to ensure there is independence injected into the review process? How far is input from patients or next-of-kin sought in such investigations? Will the patient or his representative have the opportunity to contradict evidence presented by the staff? What role does the Ministry itself play in ensuring that hospital investigations are fair and transparent to patients?

In a 2004 article entitled "Quest for Quality Care and Patient Safety", MK Lim of the NUS Faculty of Medicine noted that Singapore had more than 10 years ago, moved to a broader concept of quality assurance in healthcare that included the monitoring of clinical indicators and medical errors. According to him, what was lacking then, included public involvement and patient empowerment. Have we made any improvements in these areas?

I am aware that MOH has since moved on and now has a healthcare performance group that oversees clinical quality and care effectiveness. Could the Ministry tell us more about the priorities of this group?

Finally, the UK in 2017 set up its Healthcare Safety Investigation branch, an independent body to conduct no-fault reviews of incidents to enhance patient safety and knowledge sharing across healthcare institutions. How are we doing this here?

Personalised Medication and DNA Edit

by Low Thia Khiang

Chairman, Sir, personalised medicine which involves the customisation of medical treatments to specific patient groups based on genetic profiles, seems to be a fast-emerging field of clinical research and application in Singapore. But I believe the general public knows very little about this.

There is, for example, the National Precision Medicine Initiative, which appears to need supercomputing resources to gather the genomic information of whole Singapore and Southeast Asian populations to determine genetic risk and other personalised treatment.

Can the Minister share more about the National Precision Medicine Initiative and, whether MOH has oversight of the Initiative and its programmes? What is the long-term plan for the development of precision medicine in Singapore? Will a national registry of genetic disorders be developed? If so, how will it be used and how will the data be shared, nationally and internationally? Does precision medicine research here involve DNA editing? If so, what are the bio-ethical rules governing the research?

In March last year, MOH announced that the standards for the provision of clinical genetic testing were being drafted and would be ready as a code of practice by late 2017 before becoming enforceable in late 2018. Is the Ministry still on track with this timeline?

It was reported in the Straits Times in August last year that hundreds of patients have already benefitted from personalised medicine treatments in Tan Tock Seng Hospital, KK Hospital and Singapore General Hospital. I would like to know how will ordinary Singaporeans benefit from precision medicine and how will the Government manage the cost of its widespread usage?

Pricing of Vaccines

by Leon Perera

Mr Chairman, Sir, some vaccines, like pneumococcal and HPV, are not subsidised but can be paid for using Medisave. Minister Gan said, in reply to Mr Low Thia Kiang at last year's COS, that Government Medisave top-ups can be used to pay for vaccines.

However, many Singaporeans may not want to use Medisave for vaccines, preferring to keep the Medisave for bigger bills incurred later in life. The HPV vaccine, for instance, can prevent most cervical cancers, saving lives and cost, but only about one quarter of Singapore women are vaccinated.

I have two suggestions: firstly, can the ECI consider studying and quantifying the marginal benefit in disease incidence and marginal long-term cost saving for the Government in healthcare subsidies, Medifund and so on from the increased vaccine take up that a bigger subsidy for the vaccine price would bring?

Secondly, can MOH study, by way of perhaps, a trial to what extent lowering vaccine prices through targeted Government subsidies for key vaccines would result in higher take-up of the vaccine?

Based on these two actions and their results, my suggestion is that MOH can introduce targeted subsidies to greatly reduce the price of vaccines if there is evidence that this would stimulate higher take up and not only reduce disease incidence later in life but reap long-term cost savings for the Government.

Mental Health Support in Heartlands

by Daniel Goh

Chairman Sir, we have many agencies and programmes promoting mental well-being and assisting Singaporeans with mental health issues. The National Council of Social Service publishes the Mental Health Resource Directory on its website. The Directory is 60 pages long

and there are 11 helplines listed in it. By 2021, the Agency for Integrated Care will manage 50 community outreach teams to raise awareness of mental health, identify those at risk and conduct preventive care programmes. Also, by 2021, the Mental Health GP Partnership Programme run by MOH will partner 180 GP clinics to manage patients with mental health issues.

With these programmes and resources, we have the elements of a mental health support system in place in HDB estates. By themselves, the programmes and resources can be too complex for a person with mental health issues to navigate. The next step thus, is to bring the elements together and integrate them to build a system that is easily accessible to people with mental health issues or their family, with a No Wrong Door policy to direct persons to the most appropriate help.

I have two questions in this regard. Just as AIC has been designated as the central agency to coordinate diverse senior care services to better deliver care to our seniors, should there be a central agency to coordinate mental health care services? Secondly, we already have an accessible network deeply embedded in HDB towns that coordinate the delivery of services to residents. This is the network of Social Service Offices under MSF. Would it make sense for MOH to partner MSF to leverage the SSOs to coordinate mental health care services in the heartlands?

National Dementia Plan

by Daniel Goh

My second cut. Dementia is the most prevalent neuro-degenerative disease that affects an estimated one in 10 people aged over 60 years old. There were over 40,000 seniors suffering from dementia in 2016. This is expected to rise to 92,000 by 2030. Dementia poses significant health and socio-economic burdens to patients and caregivers and to society as a whole.

I would like to propose for the Ministry to seriously consider a National Dementia Plan that systematically addresses the needs of dementia patients, promoting public awareness and improving the quality of healthcare, social care and long-term care support and services for all affected. Countries like Korea, Japan and Australia are implementing similar high-level plans, making dementia a public health priority. These plans include accessible early

detection services, access to information, pre- and post-diagnosis care and support, as well as supporting people with dementia in aged communities to remain socially engaged and active.

In 2016, the Agency for Integrated Care was discussing plans with stakeholders to develop a national registry of dementia patients so that they can be more easily located if they go missing and their care-givers contacted. However, these plans were put on hold last year. Would the Minister give an account of why the plans were put on hold? Were there issues with getting the consent of families? Were there issues with implementation linked to the registry held by the neighbourhood police centre in Yishun, as part of the dementia-friendly community initiative launched there in 2016? Would the plans for a national registry be revived?

Silver Towns

by Leon Perera

I declare that I am the CEO of an international research consultancy whose Korean arm has researched this subject.

Mr Chairman, the Korean Silver Town model is worth a closer look since it is a roughly S\$10 billion industry and it has had a long runway in Korea, evolving over the decades.

In Korea, private sector Silver Towns emerged in the 1990s. Initially, they were driven by big conglomerates or chaebol, who developed a site for senior residences but also built in proximate facilities like retail, personal services, sports and recreation facilities and even in some cases, childcare and play facilities for the grandchildren when children visit their parents.

The Korean Silver Town model emphasises high-rise, high-density living, integrating smart technology, which is a little different from the assisted living and retirement community models seen elsewhere.

Silver Towns in Korea have since evolved. There are different Silver Towns in Korea with different mixes of facilities catering to different price points.

Silver Towns embody a balanced point between, on the one hand, personal independence and freedom to seniors and, on the other hand, the presence of medical staff, facilities and the most structured daily routine administered by professionals for those seniors who need it, such as those having dementia.

I do not suggest Silver Towns as a substitute to seniors staying with their children. However, for some seniors, this is not possible while for others, this is not desirable. So Silver Towns could be part of the eco-system, catering to the needs of our seniors, offering one option for living arrangements. Lest I be misunderstood, I do not advocate that Silver Towns be run by the Government as some are in Korea or come with 100% subsidies.

The roadmap to this could be, after the concept has been studied, to issue a tender to invite master developers to build and operate a Silver Town. A pilot project could be used to test demand. Means-tested subsidies could perhaps be applied in some cases.

The Government could also nudge Silver Towns to become test-beds for the trial of new, disruptive concepts catering to the senior community and make it convenient for NGOs to target and trial programmes aimed at the seniors.

Sir, Korean Silver Towns are not without their negative points but I hope that the Government will study this idea further.

War on Diabetes

by Chen Show Mao

Sir, in 2015, the International Diabetes Foundation reported that Singapore has the second highest proportion of diabetics among developed nations. In 2016, the Minister for Health declared War on Diabetes. In 2017, the Prime Minister spoke of diabetes as one of the three key long-term issues for Singapore.

Sir, the importance to Singapore on the War on Diabetes cannot be overstated. Our children and young people are increasingly overweight. One in three Singaporeans has a lifetime risk of developing diabetes with serious and costly consequences. Could the Minister give us a report of progress from the front? What are our new and continuing efforts, plans, strategies and tactics?

In this connection, could the Ministry explore avenues for working with the food manufacturing industry and MTI to apply existing incentives and support local food manufacturers to release low-sugar snacks and drinks? The Industry Transformation May (ITM) for food manufacturing is more advanced than most other ITMs and seems well-placed to develop and promote low-sugar products on an industry basis.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
MINISTRY OF CULTURE,
COMMUNITY AND YOUTH

Malayness

by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Last year, when the issue of Elected Presidency caught our attention, there was a discussion on the issue of Malayness. This discussion did not take place among Malay Singaporeans only, but also received significant attention from Singaporeans in general.

The question being hotly debated was how a person is recognised as a Malay or who can be called a Malay.

Many questions were asked, views being brought forward and many examples were also highlighted. In short, there was a robust and lively discussion, just to seek a real answer on the issue of Malayness.

I understand, and I believe the other Malay MPs in this Chamber do too, why this issue of identity cropped up. However, in order to explain this matter clearly, I would like to give an illustration or example.

For instance, an individual who sees himself as a Malay/Muslim was informed by Mendaki that he is not eligible for the TTFS scheme because his identity card showed that his race is Indian. This individual tried to explain that he speaks Malay at home and he leads his life as a Malay; he eats asam pedas, wears baju kurung during Hari Raya and so on. But the reply he got was "Sorry, your identity card shows that your race is Indian."

Time passed, and the same individual obtained his degree, started work and got married. He then decided to serve the people through politics. He wanted to contest in the General Elections.

During the General Elections, this individual then decided to contest in a GRC as the Malay minority candidate. He submitted an application form to the Elections Department to obtain the Certificate of the Malay Community Committee, but he is not that confident whether his application will be accepted or otherwise, since his identity card showed that his race is Indian. At the same time, he does not feel comfortable to apply as an Indian minority candidate since he does not possess any characteristics as someone who is Indian.

When this individual was informed that his application to obtain the Certificate of the Malay Community Committee was approved, he thought about the reason given to him for being ineligible for TTFS because his race was Indian.

Sir, to sum up, the purpose of my speech is to call upon the Minister to initiate efforts to study the issue that I have shared, in order to achieve consistency or harmony in the way someone is recognised as a Malay or otherwise. I suggest that a committee be established for this purpose to make things clear, and at the same time, avoid any confusion in the future.

(In Malay)

Pada tahun lepas semasa isu Presiden Dipilih mendapat perhatian, telah tercetus perbincangan berkaitan dengan isu ke-Melayuan. Perbincangan ini bukan hanya berlaku di kalangan masyarakat Melayu Singapura malah telah mendapat perhatian yang agak luar biasa dari masyarakat Singapura amnya.

Persoalan yang hangat diperbincangkan adalah pengiktirafan sebagai seorang Melayu atau siapa yang boleh dikatakan sebagai seorang yang berbangsa Melayu.

Banyak soalan-soalan yang diajukan, pandangan-pandangan yang diutarakan dan banyak juga contoh-contoh yang diketengahkan. Pendek kata, kecoh dan riuh perbincangan yang berlaku, hanya untuk mencari jawapan yang sebenar tentang isu ke-Melayuan.

Saya dan saya juga percaya AP-AP Melayu di dalam Dewan ini memahami sebab tercetusnya isu identiti ini. Namun, demi untuk memberi pencerahan bagi perkara ini, saya ingin memberi satu situasi atau contoh.

Contohnya, seorang individu yang menganggap dirinya sebagai seorang Melayu/Islam telah diberitahu oleh Mendaki bahawa beliau tidak layak untuk skim TTFS atas sebab kad pengenalan menunjukkan beliau adalah berbangsa India. Individu ini cuba menerangkan bahawa beliau bertutur bahasa Melayu di rumah dan cara kehidupan beliau adalah bersifat ke-Melayuan; makan asam pedas, pakai baju Melayu semasa Hari Raya dan sebagainya. Namun jawapan yang beliau terima, "Maaf, kad pengenalan awak menunjukkan anda berbangsa India".

Masa berlalu, individu yang sama telah meraih ijazah dan masuk ke alam pekerjaan dan rumahtangga. Beliau kemudian mengambil keputusan untuk mencurahkan bakti kepada

masyarakat melalui platform politik. Beliau berhasrat untuk bertanding pada pilihanraya umum.

Tiba musim pilihanraya umum, individu ini telah membuat keputusan untuk bertanding di sebuah GRC sebagai calon minoriti Melayu. Beliau telah mengemukakan borang permohonan kepada Pejabat Pilihanraya untuk mendapatkan Sijil Jawatankuasa Masyarakat Melayu, namun beliau agak kurang konfiden tentang samada permohonannya akan diluluskan atau tidak, atas sebab kad pengenalan beliau menunjukkan beliau adalah berbangsa India. Pada masa yang sama, beliau tidak rasa selesa untuk membuat permohonan sebagai calon minoriti India kerana beliau tidak mempunyai ciri-ciri seorang yang berbangsa India.

Apabila individu ini diberitahu bahawa permohonan beliau untuk mendapatkan Sijil Jawatankuasa Masyarakat Melayu telah diluluskan, beliau imbas kembali pada alasan yang diberi apabila dirinya dikatakan tidak layak untuk mendapatkan TFS kerana beliau adalah seorang yang berbangsa India.

Tuan, rumusan atau tujuan ucapan saya adalah untuk menyeru kepada Menteri agar usaha-usaha dilakukan untuk mendalami isu yang saya kongsi ini untuk mencapai satu konsistensi atau keselarasan dalam cara pengiktirafan samada seseorang itu berbangsa Melayu atau sebaliknya. Saya cadang agar sebuah jawatankuasa ditubuhkan bagi tujuan ini untuk mendapatkan kejernihan sekaligus mengelakkan kekeliruan pada masa mendatang.

Terima kasih.

Community Development Councils

by Pritam Singh

Mr Chairman, Sir, the scope of what the CDCs have been structured to do has changed significantly over the years.

In his speech on the 20th anniversary of the CDCs last year, the Prime Minister identified the issue of worker upgrading as an urgent one. How does the CDC plan to work with the Future Economy Council to meet this objective?

In 2013, the CDCs signed an MOU with the then-Spring and MTI to set up five satellite SME centres in each district. While providing job support is a very helpful community function, is there a greater scope to draw more operational efficiencies and productivity by directing residents to proceed straight to the FSCs or even the CCs, in collaboration with Workforce Singapore, the e2i centres and the two foreign career matching providers – particularly for residents who need a job urgently? Is the position of the CDC as an intermediary necessary?

Finally, it has been the Government's position that all Grassroots Advisors must be from the PAP, the reason being that such individuals are there to support Government policies and it would be incongruous for opposition politicians, even if they are elected, to do the same. Can I clarify what is the nature of the relationship between an opposition MP and the Town Council of which he or she is an elected member on the one hand and the CDC on the other? Does it follow the approach taken by the People's Association vis-à-vis Grassroots Advisers? What are the differences, if any?

Roles of a Grassroots Adviser

by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Sir, in 2011, responding to a public query on why an elected opposition Member of Parliament cannot be appointed as grassroots adviser, the PA spokesperson mentioned to a Forum letter, I quote: "The PA and grassroots organisations gather feedback from the public, explain Government policies and programmes to citizens, and implementing social programmes." It was further mentioned that: "It is not possible to appoint Opposition MPs as advisers because we cannot ask Opposition MPs to help the Government to connect better with the people." Another excuse given was "Nor can PA reasonably expect them to help the Government explain, implement or improve its policies".

Sir, I would like to argue that the current arrangement of appointing the ruling party candidates who contested and were defeated in the general election or any other ruling political party member to be grassroots adviser of a constituency is not right, and the People's Association's reasons for not appointing Opposition Members of Parliament to be grassroots advisers, as cited earlier, does not legitimise the reasons to appoint the two groups of individuals I mentioned earlier.

Sir, to address the People's Association's concerns that the roles of grassroots advisers are not suitable for Opposition MPs due to the reasons provided, the People's Association can alternatively appoint a retired or even a current serving civil or public servant of a certain high position, such as Permanent Secretary or statutory board CEO, to be a grassroots adviser. Appointing persons with such reputable civil and public service background and experience is very relevant and much more appropriate, as they are in a better position to explain Government policies and programmes to citizens, implementing social programmes, as well as helping the Government to connect better with the people.

Another positive reason for appointing such individuals is that it will help to eliminate or avoid any possibilities of: one, conflict of interest; and, two, politicalisation of the grassroots adviser position, as compared to the current practice of appointing the ruling party's defeated candidates and any other ruling political party members as the grassroots adviser.

Sir, I would like to seek the Ministry's agreement on this. Touching on the matter of politicalisation and conflict of interest, I would like to seek answers from the Ministry whether there is, indeed, an element of politicalisation and conflict of interest in the role of grassroots adviser in the following two scenarios. I have cited these scenarios during the recent Public Sector (Governance) Bill to seek some clarification. I was told by Minister Ong Ye Kung to direct the matter to PMO. I submitted this cut under PMO but was redirected to MCCY.

First scenario: A member of a political party who contested but was defeated in the general election holds two designations at the same time: one, as the branch chairman of a political party; and, two, as an adviser to People's Association's grassroots organisation.

Second scenario: A grassroots adviser conducts house visits accompanied by PA's grassroots leaders and staff of statutory boards, such as the HDB, and inviting residents to attend his Meet-the-People session if residents require him to appeal on their behalf. Nonetheless, the MPS session is held in a political party branch office by the grassroots adviser who writes referral or appeal letters using a political party's letterhead and signs off as the party branch chairman of a political party.

Sir, I hope the Ministry will be able to provide clarity and answer.

Class Divide

by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Sir, an IPS study on social capital, released in December 2017 highlighted class as an emerging social divide in Singapore, but that this potential divide can be softened by having different groups mix to improve sentiments towards national identity, national pride, social trust and trust towards other racial, religious and nationality groups.

In a response to the report, the Government said that it would take steps to help facilitate opportunities for people of different backgrounds to mix; and for sensitive issues, in general, deeper level of engagement and discussions are needed.

On serious divides, such as race and religion, such engagements have included the Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles (IRCCs), where Singaporeans can have deep discussions and ask difficult questions. In tackling trust divides, such engagements are very important. As such, given the utility of the IRCC for the respective discussion on race and religion, does the Government have an IRCC-equivalent for discussion on issues of class?

First, as it is with race and religion, awareness on class differences can take various forms, such as acknowledging differences in the use of language – basically how they speak English, for instance – types of social norms, areas of interest and hobbies. Having a platform that acknowledges these differences and allows a discussion on them can be a step forward towards bridging the divide.

Second, given the shared facilities and common areas, for example, lift lobbies and void decks, are key to improve social engagement among Singaporeans, how does the Government plan to bridge residents across the public-private property divide?

Sports Hub

by Sylvia Lim

The former National Stadium was our nation's primary venue for events, big and small, including the National Day Parades, and a source of national pride and connection. The \$1.3 billion new Singapore Sports Hub, mooted as a replacement for this icon, was the biggest Public-Private-Partnership project at its inception, and was noted to have three cornerstones: an integrated hub for sports and entertainment, a commercially viable model, and a national and global icon.

Since the beginning of operations in 2014, three years after its project, however, the Sports Hub has been plagued with questions on these cornerstones. Even as it saw the opening of the SEA Games in 2015, and the National Day Parade (NDP) in 2016, there were well-publicised disputes over management woes, consortium disagreements and even tensions between the Government and the consortium over the NDP.

The NDP held in the Sports Hub in 2016 had a bill of \$39.4 million, over double the bill for the NDP held at the Floating Platform in the past years, and only costing \$1 million less than the SG50 NDP held at the Padang. Perhaps, it is little wonder that the Floating Platform is now mooted as the primary venue of the NDP, with its redevelopment to NS Square.

Even as the Government preaches patience, can the Ministry explain what benchmark it is using to measure the Sports Hub's viability and success?

On the issue of the Hub's cornerstone as a national icon, there seems to me a real risk that it might become a white elephant. Now that the NDP is not going to be held at the Sports Hub most of the time, how will the Government steer or nudge the Sports Hub to have a strong connection with Singaporeans at large?

Singapore Football

by Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Sir, FAS has elected their new Council members on 29 April 2017. A day later, media reports mentioned that the newly-elected FAS President, Mr Lim Kia Tong, as saying "The new work starts now and my team and I promise that we will work tirelessly to heal Singapore football and bring back the glory days".

It has been almost a year since the new Council took office. I would like to seek an update from the Ministry on whether FAS has come up with strategic directions and goals for Singapore football, especially for our National Team. I would also like to ask: whether FAS has come up with a masterplan to heal Singapore football. If no, when can we expect one?

Secondly, I would like to echo Singapore's football fans and enthusiasts frequently-asked question: what has gone wrong with our National Football Team?

It was reported in the media in October 2017 that our National Football Team has slumped to its lowest ever position in FIFA's overall ranking – dropped 11 notches from September 2017 ranking of 162 to 173.

In contrast, our Asian counterparts, such as Philippines, Vietnam and Myanmar have been showing vast improvement in recent years, and their current FIFA ranking is 116, 121 and 155 respectively.

Sir, I believe we are ahead of these countries in terms of our sports facilities and also in the area of Sports Sciences. We have many initiatives. To name some, the National Football Academy and Centres of Excellence, the Foreign Talent Scheme and FAS Youth Development Programme.

So, the question again: what has gone wrong? Sir, I do not have the answer to this question. I believe FAS will also have a hard time finding answers. One possible way to find answer to this predicament is for FAS to conduct an in-depth study involving different stakeholders, and more importantly, to involve our national football players from the different era – 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and current. I do hope that we will be able to find the healing formula for Singapore's football soon.

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