



The Workers' Party  
工人党 Parti Pekerja འོ་ལྔ་པོ་ལྔ་པོ་

The Workers' Party in Parliament

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# Budget Debate 2017

Speeches and Cuts



# Foreword

This publication marks the second issue of the Workers' Party's Budget Compilation. At the beginning of each year, the Government would present its Budget for the nation in Parliament and Members of Parliament would have the opportunity to debate the Government's position and make queries of each Ministry. While Budget 2016 outlined the Government's priorities post-SG 50, Budget 2017 plays a critical role in steering Singapore forward as we enter a challenging period of economic and political uncertainty.

Here, we showcase all the speeches made by our six constituency MPs and three non-constituency MPs during the Budget and Committee of Supply (COS) debates from 28 February to 9 March 2017. It starts off with speeches from the Budget Debate, where seven of our MPs spoke. Pritam Singh sought clarification on water pricing and pointed out that it is possible to reduce water consumption without increasing prices. Leon Perera and Dennis Tan questioned if this was the right time for the government to implement successive price hikes that would raise the cost of living and doing business. Sylvia Lim and Png Eng Huat asked how the government assesses if expenditure on various schemes has resulted in desired outcomes. Daniel Goh highlighted the need to boost the morale of Singaporeans in a flagging economy, while Faisal Manap talked about the importance of having an employee-centric work culture.

The second section comprises of Committee of Supply cuts categorized by each Ministry. This year, all nine WP MPs delivered a total of 98 cuts – where the pertinent issue of the rising cost of living was highlighted. Our MPs delivered the most number of cuts to the Ministry of Education, Manpower and Health, raising current problems faced by Singaporeans and providing suggestions for improvement.

Our MPs welcome all feedback on their speeches and suggestions. The Workers' Party will continue to be a responsible and rational voice for you in Parliament.

Enjoy reading!

**The Workers' Party Media Team**



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# Debate on Annual Budget Statement



# The Economy and the CFE: Missed Opportunities

by Leon Perera

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Madam Speaker, Singapore's economy is at a crossroads. In the past, lies an economy driven by foreign direct investment, state initiatives and capital and labour inputs. In the future, lies the dream of an economy driven more by productivity and innovation, local enterprises and private initiative. How do we move from A to B?

The Committee of Future Economy (CFE) outlined a few broad strategies. Some have criticised these for being too broad, but I do acknowledge that there are details contained in the Industry Transformation Maps and other Governmental statements outside the CFE report.

There was also not a great deal that was new in the CFE report. A few new ideas, like the Global Innovation Alliance, for example, but not many. For the most part, the CFE referred to and affirmed existing initiatives.

I do acknowledge, however, that we should not value novelty for novelty's sake. If indeed, what we are doing now has little room for improvement because it is delivering results, then so be it. But is what we are doing now delivering the results that we need?

Madam, our economic growth in 2015 and 2016 was about 2%, the slowest since the financial crisis year of 2009. As at December 2016, jobseekers continue to outnumber job vacancies in Singapore for the first time since 2012. Low headline unemployment belies deepening insecurity in the job market, with rising redundancies, reports of under-employment and more people taking up jobs in the less secure gig economy, not all from choice. As it is well known, productivity performance in recent times, has been poor and far below our target. And according to one city-level study cited by the Prime Minister in 2012, our per capita GDP is not even among the top 20 cities worldwide.

Madam, let us take another indicator – net births of companies. That refers to the formation minus cessation of companies, companies, generally being larger, and more economically-weighty entities than proprietorships. In the last three months of 2016, the net births of companies have plunged. Since December 2015, this indicator has registered negative net births of companies four times – in four months out of 13. The total net births figure for 2016 was about 6,000. For the previous four years, it ranged between 12,000 and 21,000. In fact, in the last 10 years, this figure has fallen below 10,000 only twice. In 2009, the year of financial crisis, and last year, 2016.

Madam, our SME sector employs two-thirds of Singaporeans. The SME sector situation is seriously challenged at the present moment.

Madam, we all want Singapore to be exceptional, to be a shining Red Dot. But how can we make sure that the Red Dot does not dim for our children and our grandchildren? What was lacking in the CFE report was a deep self-examination about why we are producing these kinds of results? From deep self-examination, and even self-criticism, could come fresh thinking.



Our drive towards high productivity is not new. It began decades ago. Yet we have produced weak results. United States, Korea, Hong Kong and Australia have better real productivity growth compound on annual basis from 2004 to 2014, according to one analysis published in The Straits Times on 24 April 2016.

Madam, we recognise the problem with our total fertility rate (TFR) in the 1980s, and yet we have not succeeded in reversing the decline, so much so that our TFR today is among the very lowest in the developed world. Yet other developed countries have reversed their TFR decline, such as Japan, France and some Scandinavian countries.

To take a micro example of what I am referring to here, Budget 2017 announced a new SkillsFuture Leadership Development Initiative (LDI) to groom corporate leaders, which is good. Yet an initiative to groom Singaporeans to become leaders in global companies had already been announced several years back. What lessons were learnt from that?

## Budget 2017

Turning now to Budget 2017, is it a Budget that deals with the economic situation we are in? The Minister for Finance said that 2016 was an expansionary budget, meaning to say, in crude terms, and at the risk of some over-simplification, that the state was pumping in more money into the economy than was taking out, because the basic deficit was \$5.6 billion in 2016. In 2017, the basic deficit is projected to be \$8.2 billion or about 2% of GDP, which would imply an expansionary budget again, even if the deficit turns out to be smaller by a few billions due to conservative budgeting, as it almost certainly will be.

But what if we properly reflect the cash going out of the economy to the state in the form of land sales, projected to be \$8.2 billion in 2017, net of other elements that may not be reflected, such as the actual cash spending of endowments and funds. Once all of these items are accounted for, is the Budget as expansionary as the basic deficit of \$8.2 billion would suggest? I would like to ask the Government if it can include a section in future Budget Books that presents our National Budget and quantifies the surplus or deficit according to the methodology prescribed by the IMF. Such transparency is important to enable Singaporeans to make up their own minds, as to whether future Budgets are indeed an effective response to current economic realities.

Madam, the recent Budgets from the Government have tended to follow a pattern – racking up a surplus in the early part of the Parliamentary term and then incurring deficit spending towards the end of the term, close to the General Elections. So much so that some economists now openly predict the Budgets in certain years will be election year Budgets that spend off the accumulated surplus from the preceding term of Parliament.

Has the Government held back on fiscal stimulus in 2017, so as to keep ammunition in reserve for closer to the Elections? Seven hundred million dollars in construction projects have been brought forward. Has the Government considered bringing forward projects in other areas of expenditure than construction – ICT projects, for example? This will provide a greater and more sectorally-balanced stimulus.





My colleagues will comment and discuss in detail on the water price hike and other price hikes and taxes. But let me make a few observations now. The timing of these price hikes seems more synchronised to the political cycle than to the economic cycle. The economy is facing numerous problems and net births of companies are plunging. Is this the right time to raise electricity tariff, to raise the gas price, to raise parking fees, and last but not least, to raise the water price? All within the space of a few months?

Madam, what is the justification for these price hikes and their timing? Hitting the economy with these multiple price hikes within the space of a few months may make good political sense, because people have three years to forget them, before the next General Election. But do they make good economic sense?

Why introduce all these price hikes now at the time of relative economic fragility, when they could tip some SMEs at the margins over the edge, when they increase the hardships faced by Singaporeans beset by job market insecurities? Why not introduce some of them later when there is an up-swing in external demand?

## Local Enterprise

Next, I will speak about local enterprises. Budget 2017 has not make a decisive shift towards building local enterprises as an engine of value-creation, alongside MNCs and Government-linked companies (GLCs). This is a huge missed opportunity.

There are some initiatives to address SME funding, and there are some new measures announced at this Budget, for example, tweaks to the Internationalisation Financing Scheme (IFS) and the new Globalisation Fund. These are welcomed moves to be sure, but is this enough to uncage our local firms?

Commercial and industrial rents and land costs are still very high relative to the region. When this was debated in COS 2016, the reply was that we do not need more measures, because the retail and industrial space market was already softening due to market forces.

However, the Government should understand that for entrepreneurs, it is not all about the costs today, but what will be the costs tomorrow? An entrepreneur will not invest blood, sweat and tears to build the business, only to see commercial rentals surge due to market forces and wipe out his/her commercial viability in five or 10 years' time. They think about the long-term future outlook. A larger share of JTC in commercial and industrial space and a smaller share held by REITS, as was the case in the past, or another similar suite of policies, would help to underscore that long-term assurance to entrepreneurs and would-be entrepreneurs.

Madam, we also need to step up education about entrepreneurship to our students, and I have raised this in past Parliamentary Questions. Time does not permit me to delve too deeply on this subject, but we can and should do more to enable our students to understand how entrepreneurship is both a viable and a socially meaningful calling. Right now, I fear that most of our aspiring students dream of becoming civil servants or working in an MNC.

And on funding, in New Zealand, for example, an SME can obtain a bank loan for an M&A project overseas based on a certain P/E or price-earnings ratio. In countries like Switzerland, Germany and Japan, local banks have close ties to local companies in particular states or



prefectures, and both parties see a commonality of long-term interest. Is such funding easy to obtain in Singapore?

Of course, I fully recognise that not all ideas and companies are fundable. But that is precisely the point. Should we not make our support to companies much more selective – with much more generous support at higher caps, given to companies which truly have the track record of results, and the acumen and the ambition to succeed globally, with that sort of support being scaled down, if the results are not delivered, or if the results do not benefit Singapore? Should we not move decisively away from schemes of administration mindset to a results-driven mindset in SME development?

It is this kind of tough-minded results-driven approach which enabled Japan and Korea to groom world-leading companies in the 1960s and 1970s. Companies that, to this day, employ many people in their home countries both directly and indirectly, in the form of complex chains of suppliers and sub-contractors.

## Risk-Taking

Madam, one of the opportunities missed by the CFE and Budget 2017 is about fostering risk-taking. It is no coincidence that the countries with the most innovative companies and disruptors are also the countries which have a larger role for social safety nets and risk-pooling. There are two aspects that stand out. One is managing the risks of redundancies from ever shortening product life-cycles and continuous disruption. Here, Ms Sylvia Lim has proposed the redundancy insurance scheme during the Budget Debate 2016.

The second is retirement adequacy. Most Singaporeans do not have enough in their CPF to live on when they retire. As the Prime Minister discussed in his National Day Rally speech in 2013, necessitating some kind of monetisation of their HDB flat, which is not always an easy straightforward or happy process, or continuing to work till they are much older. This is due to high property prices depleting the CPF Ordinary Account.

Managing these risks are important if a globalised open economy and society are to thrive. We must create enough security and confidence for Singaporeans to become the disruptors, and not the disrupted. There have been some measures announced to address these issues over the past few years, but the basic structural impediments remain.

Most households are exposed to cyclical economic risks without robust safety nets and risk-pooling, reinforcing a tendency to focus on short-term cash flow. This makes it less likely that they will set up companies, less likely that they will take risks to innovate, less likely that they will take time off work for education, re-skilling or training, because they cannot afford to.



## Education

And lastly, Madam, our education system excels at training literacy and numeracy to a high standard. The Government takes pride in our PISA scores. But equally important to competitive success in the 21st century are "skills" like lateral thinking, creative problem-solving, leadership, communication and self-confidence, as I spoke about during COS 2016.

Can we sustain the current high academic content workload and add the cultivation of these softer attributes on top, like the icing on a cake? Will our students be able to cope with these demands?

Some recent research suggests that there is generally an inverse correlation between a country's PISA score and that country's GEM score which measures entrepreneurial qualities. An over-emphasis on high stakes academic testing may hold back the cultivation of these elusive entrepreneurial qualities.

I am not arguing that we should reduce our PISA scores in the hope that our GEM score will go up, nor am I saying that having both a high PISA and GEM score is impossible. In fact, Finland is one such outlier country which has high scores on both metrics.

But in striving for very high academic standards we must always measure, publish and debate the impact of that academic workload on the cultivation of other qualities in our young people to ensure the right balance.

My colleague Mr Png Eng Huat has spoken about the need to study the reasons behind the vast tuition industry in Singapore. Raw academic performance can always be inflated upwards with enough academic pressure from schools and families, enough tuition, model answers, 10-year series and discipline. But to what end? Are we helping our children compete in the world of disruption that they will live in when they grow up?

Madam, in conclusion, while we do recognise the positive moves in Budget 2017, we question the timing of some of the measures that will raise costs as well as their necessity and justification. We question whether more can be done to support a beleaguered economy at this time. And above all, we question the missed opportunities to make decisive bold moves in local enterprise development, risk-pooling and education to pivot Singapore towards truly finding its place in the sun in the 21st century.



# Water – Understanding how it is priced in Singapore

By Pritam Singh

Mr Deputy Speaker, this year's Budget has brought the focus on cost of living issues by way of an increase in water prices amongst other things. This increase comes on the back of a 15%-odd increase in HDB car park charges, higher electricity and gas charges and the announcement of higher Service and Conservancy rates all in the space of about three months. The Straits Times noted that the Government feedback channel REACH had identified cost of living as a key pre-Budget concern among Singaporeans.

I have a few questions for the Government to understand the decision-making processes around the latest round of increases in water prices. The last time an announcement was made to raise water prices in 1997, prices were raised by 120% for households and 30% for industrial and commercial users over a four-year period.

## Singapore's Water Pricing Principle – Long Run Marginal Cost

The Government has stated in previous parliamentary replies that it prices water according to its Long-Run Marginal Cost or LMRC. To this end, the water tariff, water conservation tax and used water charges or waterborne fees are priced to reflect the cost of producing the next drop of potable water, which is, I quote, "is likely to come from desalination and NEWater." In announcing the opening of the fifth NEWater plant last month, the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources noted that there has been upward pressure on costs because of increases associated with asset replacement, energy and manpower. Can the Government share details on how the components of Long-Run Marginal Costs for water pricing are computed by the Public Utilities Board (PUB) and how it assesses when to increase the price of water?

Can the Government also clarify if the maintenance and upkeep, and the associated manpower costs of current PUB assets, including thousands of kilometres of transmission networks and so forth, would have already been factored into the calculation of LMRC before the latest round of price hikes? Even so, it would be helpful to understand which variables of LMRC have changed from 1997 when the last price hike was announced, what is the range within each variable, and how often is the LMRC determined or re-determined?

Can the Government also share how much it costs each desalination and NEWater plant to produce water today, especially since some of these plants operate on a private-public partnership basis? How do they compare with plants directly run by the PUB?

Finally, when the PUB refers to the long-run in LMRC, what sort of time horizon is used for projection purposes and what are the population parameters for these projections? Are we looking at 2061 when the Water Agreement with Malaysia comes to an end, or is it when the PUB expects a doubling of Singapore's consumption in absolute terms for a much larger



population and when 85% of our needs are projected to be met by NEWater and desalination? If this is so, what are the projections for expected water price hikes as the population grows?

It is noteworthy, Mr Deputy Speaker, that the PUB was able to bring down the cost of NEWater production from 2002 to 2004 from \$1.30 to \$1.15 per cubic metre as a result of more competitive membrane technologies. In 2003, a Straits Times article quoted then Prime Minister Goh assuring Singaporeans that, and I quote, "the price of PUB water, which now costs \$1.52 a cubic metre, would stay below \$2 for some time, reversing all earlier projections. The sums were redone because desalinating sea water was cheaper than thought; and NEWater, even cheaper to produce."

The same year, it was reported that the Tuas desalination plant desalinates water at the cost of \$0.78 per cubic metre. This compared very favourably against about \$0.90 per cubic metre produced by the Ashkelon desalination plant in Israel, considered in 2003 to be the one of the cheapest producers of desalinated water. In 2008, Sembcorp, which secured the bid to design, build, own and operate the fifth and largest NEWater plant, submitted a first-year price of about \$0.30 to produce a cubic metre of NEWater. A 2011 Business Times' report also noted that Singapore would produce the world's cheapest desalinated water by 2013. How does the PUB adjust its Long-Run Marginal Cost projections with the advent of new technology so as to keep water prices affordable and to keep its profits within reasonable limits, on an on-going basis?

From parliamentary replies in the past, it would appear that energy is the real cost variable that can be difficult to track with a sufficient degree of accuracy. In view of the lower cost of producing water over the years, can the Government reveal how much NEWater and desalination costs have fluctuated over the years as a result of energy prices?

In 2008, the Siemens Water Technologies Team was awarded a \$4 million grant from the Environment and Water Industry Development Council (EWI) for successfully designing a more energy efficient desalination technique which produced a cubic metre of drinking water on 1.5 kWh of power as compared to PUB's current desalination method using 3.5 kWh per cubic metre. In addition, the 2015 PUB annual report highlights PUB's collaboration with a US water technology company which has piloted electro-deionisation technology which has achieved reductions in energy consumption in the desalination process by more than 50%, and this pilot would be expanded in 2016. Can the Government share details of this project and its prospects going forward?

## The Linggiu Reservoir Factor

Separately, Mr Deputy Speaker, the announcement of an increase in water tariffs bookends a two-odd year period when Singaporeans were repeatedly reminded of water scarcity issues as a result of very low water levels in the Linggiu reservoir in Malaysia, a water supply source five times the size of all of Singapore's reservoirs. At the start of each respective year, the water levels were at 84% in 2015, 49% in 2016 and 27% in 2017. We have been informed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in response to a Parliamentary Question in January this year that there is a significant risk of the water levels in the Linggiu Reservoir falling to 0% this year should there be a dry spell in Johor.

In view of the low water levels in the Linggiu Reservoir from 2015 onwards in particular, how



often has Singapore drawn less than the 250 million gallons a day it is legally entitled to under the 1962 Water Agreement and what has been Singapore's average daily rate of abstraction from the Linggiu Reservoir since 2014? To that end, what role, if any, have the low water levels in the Linggiu Reservoir played in the latest water price revision especially since the Government's position as late as 2013 confirmed no need to raise water prices?

In the middle of last year, on the back of the Singapore International Water Week, a PUB official stated that should the Linggiu Reservoir fail, there ought to be no cause for panic in Singapore as there were new and indigenous capacities in Singapore to meet such a contingency in the form of NEWater and desalination. However, the Minister of Foreign Affairs only last month stated that the failure of the Linggiu Reservoir would cause severe problems for Singapore and Malaysia. Can the Government elaborate what are its contingency plans in the event of such an eventuality? Do these contingencies include the possibility of another rise in water prices, especially the water conservation tax since its policy rationale is aimed at reminding the taxpayer about the importance of saving water and separately, to account for the Long-Run Marginal Cost of desalination and NEWater? That would also prompt a corollary question as to whether the latest water price revision was set with a view to account for the complete failure of the Linggiu Reservoir.

Even so, in the middle of 2016, it was reported that Johor was studying plans to divert water from two rivers into the Linggiu Reservoir. The first proposal was to build a low wall to channel about 50mgd of water from the Sayong River catchment area at the cost of about RM\$250 million. The second plan called for the building of a dam at the Ulu Sedili Besar River to transfer about 110mgd to the Johor River at the cost of RM\$660 million.

At the end of the last Leaders Retreat between Prime Ministers Lee and Najib in December last year, it was reported that Malaysia was looking at measures to increase the supply of water at the Linggiu Reservoir. Can the Government comment, in the event Malaysia successfully diverts water to the Linggiu Reservoir allowing Singapore to draw its full entitlement of 250mgd or more, would such an outcome end up reducing the price of water for consumers in Singapore? And if so, would Singapore consider co-funding the diversion of the two rivers or re-negotiating some aspects of the Water Agreement with a win-win prospect in mind especially since Singapore has not hesitated to supply Malaysia with more treated water than it is required to in its time of need particularly in times of drought and over the Ramadan period last year?

## Is Water Scarce Or Not?

This brings me to my final point about the public messaging on water conservation policies and the outcomes the Government seeks from the water conservation tax and how these outcomes can be improved. About a month before the 2015 General Elections, the Prime Minister said, "In Singapore, water will always be a precious resource. Never take it for granted or waste it."

In the middle of last year, on the back of the Singapore International Water Week in a piece entitled "How Singapore Will Never Go Thirsty", the PUB CEO announced that Singapore, in spite of being water-poor, had "significantly overcome the challenge of water scarcity" and later that "Singapore is not short on water".







This would be important as the water price hike occurred on the back of many other municipal prices increases which could arguably have been better phased to reduce the impact on the average Singaporean for whom cost of living concerns are an increasing issue. There remain concerns among Singaporeans who fear the knock-on effect of the water price hike on daily necessities and I hope the Government will address this point too. Thank you.





## Budget 2017: Increasing the Cost of Living despite an Uncertain Economic Climate

By Dennis Tan

Madam Speaker, I am very concerned with some of the measures announced in this year's Budget. First of all, the increase of water tariffs by 30% and the imposition of water consumption tax.

In this year's Budget, the announcement by Finance Minister to raise water tariffs by 30% left many Singaporeans anxious. Not only was the increase of water tariffs sudden, the scale of increase is also higher than expected. At the same time, the Government has also decided to impose a water consumption tax, which will increase the burden of the people during this water tariff hike.

Although the Government has said that it will be giving rebates to some families through GST vouchers U-Save rebates, most Singaporeans and industrial/commercial users will be affected, as they do not fulfil the criteria to enjoy rebates or will be receiving only token rebates. Companies and industries that uses a lot of water, such as the F&B industries, will be affected the most. I am concerned that this large increase in water prices will have adverse knock-on effects, leading to price hikes of other daily necessities and increasing the cost of living, which will in turn, increase the burden of the people. How can the Government ensure that the rise in water tariffs will not lead to price increases at hawker centres, coffee shops and other products?

Many industrial and commercial activities require the use of water. This rise in water tariffs mean that operating costs and living expenses will increase. With uncertainties in our economic prospects and growth, the hike in water tariffs will make the situation worse. So, I would like to know if the Government will offer assistance to industries that will be adversely affected by the increase in water tariffs, especially those that require a lot of water.

What puzzles me, is that the Finance Minister has mentioned in his Budget Statement, that water is essential to our survival, so the pricing of water must reflect the higher production cost of desalinated water and NEWater. My question is, we have had desalination and NEWater plants for some time now. In recent years, water reservoirs, desalination plant and water supply from Malaysia and other water issues have been better resolved. We already have more choices when it comes to water supply. Then, why the sudden mention of higher cost of water? Why was this not mentioned in recent years?

Second, I am also very concerned about the increase in diesel tax by 10 cents per litre, which applies to car diesel, industrial diesel and bio-diesel. The reasons given for the increase in diesel tax are firstly, diesel is a source of pollution; and secondly, to encourage users to reduce consumption by imposing diesel taxes. I can understand and agree with the problem of pollution, but I do question the timing and scale of increasing diesel tax. I believe that it is not the right time to increase diesel tax under the current difficult economic situation.

The tax increase will cause diesel prices to go up, and this will directly affect transport costs,



such as those of taxis and buses, as well as school buses and buses ferrying workers. Can the Government assure the people that our transport cost will not increase? Can the short-term road tax rebates ensure that transport costs will not increase?

The Finance Minister has also announced a cut in Special Tax for diesel cars. For taxis, even if taxi companies were to return the savings of \$850 from the reduced special diesel tax to taxi drivers, the taxi drivers would still have to come up with cash to make up for the increase in diesel prices. This is calculated based on the distance of 250 km to 500 km that a taxi needs to travel every day, assuming they will need to consume 25 litres to 50 litres of diesel a day.

Diesel is the general fuel for delivery trucks, vans, lorries and other heavy vehicles. With the 10-cent increase for every litre, transport and delivery costs will also increase, and this will also affect the operating costs of businesses that depend directly or indirectly on transport services. Madam Speaker, after the budget was announced on the 20th of February, the general consensus among businesses is that SMEs and Singapore-based companies are not getting sufficient help from this Budget amidst the difficult and uncertain economic climate. The increase of diesel tax at this point will only add on to their operating cost.

In view of the economic uncertainties and anxieties over job prospects, it is regrettable that the measures announced by the Government in this budget have not given the people a stronger sense of security. Instead, they have increased the cost of living of the people.

(In Mandarin)

议长女士，我非常关注今年财政预算案所宣布的一些措施。

首先是水价上涨百分之三十，并同时实施耗水税

财政部长在今年的财政预算案宣布水费将上涨百分之三十。许多新加坡人对水费涨价感到心惊胆跳。水费上调不仅突然，涨幅更是出乎人们意料的高。同时政府又决定推出征收耗水税，这将更加重人民水费涨价的负担。

虽然政府已宣布将通过GST Voucher-U-Save方式对某些家庭给与回扣，不过，多数的新加坡人和工商业用户，将会因为不符合回扣的条件，或者只获得象征性的回扣，而受到影响。首当其冲的是必须依赖食水的行业，例如食品和饮料行业以及需要大量用水的工业。我担心大幅度的水价上涨，恐怕会引起不良的连锁反应，导致其他日用品的价格也跟著水涨船高，使到生活成本增加，加重人民的生活负担。政府将如何确保，水费上调不会导致咖啡店，小贩和其他物品的价格上涨呢？

许多工业生产或商业活动，很普遍的都需要用到水。水费的上涨意味着企业的营运成本和生活费将会提高。鉴于经济前景的不确定性和经济成长的不稳定，水费大幅度上调无异是雪上加霜。我想知道，对那些受水费上涨影响的企业，特别是那些用水量需求高的，政府是否会提供协助？令我感到纳闷的是。财政部长在预算案中提到，自来水是关系到国民生存的问题，我们给水费定的价格，是要反映海水淡化和新生水的较高生产成本。我的疑问是，我国已经有海水淡化厂和新生水厂相当长的一段时期了。近年来，水库，海水淡化厂和马来西亚的水供等水源问题都已经获得更好的处理，新加坡在水供方面也更有选择了，为什么现在突然间出现了更高成本的问题呢？为什么过去几年来都未提出这个问题？



## 第二，增加柴油税

我也非常关注柴油税每公升大幅度加税一毛钱。增税范围包括汽车柴油，工业柴油和生物柴油。增税的理由是：（1）柴油是环境污染的来源，（2）根据用途对柴油征税，鼓励用户减少消费。我可以理解和同意所提出的环境污染问题，但我质疑增加柴油税的时机和幅度。在目前经济状况不佳的时刻，我认为这样的增税措施是不合时宜的。

增税将导致柴油价格上涨，这会直接影响运输费用，例如德士，公共巴士和载送工人的租用车或校车。政府能向新加坡人保证，我们的交通费用不会上涨吗？部长宣布的短期路税回扣能确保交通或运输费不会上涨吗？

部长宣布，柴油车特别税将减少。就德士而言，即使德士公司把减少特别税所得的八百五十元所节省费用全数回扣给德士司机，德士司机也还需要自掏腰包补贴上涨的油价。这是基于一辆出租车，每天行驶250-500公里，假设在这个距离范围内需要消耗25-50升柴油计算得来的。

柴油是运输货车，小货车，罗厘车和其他重型车辆的一般燃料。每公升增加一毛钱将意味着交通和运输费用的增加，这也会增加需要直接或间接依赖运输服务的企业的商业成本。

议长女士，自从二月二十日公布财政预算案后，工商界的共识是，以目前这困难和不明朗的经济环境，中小型企业和其他以新加坡为基地的企业，并没有在这项财政预算案中得到充分的协助。增加柴油税更加重它们的运作成本。

运输服务和交通费用的增加，不仅直接影响企业的成本，也会影响一般消费品，甚至服务业的价格，最终将会使生活费用上涨，加重人民的经济负担。

议长女士，政府在经济前景不明朗，人民忧心工作前途的情况下在预算案中所提出的措施，不但没有加强人民的安全感，还加重人民的生活负担，令人感到遗憾。



## A Disappointing “Wait and See” Budget?

By Daniel Goh

Madam Speaker, my initial reaction to the Minister of Finance’s Budget Statement last Monday was deep dissatisfaction and disappointment. I thought a lot about it in the next few days.

Was I disappointed because this Budget contained relatively few goodies for SMEs, workers and consumers? This was the first question that crossed my mind. Many businesses and Singaporeans expressed the same sentiment, as reported in the papers and as can be read online on social media.

It is understandable. This time round, the support given by the Government is targeted rather than broad-based. We have gotten too used to spectacular Budgets with goodies for everyone and the fireworks of snazzy phrases, pictures and presentations. Yet, there is nothing positively spectacular in this Budget. Instead, the negatives stand out in ominous light, especially the big 30% hike in water prices.

I stared at the Budget in Brief for a very long time, putting aside my sentiments, trying to make rational sense of the Budget, to see the pattern and trend that have to be there. So I stared and stared. Then it came to me, this is a “Wait and See” Budget.

It clicked. This is why Minister Heng opened the Budget Statement signaling a time of VUCA – the volatility of populist politics, the uncertainty of economic protectionism, the complexity of technological disruptions, the ambiguities of the changing global order.

In such a context, it is prudent to wait and see before committing national resources to a set path with a clear destination. When everything is up in the air, we need to wait and see, to keenly observe the trajectories of the things being thrown up to decide which gems to catch and how to catch them.

### Wait and See Does Not Mean Do Nothing

Wait and see does not mean to do nothing. I read an article in the Harvard Business Review that helped me see the pattern and logic of the Budget in Brief I was staring at. This was an article written by two United States Marine Corps officers who switched careers to become business consultants. They wrote, and I quote,

*“As Marine officers, we always ate last, ensuring others had food on their plates before ours were filled. During down time, we kept our teams busy with training opportunities so they could broaden their skills, which also curtailed complacency. When it was dark and cold in the field, we made a point of being present on the lines (not hiding out in a warm tent) to show our teams we were right there with them. Through our actions, we demonstrated that we were willing to go without food, free time, and comfort to ensure our people knew they were supported. The result? Our teams felt cared for and valued, and they demonstrated their loyalty through their initiative and engagement.”*



Waiting means to keep ourselves busy with training and development. Thus many of the Budget initiatives are focused on the long-term development of business capabilities and enhancing the affordability and accessibility of training for our workers.

Seeing means to be vigilant and being prepared to respond quickly to opportunities and exigencies. Thus many of the Budget initiatives have to do with road-mapping and transformation mapping, and prototyping, testing and experimenting.

As the Marine officers related, waiting and seeing also means cultivating strong bonds of trust through shared engagements. Thus many of the Budget initiatives emphasize partnership, alliances and integrated spaces.

If I were to summarize this Wait and See Budget into three main thrusts, they are, one, training and development, two, mapping and testing, and three, partnership and team building. Despite my initial disappointment and dissatisfaction, I believe this Budget is making the right moves of waiting and seeing in these three thrusts.

## Psychological Security

But I do not think we should dismiss the negative sentiments of disappointments and dissatisfaction with this Budget. They are also signals to possible deficiencies and gaps in the Budget.

I believe they point to one defect that the Government can do a lot better to address. This is the psychological effect of insecurity induced by the VUCA environment. It is getting very dark and cold in the field and ordinary Singaporeans are feeling unsettled by the uncertainty. We need to understand and alleviate this psychological insecurity.

There are three ways to improve the psychological security and mental well being of ordinary Singaporeans even as they are exhorted to train and develop themselves as they wait and see. First, we should maximize the availability and accessibility of the training programmes as far as possible.

Second, we need to strengthen the safety nets for middle-income households who are financially squeezed on several fronts and threatened by employment insecurity.

Third, we should transform the current management culture of top-down leadership to one of service-based leadership, which is more conducive to fostering real partnerships of trust.

## 1. Maximise Availability and Accessibility of Training and Development

The first way to improve psychological security is to maximise the availability and accessibility of training and development for workers. We should not underestimate the sense of security that comes with knowing that there are many options available to us for deepening our skills or changing tracks to pursue new dreams. I have three substantive points to make in this respect.



The Adapt and Grow programmes are excellent for promoting functional skills and the practical placement of jobseekers. But we should not forget the psychological impact of the various conditions and restrictions that the programmes place on workers. For example, young PMEs have to wait for six months of unemployment before they become eligible for the Career Support Programme.

The new "Attach and Train" initiative is interesting. Notwithstanding the details to be elaborated later by the Manpower Minister, I ask that the Government pay close attention to the psychological aspects of attached participants, as there is a risk that the attachments could backfire if participants find themselves treated as mere interns and not as valuable would-be employees.

Regarding the Global Innovation Alliance, going forward, it would be good to open up the Innovators Academy to mid-career workers who would like to explore opportunities and build up experiences in innovation. Many entrepreneurs are not born straight from the universities, but become enterprising innovators after accumulating years of experience in the marketplace.

Regarding Continuing Education and Training degree programmes, this would be a good time to accelerate the placement of adult learners in part-time programmes in our universities to 10% of each cohort from 2015 onwards as recommended by the 2012 Committee on University Education Pathways. I understand our six universities have been launching various types of work-study programmes with SkillsFuture support and in partnership with industry. But many of these programmes are understandably starting out slow and small and targeted at young adults heading to university and not adult learners. I hope this would accelerate to cater to adult learners who defer their university education to later and even to mid-career switchers, especially since the size of cohorts heading to university would start to shrink due to plunging birth rates two decades ago.

## 2. Strengthen Safety Nets for Middle-income Households

The second way to improve psychological security is to strengthen the safety nets for middle-income households. The 30% hike in water price and the carbon tax when implemented will have knock-on effects on the costs of living, as all areas of everyday life are affected by the use of water and electricity.

Middle-income households do not have the benefit of the enhanced financial transfers to low-income households to soften the impact of the water price increase. Compared to low-income and high-income households, middle income Singaporeans will feel the head-on impact of the increase in costs of living most strongly.

In this respect, the Personal Income Tax Rebate of 20% capped at \$500 does not benefit the middle-income worker as much as the high-income earners. For example, a worker earning the median gross monthly income with a taxable income of around \$40,000 will only receive \$110 tax rebate. On the flip side, high-income earners will be receiving the full \$500 tax rebate. This effectively means that the Government will be subsidising the expenses of high-income earners many times more than middle-income workers. Middle-income workers need the rebates a lot more in order to soften the impact of water price increases and the knock-on





increases in costs of living.

Middle-income workers are also facing higher risks of retrenchment and under-employment. While the Adapt and Grow programmes help to mitigate the fallout from retrenchment and encourage retrenched workers to reskill and return to employment, the Budget could do better to provide for short-term relief to allow workers to find their feet and not be mired in temporary cash-flow problems that could distract them from training and job-seeking. The Government could consider introducing redundancy insurance to even out the risks of retrenchment and provide short-term support. Short-term tax deferments would also help retrenched workers to manage their cash flows.

### 3. Encourage Service-based Leadership

The third way to improve psychological security is to promote service-based leadership. Management thinker Robert Greenleaf introduced the concept in 1970 in his famous essay, "The Servant as Leader". In contrast to traditional leadership involving the top-down exercise of power and the taking of individual credit from the team's work, the service-based leader focuses on the growth of the people they are leading and the well being of communities they serve in.

The SkillsFuture Leadership Development Initiative announced by the Minister Heng is an excellent initiative. It is a belated recognition that we need to consciously cultivate Singaporean leaders in all our industries. We have focused on talents who could follow through the logic of development and faithfully execute the plans. What we need now are thought leaders and visionaries who could inspire teams of talents and workers to collectively chart and create new pathways of growth.

However, to maximize the return of investment in leadership to ordinary Singaporeans, we should focus on cultivating service-based leaders. Traditional leaders who are focused on their own power and achievement may well achieve the same level of growth as service-based leaders, but the benefits will not be equitably distributed to workers and the community. On the other hand, because service-based leaders are committed to the personal and professional growth of their workers, growth will benefit everyone.

In turn, this will foster committed and engaged workers who will use their initiative and give their best and all to the team's efforts. The two Marine officers I quoted at the beginning of my speech consciously applied this concept of service-based leadership to build up a cohesive team of well-trained and deeply committed warriors. Instead of producing an elitist group of leaders commanding regular troops, they forged an elite fighting unit.

Conversely, traditional leaders will treat workers as expendable units to be constantly evaluated for their performance and stigmatized and culled if they no longer meet certain standards. I think it is very clear how this can be detrimental to the psychological security of our workers, with ripple effects beyond the affected companies and industries, as can be seen in the Surbana terminations.

I believe this is the missing ingredient in our drive to improve productivity and inspire engaged workers. Thus, I urge the Government to emphasize service-based leadership in its industry



transformation mapping exercises, in the SkillsFuture Leadership Development Initiative and in the Future Economy programmes to deepen partnerships to share expertise and solutions.

## Present in the Lines with Everyone of Us

Madam Speaker, I have come to accept this “Wait and See” Budget for what it is. It is down time and the Government is encouraging Singaporeans to get busy with training and development, mapping and testing, partnering and team building. We are preparing for the fight to come.

But it is also getting dark and cold in the field. It is unnerving to many Singaporeans. The price hikes and looming tax increases do not help. A sense of insecurity is setting in. Other than the three ways to improve psychological security even as we train and prepare I have highlighted above, there are two things that the Government, the political leaders, can do.

First, we are still not getting a sense of the big picture of the changes in the global order and how Singapore features in this big picture. What are the different scenarios of the future we are facing? We seem to be still focused on internationalisation, but do we have a plan if nationalistic protectionism takes root and spread? What are the worst-case scenarios and the known unknowns, and how should we prepare for these? We need to have a shared understanding of what we are fighting and what we are fighting for.

Second, as the example of the two Marine officers show, when it gets dark and cold in the field, being present on the lines with the troops and not hiding out in a warm tent is a tremendous demonstration to our people that they are being fully supported and truly valued. It is not my place to lecture the Government leaders on what they should be doing to be present on the lines with the workers and small businesses. But it is my duty to register that there is a need for it.





# Addressing the Uncertainties of our Economy

By Png Eng Huat

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Madam, the geo-political uncertainty and shifts in policy impacting the international economy, balance of power around the region and free trade may not have fully sunk in yet for the man in the streets, but in time to come it will become a worrying concern in the minds of all Singaporeans, young and old.

What does the future hold for our jobs, our careers, and our cost of living upon retirement, are questions that will creep up eventually. Budget 2017 is a reflection of the uncertain times we are living in today.

Although this Budget attempts to address some of the concerns and outlines measures for our economy and our society to weather the uncertainties, there is just no certainty in dealing with uncertainties. Some measures may work, and some may not. Some measures are judgement calls, calculated at best, clutching at straws at worst, all in the hope that some of them will bear fruits for the economy.

Some of the previous Budget measures have gone on to become permanent features of the fiscal policy. Some were given a makeover, hoping that the result will work better this time. But at the heart of all these measures, we must remain focused on what we want to achieve at the end.

This year's Budget introduces the SMEs Go Digital programme. The main push is to get SMEs on to the digital bandwagon to improve productivity. The target sectors are retail, food services, wholesale trades, logistics, cleaning and security. What does the Government hope to see at the end of this initiative? We have seen this initiative introduced in the past under different packaging. What did the Government learn from the results of the past initiative? Why are the targeted SMEs not embracing the digital revolution, despite the many opportunities to do so in the past? Does the Government want every SME to go digital? And is it even necessary to do so?

One of the measures introduced in 2010, the Productivity and Innovation Credit (PIC) scheme, has impacted the food services sector positively. The tablet computer has replaced the hardcopy menu in many restaurants. Customers no longer need to wait to be served to place their orders. The use of technology in this instance is motivated and meaningful.

In 2006, then Second Minister for Information, Communication and the Arts, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan highlighted an example of a local businessman who had embraced infocomm to improve his business. He shared that the dessert stall owner has invested in the touch-screen system to allow customers to place their dining in or take-out orders at the People's Park Complex Food Centre. He cited that the use of technology had brought the owner new business and improved productivity in tracking the stock of the desserts sold, and the amount of ingredients left.



I visited the dessert shop at the old food centre to see for myself why the shop was worthy of a mention by the Minister at the Opening of 10th InfoComm Commerce Conference in 2006. The dessert shop was manned by two persons: a lady at the counter, and a gentleman to prepare the dessert right behind her. Both of them could easily take orders from customers, as the shop was very small. For those who have been to People's Park Complex you will know what I mean. I proceeded to order via the touch-screen and waited. The lady looked at me in anticipation. I looked back at her and tried to hint with my eyes that I have just ordered my dessert at the touch-screen system. There was a queue forming and she snapped suddenly and said, "Ai simi?", which means "What do you want?" So the touch-screen system was not broken but it was not much of a use. A decade on, and the use of the touch-screen technology in hawker centres has not caught on. It was more of a novelty than an enterprising productivity tool, as highlighted by the Minister.

Madam, there is a lesson to be learnt in what the lady at the dessert shop asked me that day, "What do I want?" What does the Government want from the targeted sectors under the SMEs Go Digital programme? Technology can cut both ways. It can be a productivity tool or a glorified novelty. This Government should not waste public funds on the latter. The fact of the matter is, for some sectors, going digital may not be the sole solution to improve productivity. Beyond automation and going digital, the cleaning sector, for example, needs a re-design of the way refuse and waste are being collected. The design of old HDB estates needs a serious relook because it takes too long to clear the many bin chutes for just one block of flats.

Going digital alone is not going to help the cleaning sector. It also needs the Whole-of-Government (WoG) approach to educate or incentivise the public to generate less waste, because no amount of productivity improvements is going to help if we keep on generating waste at the current rate. It is important to embrace the digital economy but going digital alone is not going to resolve the productivity issue. The digital economy needs "brick and mortar" support. It may need the Government to relook into all the compliance processes and to remove them if necessary. Getting SMEs to go digital is only one part of the equation. It needs a collective effort for the digital economy to function and flourish.

Next, most of the measures introduced under the objective to sustain a quality environment for the future will impact Singaporeans and the aggregate of their impact will add to the cost of living. The carbon tax although scheduled to start in 2019, will hit households with an increase in electricity prices when the time comes. The volume-based diesel tax will impact the earnings of commercial vehicle owners when the rebate runs out in three years' time.

Madam, it is logical to harmonise the tax structure for all motor fuels including diesel, to be based on how much is used. Since the Government has taken the approach to incentivise users to reduce consumption and manufacturers to develop more energy efficient vehicles, the special tax on diesel cars and taxis should be scrapped completely upon the implementation of the volume-based diesel tax.

Likewise, now that the tax structure for all motor fuels is harmonised, the road tax for vehicles should also be scrapped in favour of the more equitable volume-based usage tax, which was already in place for the longest time. Road usage is tied to the consumption of fuel. The more road you travel, the more fuel you burn, and the more tax you will pay, be it petrol duty or diesel tax. So, why are motorists being slapped with a road tax that is based on the engine capacity of the vehicles? What has engine capacity got to do with road usage? The current road tax regime



is beyond a misnomer to begin with. Let us compare two cars of the same engine capacity. If one owner uses his vehicle seven days a week while the other utilises his vehicle three times a week, why are both drivers paying the same road tax when one is obviously contributing more to road congestion and pollution? What is the relevance and purpose of keeping an engine capacity-based road tax which has no relation to road usage, on top of the volume-based fuel duty which, in my opinion, is the actual and fairer road tax?

Last, the quantum of the water price hike is perhaps the most puzzling measure in the Budget. Can the authority share how much losses it has made supplying water to Singaporeans since 2000 to warrant such a hefty increase? Minister Masagos has stated in his reply to my Parliamentary Question that the current national average water consumption has dropped about 11% as compared to 10 years ago. The number of households that consume more water than the national average today remains stable in the past decade at 40%. If we look at the per capita usage, water consumption in Singapore is about 5% to 70% lower than that of London, Melbourne, Tokyo, Hong Kong and New York.

What do all these numbers say? They basically say Singaporeans understand the scarcity of water and we have been doing our part to conserve this precious element all this while. The Minister also acknowledged that and he cautioned Singaporeans not to be complacent and to save more water wherever possible. Singaporeans have done that before and I am quietly confident Singaporeans will do just that, going forward.

It was reported in the news that the cost of developing and operating Singapore's water supply system has more than doubled from \$500 million in 2000 to \$1.3 billion in 2015. The Public Utilities Board (PUB) said this cost included water treatment, reservoir operation, NEWater production, desalination, used water collection and treatment, and the maintenance of water pipelines. So, in short, it is the entire cost of supplying water to the masses. It was also reported that homes account for 45% of water use daily. Using simple ratio, the share of the cost of supplying water to households should be 45% of \$1.3 billion or \$585 million. This will roughly translate to an average cost of about \$40 per month to supply water to each household in 2015. This is well below the average monthly water bill paid by households of 4-room and above and I am sure for most private housing as well, before the proposed price hike.

As highlighted by the Government, water prices have remained unchanged since 2000. What that means is that the margin of supplying water to households could be even higher in 2000 than what I have estimated for 2015. Using the same assumption, it costs about \$21 per month to supply water to each household in 2000.

Since water consumption per household was fairly stable the past decade and water prices have not changed since 2000, and based on available data, the Government could not have lost money supplying water to household for the past 15 years.

Madam, this Government needs to be more transparent with the justification for the 30% hike in water prices. Resident households are already facing price pressure in carpark charges to transportation to food. From the proposed carbon tax, volume-based diesel tax and the 30% hike in water prices, the knock-on effect will be felt by Singaporeans eventually one way or another.

No time is a good time to increase prices but if this Government is bent on raising the price of an essential commodity by 30%, it is certainly the right time to open the books to Singaporeans



to justify the increase. Madam, I do not support the 30% price hike. Thank you.



# Empowering a Happier Workforce for Productivity and Innovation

By Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Madam, in 2016, we have witnessed two major events that have surprised many: Brexit and the American Presidential election.

Many expressed concerns on the possibility of a major global impact these two events may pose, especially on the economic front. Many see a future with uncertainties.

Madam, moving into an uncertain global situation, each nation must analyse and evaluate its own strengths and resources and find ways to strive and strengthening its utilisation of resources in a more prudent and most effective manner.

In this year's Budget, the two main themes or objectives are: one, a compassionate and inclusive society; and two, an innovative and connected economy.

Madam, Singapore, as an island city state, only has human resource at our disposal. We rely heavily on our human resource to generate a strong and robust economy. However, we are also very aware that human resource is a challenging factor in the near future due to the drop in our total fertility rate (TFR) in a rapidly ageing population.

Apart from making efforts to increase our total fertility rate, we should also find ways to empower Singaporeans, in particular our workforce. With an empowered nation, only can we achieve our objective of: one, a compassionate and inclusive society; and two, an innovative and connected economy.

Madam, in this year's as well as previous years' Budgets, many initiatives have been rolled out and implemented, such as SkillsFuture, to enable the Singaporean workforce to upgrade their skills so as to remain relevant and ready to face the challenges in an uncertain global situation. In addition to improving individual skills of the workforce through training, schemes, such as Productivity and Innovation Credits (PICs) and others, have also been introduced to equip companies and employers with technologies to further enhance innovation and productivity.

Madam, the introduction of technologies, 'Hardware', is indeed good and necessary. However, enhancement is also very much needed on the aspect of 'Software' or 'Heartware' (values). Technology, by itself, is not able to achieve better innovation and productivity. Its effectiveness relies on employees who use the technology. Only with a motivated workforce can we work towards enhancing our innovation and productivity.

Madam, a happy employee equates to a motivated employee. A motivated employee is obviously more innovative and productive, and many studies have proven this. A study conducted by the University of Warwick in 2014 found that happiness led to an increase in productivity by 12%. The same study also found that workers who are otherwise unhappy show a decline of 10% in their productivity level. The Harvard Business Review, a magazine published by Harvard University, also produced analysis of several studies that showed an average increase of 31% in productivity level for happy employees.



Madam, the organisational and work culture has a very great impact on the level of happiness of our workforce. Many internationally-renowned companies and corporations practise employee-centric work culture. Mr Richard Branson, Founder of Virgin Group, in an interview in 2014, mentioned that one business strategy that he used is an employee-centric management, giving priority to employees. He said, and I quote, "It should go without saying if a person who works at your company is 100% proud of the brand, and you give them the tools to do a good job and they are treated well, they are going to be happy." In the same interview, Mr Branson also said, and I quote, "If a person who works at your company is not appreciated, they are not going to do things with a smile." Mr Branson further shared that the first priority is his employees, customers second, and shareholders third.

Google, a giant Internet company, emphasises on organisational and work culture that focuses on satisfaction and happiness of employees. As a result, Google has consistently received the top spot in the list of Fortune's "Best Companies to Work For". Google believes that, on an average, a person spends most of his time in the workplace and, hence, it is important to feel happy and calm. They believe, with joy and peace, it will spark innovation and productivity.

Among Google's initiatives are (i) the office is designed with an open concept that allows their employees to interact openly in order to stimulate the mind and spark innovation (ii) to provide facilities, such as gymnasium, fitness centre and game room. Google believes that a healthy workplace produces joy and happiness and, hence, this will further spark innovation and productivity. Google's office in Malaysia houses a café that provides free food to employees. Google believes that spending on such is part of their investment cost because everyone knows that good food can boost employees' morale.

Madam, the questions are: what is the state of our workforce today – a happy or unhappy one? What is the situation of our organisational and work culture in Singapore? Do employees feel happier while on assignment? Do they feel their employer cares for them? Are our employers making their employees as their top priority? To answer these questions, I will cite findings of a couple of studies conducted, addressing the issues of Singapore's employees' level of happiness.

Madam, in 2014, the Singapore Human Resources Institute (SHRI) and Align Group, a consulting firm, conducted a study, "An Overview of Workplace Happiness Index". Their findings indicated that employees in Singapore are not so happy with their workplace. The index obtained is 59 out of 100 fell in the category 'Under Happy'. The study used a scientific method that contains 28 factors which were categorised into four main categories – satisfaction, alignment, engagement and well-being.

The survey also found that happiness is related to employees' perception of their work and experience in the workplace. The report also stated that the ability of companies or employers in promoting pride, positive emotions, a sense of accomplishment and enhancing work culture will affect how happy their employees may feel.

In September 2016, JobStreet issued a report on a survey 'Job Happiness Index', which was conducted in seven ASEAN countries. The result of the survey showed Singapore employees ranked the lowest amongst their ASEAN counterparts. Singapore only gained 5.09 out of 10. In the same report, it was said that the job happiness index for Singapore will continue to fall to the level of 4.93 in the next six months. The report further mentioned that, given such





circumstances, employers have been advised to revisit and review their HR practices and address the factors that caused employees to feel less satisfaction.

Overall, if we look at the studies and surveys conducted on Singapore's workforce for the last couple of years, our workers are unhappy. Arguably, the main cause is our organisational and work culture that does not give job satisfaction. The consequences of not being able to provide job satisfaction are hampering our productivity and innovation.

Madam, efforts to change our organisational and work culture must be made a top priority if we want to see positive changes in our nation's level of innovation and productivity. Changing a culture is not easy. It is a process that needs collective and continuous effort – participation of the Government, employers and employees, spanning over a period of time.

The Government must take the lead in changing the organisational and work cultures through programmes, its schemes and other initiatives. Programmes should be conducted for employers to enhance their knowledge on how to establish a conducive work culture that can make employees feel appreciated and, thus, feel more motivated to innovate and be more productive. In addition to these programmes, schemes, such as the Productivity and Innovative Credit (PIC), should be extended to the cost expended in transforming our organisational and work culture to be more conducive and employee-centric.

Employers have an important task in ensuring that the Government's schemes and initiatives are being implemented and practised in the most extensive manner to bring about an employee-centric culture. As for employees, they must strive to manifest the best work values. One way of doing so is to attend more programmes and training to improve both the hard and soft skills.

Madam, I am convinced that employees equipped with both hard and soft skills are the ones that are more motivated and display good work attitudes. I am of the view that we need to cater more programmes and training focusing on the development of soft skills. I would like to suggest that the learning on the topic of human psychology should be made the main thrust in programmes and training syllabuses. The reason is so that self-awareness, as well as awareness and better understanding of others around us, will allow the development of more positive and effective intra- and interpersonal skills.

Madam, I would also like to suggest that the learning of psychology be introduced in our lower Secondary school curriculum to develop soft skills, both intra- and interpersonal, in our younger generation. We need not teach the whole spectrum on the subject of psychology. My suggestion is to include the following three components: one, personality; two, perception; and, three, social psychology. It can be included as part of the Science subject, alongside Physics, Chemistry and Biology.

The learning of these three components will allow our younger generation to develop better awareness of themselves, family members, friends and others in our society. With such better awareness, our young ones will be able to establish good social and community values. And with such good values, and equipped together with skills and knowledge, our young Singaporeans will be more empowered when entering our workforce.

Our nation's goals are to achieve: one, a caring and inclusive society; and, two, an innovative and connected economy relies heavily on both components 'Hardware' (technologies) and



'Heartware' (values). Comparing both, the latter is more crucial and requires a tremendous and continuous effort as well as commitment. Mindset and culture need to be evolved and developed.

Madam, I am confident, empowered with the right and sincere hearts, followed by a determined, collective and consolidated effort, we can achieve happiness, prosperity and progress for our nation. Thank you, Madam.

(In Malay)

Puan, budaya organisasi dan kerja mempengaruhi tahap kegembiraan para pekerja.

Banyak syarikat-syarikat terkemuka dunia seperti Google dan Virgin Group telah mengamalkan 'employee centric work culture' atau budaya kerja yang menumpukan keutamaan kepada para pekerja.

Puan, soalan nya, apakah realiti budaya organisasi dan kerja di Singapura? Adakah pekerja-pekerja kita berasa gembira semasa menjalankan tugas? Adakah mereka merasakan majikan mereka mengambil berat atau diberikan keutamaan kepada mereka?

Puan, jika kita lihat pada hasil tinjauan-tinjauan yang dilakukan keatas para pekerja Singapura dalam beberapa tahun yang sudah, secara keseluruhannya para pekerja Singapura bukanlah golongan pekerja-pekerja yang gembira dan punca utama boleh dikatakan budaya organisasi dan kerja yang kurang memberi kepuasan. Akibat dari tidak mendapat kepuasan perkerjaan atau 'job satisfaction', tahap produktiviti dan inovasi tidak akan dapat diperbaiki.

Puan, usaha-usaha untuk merubah budaya organisasi dan kerja harus diberi keutamaan jika kita ingin melihat perubahan yang positif pada aspek inovasi dan produktiviti negara. Merubah sesuatu budaya bukanlah mudah. Ia nya adalah satu proses yang akan mengambil masa yang panjang serta usaha yang kolektif, keseluruhan dan berterusan. Ia nya memerlukan penyertaan dari kesemua pihak; pemerintah, majikan dan para pekerja.

Puan, menyentuh tentang perasaan ketidak kegembiraan, ramai telah menyuarkan rasa kurang senang terutama melalui media-media sosial tentang kenaikan harga air sebanyak 30% yang di umumkan oleh pemerintah. Walaupun pemerintah telah memberi bantuan tambahan melalui rebat U-Save, namun kenaikan harga air meliputi bukan hanya pengguna domestic atau kegunaan dirumah sahaja tetapi ia merangkumi segala rupa penggunaan air seperti industri dan perniagaan. Kenaikan harga air, bertambah pula dengan kenaikan harga diesel akan menyebabkan kenaikan kos operasi dan perniagaan. Kos-kos tambahan ini saya percaya sebaliknya akan disalurkan kepada para pengguna. Contohnya, kenaikan harga air berkemungkinan akan menyebabkan kenaikan harga dikedai-kedai kopi serta pusat-pusat penjaja makanan. Kenaikan harga diesel pula berkemungkinan akan menyebabkan kenaikan harga tambang taksi dan bas. Bolehkah pemerintah memberi kepastian bahawa kenaikan harga kepada para pengguna tidak akan berlaku?





## Justifying Revenue and Expenditure

By Sylvia Lim

Madam Speaker, when the Finance Minister delivered the Budget Statement last week, the announcement which grabbed the most attention was the increase in the price of water by 30%. Besides the quantum of the increase, what shook people was the suddenness of the announcement and the very short lead time from the announcement in February to its implementation in July.

Yesterday, the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources gave various reasons for the water hike. But these reasons are longstanding. The justifications, such as increased cost of production, the need to build more desalination plants and so on, did not come up suddenly.

For the last 17 years that the water price was unchanged, did it not cross the Government's mind before this year that it would want to raise the price of water? By contrast, there is a two-year lead time for the impending carbon tax, which the Government is announcing ahead of its implementation in 2019. This lead time is welcome, as it will enable businesses and consumers to prepare, such as by strategising and investing in energy-efficient measures.

Coming back to water, why was it not possible to prepare Singaporeans for the increase to take effect in July this year, with an announcement similarly two years ahead of time – in July 2015? Perhaps, in July 2015 was not a good time to make such an announcement.

Madam, the other statement in the Budget speech which caused insecurity and unease was at paragraph E.18 – that as we invest more in healthcare and infrastructure, the Government would have to raise revenues through new taxes or raise tax rates. Few people would quarrel with the need to invest more in healthcare and infrastructure. Our healthcare system is still facing capacity shortages, as seen from the 20-hour waiting times for beds at certain public hospitals.

I understand that the waiting time at some hospitals providing Long-Term Acute Care are indefinite. As for infrastructure, Singaporeans will benefit from a more comprehensive rail network, which will hopefully ease traffic congestion and provide more efficient connectivity.

## Measuring Effectiveness of Schemes, Avoiding Repeated Wastage

One legitimate question to ask, however, is whether there is an effective mechanism to assess whether expenditure that has been incurred has been effective in achieving desired outcomes.

Take for example, the Productivity and Innovation Credit Scheme (PIC) introduced in 2010. I believe the Government's intention was to design an inclusive scheme with less red tape, which would be easy for businesses to access. I am aware that businesses are supportive of the PIC scheme, but for various reasons, not necessarily related to productivity. For example, in a 2014 Post-Budget survey conducted by KPMG, 58% of the 80 senior executives surveyed admitted using the PIC to defray operating expenses, instead of using it to raise productivity.



Madam, I am not faulting the Government for its system design at the outset, as it may not be possible to foresee initially all the ways in which a scheme may be gamed or exploited. But now that the scheme has run for some years, how effective has the PIC scheme been in achieving its aim of boosting productivity? The PIC is a huge scheme with the Government putting in billions of public funds. Do we know whether the results were worth the huge cost? As it turned out, millions of dollars were also sucked out of the system through fraudulent or dubious PIC claims. What lessons have we learned from this? We now read that the SkillsFuture scheme, launched just last year, has also been subject to a potential fraud of \$2.2 million already paid out. While I understand that designing schemes is not a simple process, what lessons has been learned in order to minimise such wastages of public funds?

This year, the Committee for the Future Economy (CFE) has come up with seven broad strategies to tackle the challenges ahead. Minister Iswaran took us on a tour on some of the key thrusts on Monday. We have also had such committees to review our economic strategies in the past. Have we had any review of what had worked in the past, and what had not?

For instance, in 2010, we had the Economic Strategies Committee (ESC). The ESC had made recommendations to improve productivity which the Government accepted and implemented. The aim was to grow productivity by 2% to 3% per year over a decade, which should bring us to a 30% productivity increase by 2019. However, after seven years, productivity improvements are way off target and weak in domestically oriented sectors like retail and food & beverage. What lessons have we drawn from here, and can these lessons be applied to the CFE's strategies?

Madam, after the Budget Statement, several economic round table discussions were held. Various economists expressed concern about fiscal sustainability. They called for greater accountability on the outcomes of public spending, which they thought was necessary before the need for additional revenues and new and higher taxes should be called for.

At the roundtable organised by the Economic Society of Singapore, SIM University economist, Dr Walter Theseira, made the following observation, "Every few years, we have a big transformation package. We spend a few hundred million dollars here, a billion dollars there on different kinds of programmes, but we never really found out years later whether those programmes were any good or not."

Since the Government looks to the people to raise funds for such expenditures, public accounting for the outcomes for spending is warranted.

## Fuller Recognition of Revenue

Madam, another issue that has been raised from time to time is whether the Government's revenue from land sales should be factored into the Budget as a source of revenue.

I raised this matter during the Budget debates 10 years ago, and I am glad that other Members also see the pertinence of raising this question in this year's Budget debate. Economists have recently also revived this question in their current discussions on Singapore's fiscal sustainability.



At the time I made my speech 10 years ago, the revenue from land sales was in the region of \$4 billion to \$5 billion. Today, we see the revised land sales figure for this Financial Year to be \$11.8 billion and the projection for the coming Financial Year to be \$8.2 billion.

Tapping on land sales to fund annual budgets is internationally accepted, and practised by other governments. As our expenditures are expected to rise in the coming years, is it not reasonable to seriously think about utilising land sales revenue to fund the Budget? This will reduce the need to tax the people further.

## Conclusion

Madam, as I mentioned at the start of my speech, few will quarrel with the need to spend more on areas such as healthcare and public transport infrastructure. The legitimate questions being asked are whether we have done adequate reviews of past and current initiatives to weed out wasteful and ineffective expenditures. The other issue is whether we have completely recognised our sources of revenue. Doing so will help to ensure that we do not place unnecessary tax burdens on the people.

# COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY:

## Prime Minister's Office



## Singapore Citizenship Journey

by Leon Perera

Madam Chairperson, new citizens undergo the Singapore citizenship journey or SCJ so as to familiarise them with our national norms, culture, history and institutions. However, I am concerned about the possibility of one-sidedness in the political education that new citizens receive.

In the SCJ HOME for New Citizens guide, there are brief overviews of our political system explaining the role of elections, Parliament and so on. However, two matters stand out that are of concern.

1. In the SCJ community sharing sessions, new citizens and prospective new citizens are exposed to grassroots organisations under the People's Association umbrella. In the course of the SCJ process – at their citizenship ceremonies for example – they are exposed to and may get to meet PAP politicians but not politicians from other parties.
2. I have met a few new citizens who have told me that they are concerned that their citizenship would be taken away if they did not vote for the PAP. One example stands out in my mind. One older new citizen who was highly educated and credentialed told me that he supported more balance and competition in our political system. He said that as a successful businessman he knew the value of competition in producing better outcomes for the customer. However, he went on to say that as a new citizen he was afraid that if he voted for the Workers' Party, the government would find out and take away his citizenship. We spent 10 minutes trying to explain the process by which votes are secret. At the end of that 10 minutes, I am not sure if we convinced him. My guess is – probably not.

Will the government find ways to expose new citizens to members of other political parties? More importantly, will it include an element of education to train them in how their votes are kept secret in the electoral process? I could not find this being treated at all in the HOME for New Citizens guidebook. If there is a doubt that this is an issue, will it conduct a study to ascertain whether new citizens truly understand that their votes are secret?

## Total Debt Servicing Ratio (TDSR)

by Sylvia Lim

The rationale for the TDSR policy is well-known. While the Government has a good intention, TDSR is a blunt instrument that has seriously affected certain groups of Singaporeans in the current economic climate. I raised this in a recent Parliamentary Question but feel compelled to



raise it again as some of our residents are in the affected group.

The TDSR restricts borrowing from financial institutions at 60% of a person's monthly income, and applies not only to loans for purchasing a property but also to loans secured on a property. The first affected group will be retirees who have properties to mortgage but no income, who may need some liquidity for one reason or another. A second affected group would be those who have suffered a drop in income or been retrenched in the current downturn, but who can offer property as collateral for a loan.

What these persons ask for is a tweak to the TDSR policy to give them the flexibility to re-schedule their debt obligations, at little risk to the lenders. It seems that banks are applying TDSR strictly with no or few exceptions.

## Money Laundering

by Sylvia Lim

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A Malaysian Government investment company, 1Malaysia Development Berhad, or 1MDB, has spawned criminal and regulatory investigations into embezzlement or money laundering in at least 10 countries. Billions of funds associated with 1MDB and wealthy financier Jho Low have reportedly flowed through bank branches in Singapore.

The repercussions on our banking industry have been severe. BSI – one of Switzerland's oldest private banks – had its Singapore branch shut down by the MAS in May 2016, because it was the custodian bank for \$2.3 billion of investments from 1MDB. The Singapore branch of Falcon Private Bank – another private Swiss bank – was also shut down by the MAS in October 2016 after being linked to US\$3.8 billion of 1MDB fund flows. Standard Chartered Bank was fined while both UBS and DBS were penalised by the MAS. Bankers have since been convicted and jailed.

All these happened after last year's COS debates when Minister Chan Chun Sing said that MAS had put in place a robust preventive regime. Madam, this ongoing saga has severely tarnished Singapore's reputation as a financial centre.

In June 2016, the MAS announced that it would combat money laundering by strengthening enforcement. This included the setting up of a dedicated Anti-Money Laundering department, a dedicated supervisory team to monitor risks and carry out onsite supervision of financial institutions, and a new enforcement department to work jointly with the CAD.

However, even the MAS has acknowledged that "it is not possible to prevent regulatory breaches and misconduct even with intrusive supervision". Therefore, we are still very reliant on Financial Institutions and their employees themselves being vigilant and filing Suspicious Transaction Reports. This regimen breaks down when institutions themselves have fostered a culture of non-compliance, as we have seen with BSI and Falcon Bank, in how they wilfully ignored the risks in the 1MDB-related transactions.



Billions in transactions and millions in bonuses are tremendous incentives to break the law. Even with vigorous enforcement, punishments will still only be meted out after the fact and Singapore's reputation in this regard will still be damaged.

I would like to ask the Minister, will the Government take its regulatory measures a step further and actively try to detect bad institutions, and if so, what are the steps by which it intends to do this?

# COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY: Ministry of Foreign Affairs





## Staffing Needs for a More Complex World

by Pritam Singh

Mr Chairman, to say that the last financial year has been a public education in diplomacy for many younger Singaporeans would be an understatement. The release of the Permanent Court of Arbitration's judgment in favour of the Philippines over territorial differences in the South China Sea was followed up almost overnight by an unexpected upswing in relations between China and the Philippines, even as Singapore and many like-minded countries affirmed the judgment and the rule of law. The Terrex episode which saw nine military vehicles temporarily confiscated by the Hong Kong authorities hit even closer to home. While the issue appears to have been resolved and relations with China back on the usual even keel, some observers continue to watch the signature of Singapore's military activities in Taiwan even as others view the episode as a shrewd diplomatic ploy by China to make a point about the One China policy and to signal dissatisfaction with Singapore's position on the South China Sea.

I would imagine these incidents, amongst many others, to have taken up much time and energy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Government in general. It also is worthwhile to note that Singapore is into its second year as country coordinator for ASEAN-China relations, a challenging assignment made even more so by a new US administration determined – on the surface at least – to take a hard-headed and transactional approach in its relationship with China and with its domestic constituency more paramount in the conduct of foreign affairs than ever before. More recently, the last few weeks have also seen the Malaysian Government re-open the Pedra Branca case by way of an appeals mechanism.

Closer to home, it was significant that strategy number one of seven strategies arising out of the Committee on the Future Economy (CFE) was to deepen and diversify Singapore's international connections and to press ahead with trade and investment cooperation. In view of this renewed strategy cast against a broader evolutionary geopolitical environment, does the Ministry plan to review its staffing requirements both locally and in overseas Embassies and High Commissions with a view to raising manpower? Secondly, in view of ASEAN as a central economic region for Singapore, and in step with the CFE report's relevance to the ASEAN Economic Community, does the Ministry plan to open more consulates in ASEAN cities to further economic linkages and develop our international trade relationships?

## Foreign Policy in the New World Order

by Low Thia Khian

Madam, it was only half a year ago that the Prime Minister conducted a marathon of diplomatic visits to our closest partners in the region. In three months, he travelled to Laos to meet with ASEAN leaders and the United States, China, Japan, India and Australia to affirm longstanding ties.



Things were looking up for our relations with these key countries. Our principled foreign policy position has emphasised the international rule of law, commitment to an open economy and freedom of navigation, mutual respect for each other's independence, and armed neutrality. This seems to have earned us a good deal of legroom as a small, sovereign city-state among large powers. Some even commented that we are punching above our weight in the international arena to influence outcomes for the common good.

Much of our foreign policy achievements are clearly due to our hardworking diplomatic corps, members of whom have been building on the foundation established by our premier statesman, the late Mr. Lee Kuan Yew. But it is also becoming apparent that the global order is changing, and it is changing rapidly. Even as the Prime Minister continued his diplomatic marathon, when he was visiting Japan in September, a Chinese state-owned newspaper stoked public anger by accusing Singapore of taking sides against China.

Madam, I am glad that the issue with the seizure of the Terrex vehicles by Hong Kong Customs was handled with great care by China and Singapore and have come to pass. Nevertheless, the public expressions and discussions resulting from the events do point to some critical challenges to Singapore in this changing global order. The critical challenges pertain to a rising China with the economic and military clout to impose its will on Asia. China may not do so in the near future, but with the means and its strong position on the South China Sea claims, the potential is there.

Whether we like it or not, China is an important strategic partner. However, even as Singapore invests in new opportunities of bilateral cooperation, especially under China's "Belt and Road" initiative, we need to be mindful of not becoming too dependent on the Chinese economy. We have encouraged our businessmen, entrepreneurs and professionals to connect with their Chinese counterparts using deep historical and cultural links.

We saw the complications when Singaporeans doing business and working in China came under public pressure during the events last year. Some Singaporeans were even of the opinion that we should appease China. Singapore not only risks becoming economically vulnerable to any strategic foreign policy shift by China, the multi-racial and multi-cultural character of our society will also come under pressure.

To compound this challenge, the new United States administration pulled out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership a month ago. The US looks set to turn inwards to deal with domestic political conflicts. If the US disengages from Southeast Asia, this will leave a gap, if not a vacuum.

If ASEAN continues to be divided on the collective response to the South China Sea issue, then the gap left by the US will mean ASEAN will have to face a strong China by ourselves and divided. This is a grim prospect.

Madam, one of the tenets of our foreign policy is hard-nosed pragmatism to survive as a small city-state. I would like to ask the Foreign Minister whether our foreign policy principles need to be updated in view of the changing world order, and if not, how the existing principles would guide us in the volatile and uncertain waters.



## ASEAN

### by Low Thia Khiong

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Since the Permanent Court of Arbitration's ruling in favour of the Philippines against China's territorial claims in the South China Sea last year, media reports on the summits between leaders of ASEAN and China, coming just before and after the ruling, alleged that China's interference in ASEAN's affairs succeeded in dividing the organisation.

It would appear that Laos and Cambodia, which have strong overland economic ties with China, were weighing their national interests against the collective interests of ASEAN. Has this split healed since the events last year? What is the status of ASEAN integration, or has the South China Sea issue effectively blocked any progress for integration? Are the Philippines really embracing China? If so, what are the implications for ASEAN unity, given the Philippines is the ASEAN Chair this year?

It has been said by an expert in the foreign policy field that a divided ASEAN is not in the interest of China. This is not obvious to me as a layperson, as it seems that it is in China's interest to have a divided ASEAN. Historically, great powers will seek to divide and rule and advance their own interests in Southeast Asia. I am not sure China will be an exception, given its own imperial history. China continues to expand its economic influence in mainland Southeast Asia, and even with Malaysia, and will seek leverage with small states, such as Brunei and Singapore.

We, of course, have our principled foreign policy and will never compromise our independence. However, are we in a position to help unite ASEAN and to block out any divisive forces? If we are not in that position, then are we able to facilitate processes or support another leading country, say, Indonesia, to help unite ASEAN?

ASEAN has long served as an anchor for Singapore in the region. If ASEAN is beginning to lose its viability, then what alternatives does Singapore have to try to achieve a semblance of stability in its surrounding waters?

# COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY:

## Ministry of Defence



## Military Ties with Malaysia and Indonesia

by Pritam Singh

Madam Chairperson, at the recent 7th Malaysia-Singapore Leaders' Retreat, Prime Minister Lee and Prime Minister Najib reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthen bilateral relations and reiterated the importance of defence cooperation between the two countries and to strengthen bilateral defence cooperation. A month earlier, the latest in a long series of the Semangat Bersatu joint military exercises between the Malaysian and Singaporean armies was successfully concluded. While it remains important to remember that such exercises were halted when relations turned sour in the past, the reality of the geopolitical environment today emphasises the importance of greater defence cooperation and not less, so as to improve bilateral and regional security. To that end, is the Ministry considering the introduction of newer confidence-building initiatives with both Malaysia and Indonesia in addition to the Malacca Straits Patrol (MSP), the Five Power Defence Arrangement (FPDA) and ADMM and ADMM-Plus frameworks? In previous cuts, I have suggested pursuing the prospects of joint peacekeeping initiatives and training for international assignments. Is the Ministry considering newer areas for military-to-military collaboration with Malaysia beyond those like Semangat Bersatu exercise series so as to take advantage of the goodwill arising out of the political relationship with a view to more durable ties in future?

In contrast, while the political relationship with Indonesia is more complex, as a result of the politically diverse and more representative democratic terrain today, the military relationship appears to be an all-weather one despite occasional political turbulence.

Yet, 2017 marks the 10th anniversary of the yet to be implemented Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) between Singapore and Indonesia. As members would remember, the DCA was linked to an extradition treaty between both countries. In 2007, Indonesia sought to review the DCA after agreeing on the details with Singapore, while Singapore insisted that negotiations were complete. All this resulted in a package agreement that was stillborn.

In April last year, however, Jakarta confirmed that it was intensifying cooperation in law enforcement in lieu of an extradition treaty and was reported to have given Singapore a list of fugitives for follow-up and assistance. In light of the 50th anniversary of Singapore-Indonesia diplomatic ties and the signing of the Eastern Boundary Treaty, what is the Ministry's perspective of initiating fresh discussions on the DCA, in the name of renewed military cooperation and stronger diplomatic links between both countries?

## Transport Allowance for Nsmen

by Dennis Tan

I understand that full-time National Servicemen may be allowed to make transport claims such as taxi claims, for the purpose of odd working hours, to facilitate travel between their unit and



home on working days. I believe that this is meant to assist in defraying their transport costs given their limited NS allowance.

For NSmen, not all NS units have a 'stay in' policy during their In-Camp-Training (ICT). Madam, there are NSmen who are not given the option to stay in or could not stay in for good reasons. Some of these NSmen may still be required to book-out very late or book-in very early due to the demands of their NS roles. I would like to ask the Minister to consider allowing some of such NSmen to be eligible for transport claims, namely full-time students or NSmen who are unemployed at the time of the ICT.

In last year's COS debate, Second Minister for Defence Mr Ong Ye Kung, mentioned that students in local universities are called up for ORNS training while studying. These are full-time students and may be no different from full-time NSF personnel in that they are not working and do not have income. I would also like to ask the Minister to consider allowing this benefit to NSmen who are full-time students studying private courses and NSmen who are unemployed at the time of ICT. Their commanders can help administer such claims in accordance with suitable conditions to be stipulated by MINDEF.

I believe that allowing such transport claims will assist some of our NSmen to cope with booking out and booking in at odd hours without having to shoulder any unnecessary financial burden.

# COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY:

## Ministry of Home Affairs





## Auxiliary Police

by Sylvia Lim

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The need for additional resources for policing is clear. The population of Singapore is now more than 5.6 million, compared to 4.4 million in 2006, a 1.2 million increase over 10 years. More people means a higher population density, increased interaction and proximity, more potential for crime and more assets to protect.

Over the last few decades, the role of the Auxiliary Police has expanded exponentially. From an initial brief of static guarding of key installations to accompanying cash-in-transit, the Auxiliary Police are now in roles that require them to interact with the public in a variety of scenarios, such as crowd control, management of prisoners, checkpoint security and policing liquor control zones.

The training of Auxiliary Police has been enhanced, but is it adequate to ensure that the APO is equipped to meet the challenging needs of handling complex and unpredictable situations? Policing Singapore is complicated by the fact that our population consists of 1.7 million non-resident foreigners.

In answer to a Parliamentary Question I filed, the Minister has confirmed that Certis CISCO has obtained approval to recruit officers from Taiwan due to manpower shortages. I wonder whether the shortage will lead to a compromise in recruitment standards.

Several Singaporeans have expressed to me their concern about foreign APOs walking around with firearms. Related concerns have also crossed my mind, in particular, in the wake of the Little India riots in 2013, when it was clear from the incident reports that quite a number of the APOs at the scene were not Singaporeans.

What security risk is posed by having foreign APOs carrying firearms? What risk mitigation measures are in place? What about psychological testing? Is it time to consider arming APOs, especially fresh recruits from overseas, with non-lethal weapons such as stun guns?

## Safeguards during Police Investigations

by Sylvia Lim

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Singaporeans want the police to be effective. At the same time, the criminal justice system needs to balance State power with due process and ensure that investigations are conducted lawfully, with suspects accorded their constitutional and legal rights.

One of the safeguards proposed by myself and others during previous COS debates was to video-record the process of the recording of statements from suspects. As argued previously, such a procedure would also save the State from spending time to address frivolous challenges



in Court, and protect officers from false allegations. The Ministry had indicated that it would do a pilot project in the first quarter of 2016. Last October, I was disappointed to learn from a Parliamentary Answer that the Government had decided to put the initiative on hold, pending putting the legal framework in place. Could the Minister elaborate on the rationale and when we can expect the pilot to commence?

Secondly, the right to counsel upon arrest has also been debated in the past. Article 9 of the Constitution guarantees the right to consult a legal practitioner to a person under arrest, but case law has held that this right is subject to the exigencies of police investigations. During the COS 10 years ago, in 2007, there was a pilot announced to give early access to counsel. What was the outcome of that?

Finally, there is an issue about the length of time taken to complete the investigations. In some cases, the individual under investigation may suffer in his ability to earn a livelihood while the investigation continues, for example, when a person's vocational licence to be a public bus or taxi driver is suspended or revoked during the pendency of investigations. Sometimes, cases hang for months with no visible investigative step being taken. This leaves the accused person in indefinite limbo and unable to earn a living. Could there be a monitoring mechanism to ensure that such cases are investigated with a certain haste?

## Youths Facing Criminal Proceedings

by Sylvia Lim

I wish to touch on young suspects and their rights in the criminal justice system, in particular, those aged between 16 and 18 years.

Singapore has acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child ("CRC"). This is one of the few human rights treaties that Singapore has acceded to, showing the importance our country places on this set of international obligations. Article 1 of the CRC defines "Children" as persons below the age of 18. Under Article 4 of the CRC, Singapore is obliged to "undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the present Convention".

However, our Children and Young Persons Act ("CYPA") defines a child to be a person below the age of 14 years, and a "young person" to be between the ages of 14 and 16. This means that children between the ages of 16 and 18 are not covered by the protections under the CYPA.

For instance, children in Singapore between 16 and 18 years old are not protected by Section 35 of the CYPA, which prevents the media from publishing the particulars or identifying details of those under 16 years old involved in court proceedings. This gap in our law is not consistent with our CRC obligations, as Article 40 obliges state parties to ensure that every child (up to the age of 18) has his or her privacy fully respected during criminal proceedings.

Children between 16 and 18 years old are also not protected by Section 29 of the CYPA, which



protects those under 16 from being detained with adult offenders. This gap in our law is again not consistent with our obligations under the CRC, as Article 37 obliges state parties to ensure that every child (up to the age of 18) who is detained to be “separated from adults”.

Consider this: at 17 years old, many of our sons and daughters are still wearing school uniforms in Junior College, or attending polytechnic or ITE. Until they reach the age of 18, surely they could be given the full scope of protections Singapore has signed up to provide under the CRC. Otherwise, what is the point of signing this treaty?

Turning to the framework we do have, I note the Minister’s commitment to extend the Appropriate Adult Scheme to young suspects under the age of 16 in light of the suicide of 14-year-old Benjamin Lim. I hope the Ministry will have a legislative framework to entrench the Appropriate Adult Scheme and extend it to those below 18 years of age. Will the Ministry also consider permitting parents of such suspects to act as Appropriate Adults?

## Training for Prison Inmates

by Leon Perera

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The role of the Singapore Prisons Service to be a place where “strayed lives can be steered back on course” is a crucial one that deserves the support of the whole of society.

In August last year, during the debate of the SkillsFuture Singapore Agency Bill, I asked the Minister for Education to consider how to push training and education content, via, say, an e-learning platform, to those serving prison sentences. I am raising this again and would like to highlight two statistics from the Singapore Prison Services:

In 2014 to 2015, despite only a 1% decline in the total number of inmates, there was a 7% decline in the number of inmates trained in 2014 and a 6% decline in 2015. There was also a 4% decline in the number of inmates engaged in work programmes in 2015.

Why are fewer inmates getting access to training programmes? Can we consider different ways of enabling training for prisoners? Can SkillsFuture support our prisons by providing more platforms of adult education and training content for our inmates?

Pushing training to prisoners will facilitate the rehabilitation process and help make them productive workers or even possibly entrepreneurs in future.

SkillsFuture can be used for e-learning or for training conducted within incarceration or detention premises. In the US, we hear examples of prisoners who obtain university degrees while serving their sentences. As the SPS says, “Serving time should never be a waste of time.”

# COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY: Attorney-General's Chambers



# Staffing and Culture of Attorney-General's Chambers

by Sylvia Lim

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AGC's establishment headcount this year will be at an all-time high of 594, which, compared to the actual headcount seven years ago is a 42% jump. It would be enlightening to know why so many more officers are needed now compared to seven years ago, where these additional headcounts have been allocated, and whether this trend will continue and why.

Next, the Mission Statement of the AGC reads as follows:

"Serving Singapore's interests and upholding the rule of law through sound advice, effective representation, fair and independent prosecution and accessible legislation".

There are two further observations I wish to make.

First, we have seen senior AGC officers recruited from the private sector, such as from large law firms. I agree that AGC can benefit from private sector talent who inject fresh perspectives and updated market knowledge. However, do such persons receive any briefings to re-orientate their mindsets to function as public officers rather than private sector lawyers, from serving a client to serving the public? A private sector lawyer may be briefed to go all out to protect his client's interests, but an AGC officer should not simply go all out to ensure the government wins in court, but should serve Singapore's interests by promoting justice. It is common these days to see AGC officers refer to Government bodies in court as their "client", and in correspondences as well. This, to me, is disturbing.

Secondly, the AGC, as an Organ of State should be independent and ready to rein in the Government if it acts unlawfully or is abusing its power. To this end, I am most concerned about the recent appointment of a former Member of Parliament as the new Deputy AG. This is not a personal attack against the new Deputy AG nor his legal competence. But it is my view that filling a constitutional post in an Organ of State with a party politician is not ideal as it carries a real risk of undermining public confidence in the AGC's stated mission of fair and independent prosecutions and it is a risk that is best avoided.

# COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY:

## Ministry of Trade and Industry



## Business Space and Rental

by Chen Show Mao

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Over the past year and more, commercial rental for industry, office, and shops has declined. Yet, a significant number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) continue to cite the need for Government assistance relating to business rental. After this year's Budget was delivered, the Singapore Business Federation (SBF) said it was disappointed with the inadequate short-term support to lower business costs, including the "absence of measures on rental rebates for businesses in general."

Why is that? Quite apart from the fact that no assistance is too much assistance as far as prospective recipients are concerned, it seems that businesses facing challenging times may find even falling business rental a substantial burden. And for SMEs in some sectors more than others, business rental makes up a significant part of their operating costs. Could the Ministry consider whether targeted assistance, for example, in the form of rental rebates directed at qualifying SMEs or start-ups in certain sectors, may be feasible, say, to stimulate retail-oriented SMEs or start-ups, or microbusinesses, so as to bring added diversity and vibrancy to our heartlands? There are good reasons for this: to help SMEs relieve some of the pressure they feel and to better take on the challenges of restructuring and drive innovation.

## Business Rental Costs

by Dennis Tan

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Sir, I would like to call for the Government to do a comprehensive study of the history of business rental costs in Singapore.

In survey after survey, year after year, escalating business costs have been cited as a perennial bugbear for SMEs. In its Budget recommendations for 2016 and 2017, the Singapore Business Federation (SBF) highlighted that there was an urgent need to assist SMEs with business costs in the immediate term so as to help them overcome near-term economic headwinds, and high rental costs have consistently ranked among the top cost concerns for businesses. In 2015, rental of premises was found to be the second factor with the greatest impact on profitability, coming in after manpower costs. Even though concerns over rental have finally dipped slightly in 2016 owing to slower growth overall, this is a problem that we must still pay close attention to.

I hope the government will consider conducting a major, comprehensive historical and international benchmarking study on business rental costs to understand why rental costs rose so rapidly over the past two decades, and why despite the Government's efforts in recent years to release more land through the Industrial Government Land Sales (IGLS) programme, so as to ensure more industrial space, SMEs are still feeling the squeeze. The study should also include how the cost of doing business in Singapore compares globally, identify areas where the Government can provide greater support to our local businesses, and provide concrete recommendations in this regard. Only by having a deep understanding of the factors that cause rental costs to escalate can we incorporate the lessons into our long-term strategy and avoid





crushing rental surges in future.

## Impact of R&D Spending

by Leon Perera

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Sir, we need to nurture Research, Innovation and Enterprise (RIE) as a key driver of Singapore's economic success. What is equally important is to thoroughly review the economic impact of such public sector R&D spending so that we know what's working and what is not.

Here I have three questions.

Aside from the published data for the public R&D sector like employees, projects, patents, numbers of start-ups, R&D spending and so on, does the Ministry study and publish the economic multipliers resulting from this spending? For instance, which fields of R&D have the highest long-term multiplier effect?

Secondly, what has been the economic impact of Intellectual Property (IP) generated from the R&D spent? For example, has this IP helped to create total business spending in the wider economy and if so how much?

Thirdly, does the Ministry also have a count of jobs that are directly or indirectly created from that IP?

Running and publishing regular analyses of this nature for Parliament and the public to review would help to ensure that our R&D spending is optimised for economic and other benefits.

Such analyses do not preclude some R&D spending going to knowledge creation for intrinsically altruistic and academic purposes.

But knowing exactly what the economic impact is, makes for greater transparency and better decision-making.

## Innovation Competitions

by Leon Perera

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Sir, the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) in America holds competitions such as the DARPA Robotics Challenge, DARPA Urban Challenge, and DARPA Grand Challenge where participants from various backgrounds and disciplines are challenged to develop revolutionary solutions to practical challenges. For example, after the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011, DARPA organised a Robotics Challenge that spanned four years, aiming to spur research and technological advancement in the field of disaster robotics. The prize for the fastest robot to navigate an obstacle course based on conditions in Fukushima was \$2 million and was won by the South Korean team.

Such large-scale competitions do not only stimulate innovation and the progress of the industry, but also encourage the right qualities of perseverance, creativity and teamwork among those in



the R&D field. The resulting intellectual property could be harnessed to benefit the Singapore economy.

I would like to suggest that the Government, perhaps via public-private partnerships, hold competitions with significant grants and prizes to stimulate commercialisable idea generation from companies, campuses, Research Institutes (RIs), Research Centres (RCs) and the general public, with some conditions attached to facilitate the use of the resulting IP for the benefit of the Singapore economy.

## Private Sector Role in Economic Planning

by Leon Perera

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Sir, private sector staff do serve on the Boards of many economic agencies. But I suggest that we make more use of secondments of staff from private companies to serve short stints in government agencies to help with economic planning or promotion initiatives.

In the UK, the central civil service has just introduced a new framework for managing secondments into and out of civil service jobs, aimed at building meaningful links between the civil service and business leaders. Madam, I have met a few such private sector secondees into the British public service in the past and they demonstrated a keen knowledge of both private sector norms and constraints, as well as public sector priorities. Britain is also seeking private sector secondees to help prepare for the upcoming, technically complex Brexit negotiations. Japan similarly has private sector secondees working in Ministries to quite a significant extent.

In Singapore, there could be good demand for secondments in both directions, as business executives and civil servants may see the benefits of a stint on the other side. Of course, there are some potential pitfalls of secondment – ensuring that the stints are not too long or short, enabling secondees to adapt to a new work culture and so on – but these can be addressed through good human resource frameworks.

Given the challenges of a 21st-century economy and the predominance of lifelong civil servants in the upper echelons of public organisations and political office holders, private sector secondments could better enable us to form and execute economic policies.

## Targets for Renewable Energy

by Daniel Goh

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Sir, the intended implementation of an upstream carbon tax in 2019 shows our country's commitment to climate change mitigation. However, a carbon tax alone will not spur energy conservation and reduce emissions. The announcement has spurred talk that this could result up to a 4.3% rise in electricity prices for downstream consumers. Industries could prepare for this rise in the next few years, factor in the rise in costs, and end up not reducing energy consumption. The only one who would profit then, would be the Government.

One of the most common tools used in conjunction with carbon taxation or cap-and-trade



regimes around the world is the setting of hard targets for renewable energy production coupled with carbon offset incentives. We should cement Singapore's commitment to energy conservation by setting a target for renewable energy production. Currently, only 4% of electricity in Singapore is produced from sources other than natural gas and petroleum. We should aim for 10% renewable energy production by 2025. This will put us on par with other small developed countries like South Korea which has a target of 7% by 2020 and Belgium with 13%.

To provide incentives for power stations and other large emitters to turn to renewables, the Government should link the investment and use of renewable energy to carbon tax offsets. These offsets can be partly funded by revenue from the carbon tax revenue in the initial years.

## Competition Act and Interim Orders

by Pritam Singh

Chairman, in the middle of last year, the Competition Commission of Singapore announced that it was investigating restrictive industry practices in the supply of lift spare parts for lifts managed by Town Councils. In its press release on the matter, the Competition Commission acknowledged that there could be cost savings for Town Councils should they engage third-party lift maintenance contractors for various brands as compared to procuring lift maintenance services from each original lift installers.

To this end, the Straits Times noted that the original complaint was made to the Competition Commission about EM Services, a joint venture between HDB and Keppel Land, sparking an investigation. EM Services was found to have refused to supply spare parts to third-party contractors. On 12 May 2016, some two years after the initial complaint, EM Services came forward to provide a commitment to supply lift parts for the lift brand known to most Singaporeans as EM, to third-party lift maintenance contractors in Singapore. Following feedback from a public consultation, the Commission considered EM Services' commitments to fully address competition concerns, presumably concerns which originate from possible breaches of section 47 of the Competition Act.

The long duration of time between the initial complaint and the resolution of this matter would have had potentially significant cost implications for Town Councils, which could have secured favourable maintenance rates from third-party maintenance providers had a resolution to this matter been achieved earlier.

Section 67 of the Competition Act provides for interim measures in the midst of investigations when the Commission suspects a Section 47 prohibition has been infringed. The essential ingredients for instituting such interim measures is if the matter is an urgent one to prevent serious injury to a person or category of persons or, secondly, simply to protect the public interest. It would appear that section 67 could be employed against any lift company intentionally withholding the supply of lift parts under either of these two limbs. The high incidence of high-rise living and spate of lift incidents from 2015, in particular, brought home the point about the public interest in a very real way.

Did the Competition Commission consider making interim orders against EM Services so as to compel the company to sell spare parts to competitor maintenance companies during the



period under investigation? If not, why not? Not only would safety concerns and the public interest have been addressed, Town Councils could have potentially saved hundreds of thousands of dollars thanks to more competitive lift contracts. Secondly, on what basis did the Competition Commission deem it necessary to conduct a public consultation to affirm EM Services' conditions to supply lift parts? Who was consulted and why did the Competition Commission choose this method of resolution and not impose interim measures?

# COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY:

## Ministry of Manpower



## Singaporean Core Workforce

### By Low Thia Khiang

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Madam, if we want Singapore to remain a shining red dot for Singaporeans, it is important that we make every effort to strengthen the Singaporean Core workforce and remove potential impediments to the employment of Singaporean workers.

One potential impediment is our National Service liability. Disruptions caused by reservist call-up affect the employability of Singaporeans, especially in companies with fewer staff and less flexible operations. Two to three weeks absence from work could mean poorer performance reviews or even reluctance by employers to hire workers with NS liabilities in the first place.

While the advanced notice period was meant to give employers a longer runway to re-allocate work, in reality, it does little to mitigate the effects of reservist call-ups since employers will either have to ask other staff to cover the duties of the absent employee, which adds to their workload, or specially hire someone else to cover the worker's duties for that short period. Hence, the Government may want to consider an appropriate incentive scheme to encourage employers to employ NSmen, especially those who still have to fulfil high key ICTs.

Next, we must also maintain a Singaporean Core leadership in every field and every industry if we want to see a truly vibrant Singapore with robust economic resilience in the face of challenges. In respect of this, I am happy to see the introduction of SkillsFuture Leadership Development Initiative in 2015 and the follow up by the Government in this year's Budget announcing that it intends to groom 800 potential leaders in the next three years.

I request the Minister to share more details on the initiative, and how it intends to identify and groom these potential leaders.

## Young PMEs

### By Daniel Goh

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Madam, the Government has rightly been doing more for senior PMEs, as they bear the brunt of retrenchments and the effect of restructuring. But we must not forget the younger PMEs, who have their own unique problems as a sizeable segment in the workforce.

Moreover, young PMEs are now also facing substantial risks of being laid off and affected by restructuring. I would like to reiterate my call for the Ministry to allow all retrenched PMEs aged below 40 to qualify for the Career Support Programme without the condition of having to be unemployed for six months.

Another issue is that many young PMEs have been switching to contracts for service. Many are doing it for the flexibility of time and space, while some are doing it to expand the market for their skills, so that they can be engaged by overseas companies paying a better price. But this also makes them more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, especially since they will not be



able to lodge claims and obtain assistance through the usual channels.

The last issue I would like to highlight is: in this category of young PMEs are many young mothers who would like to return to work after a period of leaving the workforce to care for infants. There was a well-attended career fair organised by social enterprises last year that for the first time, catered to women returning to work. I hope Workforce Singapore could look into career services targeting this special group of young PMEs.

## National Jobs Bank

By Muhamad Faisal bin Abdul Manap

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Madam, the national job banks was set up in 2014 to support the implementation of the Fair Consideration Framework and is set to evolve into an online marketplace of jobs that helps to map career ladders in different industries and offers recommendations on the types of scales and trainings workers require to get jobs they want.

I have two recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the Job Bank in facilitating job-matching. First, a key challenge in job-matching is ensuring that there is a match between an employee's skill and the job requirements as well as between expectations of employers and employees regarding the job. The Jobs Bank can enhance skills matching by allowing job seekers who have just completed training courses to be automatically directed to job openings that require those skills. This dynamic matching not only facilitate the job hunting process, but it will also help job seekers recognise the value of learning new skills.

Second, I would like to propose that non-WSQ training providers be subject to a certification standard TrainTrust which can be modelled on EduTrust. To encourage providers to come on board, courses and providers that are TrainTrust-certified can be given priority on the list of courses that are recommended to Jobs Bank users. A certification standard will go some way in ensuring the quality of skills learnt, and strengthen the trust of potential employers in the courses attended or certification obtained by the jobseekers. It will provide reassurance to jobseekers on the value of the certification that they are spending time and effort to earn.

In addition, I also have two questions for the Minister. First, what is the actual number of Singaporeans who have successfully found jobs through the Jobs Bank in each year since its inception in 2014? And secondly, what proportion of the overall number of postings on the Jobs Bank is this?

## Workplace and Job Redesign for Seniors

By Chen Show Mao

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Madam, we are living longer. It makes sense to help our older workers stay active in the workplace for longer if they so choose. When we make it possible for older workers to remain active in the workforce as they wish, we help them contribute to their own economic and social well-being. In addition, their fellow workers and society in general also benefit from the full





utilisation of their human capital.

Employers can help their older workers become more effective workers in their jobs by redesigning the workplace, work processes, and even the job itself.

Last year saw several Government initiatives in the area. WorkPro was enhanced in making grants to help companies implement age management practices and redesign workplaces and processes for older workers. Also last year, a programme was launched to offer an array of courses for companies and individuals on age management at the workplace – a programme administered by UniSIM, in collaboration with MOM and others. In addition, a Job Redesign Toolkit for companies developed by MOM, SNEF and NTUC was launched. These Government initiatives focus on efforts for Job Redesign for Older Workers at the enterprise level and they are welcomed.

Could the Ministry look into making these efforts also at the industry level? This is because while workplaces and processes may be particular to a company, different companies in the same industry share a great deal in common. 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. Perhaps, Job Redesign for Older Workers could be identified as a key component of each Industry Transformation Map (ITM) currently being developed across the economy. Perhaps, Job Redesign for Older Workers can be set out among the suite of initiatives for improving productivity in any given industry. We know productivity is one of the four pillars supporting the growth and competitiveness plans of any given ITM.

Another way to envision Job Redesign for Older Workers as a key component of ITMs may be to think of it as a third horizontal, along with promoting ICT adoption and skills development, which can help to support the ITMs and produce improvements across the economy in the face of an ageing workforce.

## Welfare of Conservancy Workers

By Png Eng Huat

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An article on CNN caught my attention a few weeks ago. It tells a story about a hotel in a hikers' paradise in West Scotland. The foreign workers there were promised specific jobs with decent salaries. But when they arrived, job scopes were limitless, working hours were endless, and pay was meagre. The boss demanded additional payments from these workers to sponsor their visa, threatened to cancel their work permit if they do not cooperate, and warned them about arrest and deportation. The workers were treated like slaves. The owner of the hotel is now serving time for labour trafficking for a group of men from Bangladesh.

Modern slavery is happening everywhere, possibly embezzled by globalisation. You can see modern slaves working at the heart of our estates. These foreign cleaners work late into the night, seven days a week with low wages and no rest days. They even work when they were injured or sick. They have to work non-stop because they are living in bondage – a bondage with exorbitant agency fees and illegal kickbacks that they have to pay.



There are about 12,000 cleaning companies engaging about 58,000 cleaners, both local and foreign as of 31 September 2016. A \$3,000 kickback per foreign worker will translate into some serious money even if just 10% of the cleaning workforce were subject to the abuse. The math and the easy money are just too tempting for some people to pass up. Foreign workers are reluctant to come forth with their story for the fear of losing their livelihoods. Many of them sold their possessions and borrowed heavily to come here to make a living. They have huge debts to pay, and at the same time hungry mouths to feed back home. Coming out against their employers will mean losing their jobs and everything. A risk they can ill afford to take. The master of the modern slave trade knows this fear very well, and they milk these workers to the max.

Local cleaners are also not spared. I have seen cases of local cleaners working without payslips or contracts. For some, their payslips comprise unexplained or unjustified deductions. Some are given payslips with no CPF contributions stated and they do not know why. Some are not sure about their basic employment benefits, but they dare not confront their employers for fearing of losing of their jobs. Some of these local cleaners are elderly and illiterate, and their next job may be hard to come by. It is hard to imagine that despite all the education, publicity and threat of prosecution, such practice still persist. Would the Ministry share its result and effort to effective tackle such blatant disregard for the law and basic workers right?

Collectively, the Town Councils in Singapore hire a substantial number of cleaners. I told my General Manager to inform the cleaning contractors in Hougang I do not want such practice to surface in the estate. I am helped by warm-hearted residents who will not stand for any abuse of cleaners in their neighbourhood as well.

Madam Chair, every Member in this Chamber must not turn a blind eye to modern slavery. The cleanliness of our estate cannot come at an expense of the misery of the cleaners. It is time for us to clean up the cleaning industry for a change

## Improving Workfare Income Supplement (WIS)

By Daniel Goh

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Madam, I would like to repeat a long-held call for an increase in the percentage of the cash component for Workfare Income Supplement (WIS) payouts from the current 40% to 60%.

During last year's Budget, changes were made to the Workfare Income Supplement in order to, "provide a more direct and timely reward for work effort, and ensure that WIS continues to provide a meaningful level of support for eligible workers." There were four main changes, including a higher qualifying income ceiling, slightly higher payouts, monthly payments instead of quarterly, and increased contributions to CPF Medisave and Special accounts.

The Government, however, stopped short of increasing the cash component of the WIS from the current 40%. The last time this figure was revised was in 2013. While the four changes made to enhance the scheme were welcome and necessary, would increasing the cash



component not provide a far more direct reward for work effort? Increasing the cash component would allow workers to benefit immediately from the fruits of their labour and be a source of motivation to strive harder to improve their quality of life. This way they could get promoted and improve their earnings, which is a more effective and encouraging way to help low-income workers build up retirement savings.

## Employment Protection in the Gig Economy

By Chen Show Mao

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Madam, many calls have been made in this House over the past year for the proper protection of freelancers who operate in the rising gig economy. I wish to echo their concerns and reiterate the importance.

Currently, employment-related laws in Singapore, such as the Employment Act, the CPF Act and the Work Injury Compensation Act (WICA), outline the rights and responsibilities of employees and employers, including contributions towards housing, retirement and medical benefits.

Unlike an employee, a freelancer performing work under a contract for service currently falls outside the scope of many provisions of our employment-related laws.

Last month, Minister Lim Swee Say told the House that his Ministry is looking into results of a new survey commissioned to enable the Government to better understand the profiles of freelancers in Singapore. This initiative is welcomed. I hope it will lead to the Government looking into extending to freelancers more of the protection currently afforded employees under our employment-related laws. Perhaps, also to consider risk-pooling mechanisms yielding protection for freelancers in the event of work injury.

Madam, let us embrace the rise of the gig economy and protect our freelance workers who work in it.

# COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY:

## Ministry of Communications and Information



## "Live" Proceedings and Smart Nation

By Pritam Singh

Madam Chair, since the launch of the Smart Nation initiative in 2014, much has been said about facilitating initiatives that allow easy access to information on state services. Smart Nation envisions a Singapore where citizens are empowered by technology to live meaningful and fulfilling lives. Such efforts will also include providing greater access to official statistics and information on official programmes under public service initiatives.

In raising this cut, I use the word "smart" in Smart Nation with a non-digital definition in mind. At the time when poor information, misunderstanding and even misinformation and fake news are becoming increasingly prevalent, efforts that assist and allow the public access to primary sources of information so as to have an informed fact-based public debate are especially needed. This allows a discerning active citizenry to participate in governance and have a direct stake in policy-based discussions with fact and reasoned opinion the order of the day as opposed to wild diatribe and unsubstantiated exaggerations. No doubt, the latter will not be easy to filter out given the open nature of the Internet and the information age we are in today.

The Government has stated that it is looking at how it can reinforce its legal and regulatory hands against purveyors of falsehoods. But the long arm of the law alone is unlikely to engender a Smart Nation. A Smart Nation must – at its core – understand where to find news that allow its citizenry to make informed decisions.

Parliament is an important if not central conduit for information dissemination, and can make a seminal difference. For Singaporeans to be resistant to fake news, they must be sufficiently informed and providing a "live" and open parliamentary platform could serve as a key inoculant against fake news.

Educating the public about their rights and responsibilities as citizens and voters are equally important and useful next steps. Specifically, I would like to ask the Government if it would consider live video streaming and a searchable video archive of parliamentary debates.

The digital revolution has opened many doors to provide such services competitively. In fact, it was noteworthy that the recent Budget speech delivered by Minister Heng was streamed "live" and available on The Straits Times' website. The absence of full parliamentary question and answer clips and Second Readings of Bills appears contrary to the principles of open Government. No doubt, the delayed Channel NewsAsia videos available online shortly after a parliamentary session are notable improvement from the past. I also note that the scope and length of coverage has increased progressively as well. However, current reports on parliamentary proceedings by the mainstream media centre on snippets and sometimes omit key statements, facts and context, and this depends on the liberty of editors. As a written record of speeches, there are also limitations as to what the Hansard can convey in a timely manner, given society's migration to video-based formats on our smart phones.

I hope the Ministry can review its position on this matter and consider bringing "live" parliamentary proceedings in full to our smart devices in step with our evolution as a Smart Nation. I believe it will improve citizen-state relations in a significant way and improve public discussions about policy trade-offs and the understanding of Singaporeans about parliamentary affairs.



## Elderly Access to Government Services

By Chen Show Mao

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I would like to ask whether we could do more to help ensure that we do not leave groups of Singaporeans behind, in the drive to digitise Government services and build a Smart Nation.

One recent example is the difficulties that some seniors still face in trying to use SingPass and activating 2FA. Seniors without mobile phones need to apply for the OneKey token. In many cases, the only practical option for seniors who are unable to apply for the OneKey token online is to visit one of the two OneKey offices in Alexandra and Tanjong Pagar. This is the case notwithstanding the onsite assistance available at the 25 Citizen Connect Centres in Singapore who can help with applying for SingPass but not OneKey tokens. The process may prove cumbersome particularly for several groups of people – seniors who are not tech-savvy, those with low levels of education, those who are not conversant with English, those who do not own mobile phones and those who may have difficulties getting around. This calls to mind the bigger issues of the growing risk of losing access to essential Government services for groups of Singaporeans in the face of digitalisation. Let us try to make our pioneering Smart Nation even more inclusive.

## IMDA Grants for Media Works

By Leon Perera

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Madam Chairperson, the IMDA offers various grants for media works. I would like to ask what the IMDA is doing to promote private investment in Singapore films. Globally, new film financing models are emerging. These include loans, private equity and crowd funding, with film production completion bonds being used to help independent film-makers secure funding from these kind of sources.

What measure is the IMDA taking to incentivise and promote private sector funding for the film industry, including novel funding sources? For example, are there tax incentives for private investors who fund movie productions? Would the IMDA consider a co-investment scheme whereby the state can match private investors dollar-for-dollar, so as to kick-start the growth of movie private funding? Is the IMDA supporting the development of a crowd funding industry for films?

Such efforts may not only help commercially oriented funding, but also encourage private funders to step forward to finance films for which they have a passion. A better financial ecosystem for film production in Singapore would place the industry on a more sustainable footing. Unleashing private funding will also help the cause of artistically or nationally important films that may be less commercially viable.

I would also like to know how the IMDA is supporting local film-makers to offer content online, as this is a fastest growing platform for film consumption. All these are important for the quest to create more Singapore movies that can inspire us and help bring the light of Singapore to the world.

# COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY:

## Ministry of Education





## Sports in Schools

### By Png Eng Huat

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Mr Chairman, the journey to becoming a sporting nation and achieving sporting glory at the highest level surely must start somewhere. Look at the vibrancy of the sporting scene in the schools in the United States. They used to send their college teams to compete at the Olympics. Every young athlete there harbours a dream to compete for sporting glory at the highest level, be it local, national, or international.

However, the dream of becoming the next world champion, especially for a young athlete living in a small country like Singapore, should not rest on the individual and his family alone. The nation must share that dream, and it must filter down to the schools to begin with.

The fire in the sporting belly of our schools has dimmed. I remember back in the 1970, competitions among the schools were keen and sporting rivalries were strong, all in good spirit and character building. There was always a lesson to be learnt, in victory or defeat.

The New Nation, the predecessor of The New Paper, gave generous coverage to school sports with large photo spread. You do not see that anymore. And what you do not see often, you do not think much of it over time as well.

Sir, football is one of the most popular sports here and yet some schools do not even play the sport anymore. How can we dream about competing against the great footballing nations at the World Cup Finals when our youth are not even fired up to compete against each other in schools.

Sports in schools can build camaraderie, character, and sense of belonging in our youth. I urge the Ministry to look into promoting a vibrant sporting culture in schools because the future of our dream for sporting glory is at stake.

## Promoting Entrepreneurship in Schools

### By Dennis Tan

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Last month, in this House, we heard about the progress of the YES! Schools programme. My colleague, the hon Leon Perera, also suggested at the same sitting that we should consider a "push" model instead of the current approach. Currently, the YES! Schools and other programmes are open on an opt-in basis.

I would like to ask the Government to consider making all students go through such entrepreneurship programmes and from a young age. The Government should develop such entrepreneurship programmes progressively for different levels from Primary school upwards to tertiary levels.

I believe that that making such programmes available to every student will bring benefit not just by way of general education and exposure, but from this much larger pool of students exposed to such education, we should be able to inspire many more young Singaporeans to be



entrepreneurs and/or to develop a nose for business.

Through such programmes, we should let students try their hand at starting a business even when they are still in school. Give them practical experience in thinking out of the box, selling, raising capital, even getting rejected and learning to be resilient.

Ultimately, we need to develop a mindset change in our young students in looking at life and business and how we view risks and possibilities in life. And I believe early exposure to entrepreneurship training and development can help to bring about such a mindset change. I hope we can change the mindset of our young people to consider entrepreneurship as a worthwhile ambition, alongside, if not ahead of, working for the public service or for an MNC.

## Class Size

By Leon Perera

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Mr Chairman, we have debated the issue of class size in this House before. Class size is distinct from teacher-student ratio, which can be affected by many other factors.

While there are different perspectives in the academic literature on the merits of smaller class sizes, some facts do stand out. Class sizes of international schools in Singapore are smaller than in local schools. Our class sizes are still significantly higher than the OECD average. And our typical class size has not changed very much since I was a child, and I need not remind Members that was a very long time ago.

Our large class sizes are supplemented by remedial classes which can provide weaker students with more focused teaching and engagement. However, remedial classes have their downsides. Students who are required to attend remedial classes may feel stigmatised and become demoralised. Morale and self-esteem can have an effect on academic performance. Moreover, remedial classes extend hours for students and crimp time for other kinds of academic or character development.

I would like to ask – has MOE conducted any studies or does it have any data that assess the relative merits of smaller class sizes as opposed to maintaining the current system of larger class sizes plus remedial classes?

## Equitable Funding for Schools

By Png Eng Huat

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Mr Chairman, this is the second year in a row that I am raising the issue of equitable funding for schools. The Minister's replies, when I brought up the issue twice last year, were along the line that MOE resources schools based on the needs of students, programmes offered by the schools and the enrolment of the schools. In other words, MOE does acknowledge that there exists a distinct disparity in funding between the brand name schools and the other schools.



I have highlighted that the per capita funding for schools favours popular schools with high enrolment. Parents can see the disparity for themselves, which manifests in differences in the range of arts, sports and enrichment programmes offered by schools. When this information makes its way through the grapevine, the perception that certain schools offer more and better opportunities for student development will perpetuate. This drives the enrolment numbers for the schools, and consequently, the amount of funding that the Government disburses to them, based on enrolment figures. Even without factoring in the higher fees, greater economies of scale and contributions by well-connected alumni, the brand name schools are already competing in a league of their own.

The per capita funding for student may seem fair at the micro level but at the macro level there has to be a baseline funding for schools. If per capita funding is the great leveller in developing our students fully and holistically in all schools, why did MOE need to close down seven neighbourhood schools last year? Falling enrolment numbers should not be a reason for these schools to shut their doors then, because the Government is still committed to funding them on a per capita basis.

When some schools are forced to do more or the same with less, while others are spoilt for choice in terms of what they can offer their students, can we say that this model of funding is in the best interest of every student?

Last year, my colleague, Mr Dennis Tan, asked the Minister if the Government takes the higher school fees and contributions from wealthy alumni into account when providing funding to schools. The Minister did not provide a response to that. I hope the Minister can provide an answer to this important question and release details on the funding given to each school to support the notion that every school is a good school.

## School Buses for Special Needs Schools

By Leon Perera

Mr Chairman, for many special needs students, navigating the public transport system on their own may be a daunting task. As a result, SPED schools and parents of special needs students depend on school buses.

As a parent of two Primary school children myself, I trudge down to the void deck of my flat to see my two kids off on their school buses on most mornings. Our school buses are a Singaporean institution and special needs students should not be excluded from that.

Sir, I have encountered feedback from some VWOs running special needs schools that it is difficult for them to engage school bus contractors. This is because the bus operators for such routes may need to deploy additional manpower for special processes and equipment that may degrade commercial viability.

What would the VWO do if no operator wants to take up a school bus tender? Not all VWOs have the means to buy and operate their vehicles. Will MOE consider fresh ideas to help special needs schools address this issue?



One suggestion is to require bus operators to support a certain number of special needs school bus routes as part of the contracting requirements under the Bus Contracting Framework. Another idea is to apply a state subsidy to bus contracts for special needs schools to make them commercially attractive.

A one-off financial assistance package could also be applied to help school bus operators retrofit their buses to better cater to transporting special needs children, similar to the LTA's assistance package rolled out in 2008 to help retrofit seat belts and provide booster seats on small buses. If successful, such schemes can be extended to day activity centres and sheltered workshops for persons with disabilities operated by VWOs.

## Early Detection of Dyslexia

By Daniel Goh

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Sir, it has been reported that globally, 4% of each cohort of students suffer from dyslexia severe enough to require intervention. This would mean that there are about 1,600 children per cohort in Singapore who may have severe dyslexia.

It was reported last year that the Dyslexia Association of Singapore (DAS) has been assessing around 900 students each year, of which two-thirds are diagnosed with dyslexia. This means that there could be hundreds of children per cohort who have the condition but are not diagnosed.

Currently, dyslexia assessment is done voluntarily based on pre-assessments by pre-school and Primary school teachers who would then make recommendations to parents.

I believe it is timely for MOE to introduce mandatory and subsidised dyslexia screening at the pre-school level. An assessment performed when the child is in the second half of the second year of kindergarten would give the parents more time to prepare the child for formal schooling. Studies have shown that early intervention helps the child to better catch up in reading and writing with their peers.

## Hiring of Persons with Disabilities in Schools

By Dennis Tan

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Sir, last month, Minister Tan Chuan-Jin said, in an answer to a Parliamentary Question from my colleague, hon Member Assoc Prof Daniel Goh, that persons with disabilities and special needs (PWDs) comprise only 0.55% of the resident labour force.

Despite initiatives like the Open Door Programme, the employment rate of persons with disabilities and special needs remains low. The take-up rate to date is but a small fraction of the \$30 million set aside for the programme. Only 1,000 out of an expected number of 4,000 people have been placed under the programme by last month.



If we want to build an inclusive society, we are going to have to work on changing mindsets. I would like to propose that schools should actively look into hiring persons with disabilities and special needs for roles that match their abilities. Ministries and Statutory Boards already hire persons with disabilities.

Besides the benefit of having an inclusive employment policy which help to encourage and boost further employment for persons with disabilities and special needs, it will also expose our school children to an environment where they may grow up seeing such persons working alongside other staff.

Together with suitable education programmes, MOE and schools can use such opportunities to help all students understand the needs of persons with disabilities and special needs, and to learn how to interact and get along respectfully and meaningfully. We have a long way to go in equalising employment opportunities, but if we allow our students to develop respect and empathy from a young age, they are more likely to carry these attitudes with them when they enter the workforce in future or become employers.

## Later School Start Times

By Daniel Goh

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Sir, a number of studies on the sleep patterns of our teenage students indicate that they are not getting enough sleep. They are getting around five to six hours of the recommended eight hours of sleep. One recent study by the Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School linked sleep deficiency with lowered cognitive performances, deterioration of sustained attention, working memory and alertness. Longer term issues include high blood pressure, obesity, behavioural problems and impaired growth.

One of the recommendations from the study was to start school later. Currently, most of our schools start at 7.30 am, which means that students would wake up before sunrise, resulting in a disruption to their circadian rhythms. If we can start schools an hour later at 8.30 am, students will no longer need to wake up before sunrise and this could help improve their sleep cycles, thus leading to better health and learning outcomes. Additionally, most schools today function as full-day schools, making it feasible to implement a later start time.

## Regional Language Proficiency

By Chen Show Mao

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Sir, the importance to our country and to our economy of regional cooperation and trade; and the importance to our people and our enterprises of internationalisation and regionalisation have been much rehearsed in these COS proceedings for other Ministries. Could we complement these efforts and facilitate these outcomes with an increased focus on regional language proficiency in our school curricula?



There are other good reasons, in many ways more important reasons, for doing so.

First, education. Research has found several benefits of multi-lingual education in children, including cognitive and intellectual skills. UNESCO has consistently championed multi-lingual education in schools.

Second, to protect and preserve our own multi-culturalism. We should promote the learning of our own national language and our other official languages. It promotes national integration, and it is our good fortune that our national language and other official languages happen to be among the most widely spoken in Asia and the world.

We currently have third language programmes at the Secondary school level like MSP for learning Malay and CSP for Chinese; and we have conversational third language programmes for Malay and Chinese at the Primary school level as enrichment, but not as 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 to deepen the conversational language skills of our Primary school students, and we do this starting with our national language and our official languages, perhaps, included as part of the regular curriculum for every student, that is compulsory and during school hours, but without the pressure of examinations?

## SkillsFuture Stocktake

By Pritam Singh

Madam Chair, when I spoke about SkillsFuture during the Budget debate in 2015, I noted that as SkillsFuture got off the ground, it would be useful for the Government to track the outcomes of SkillsFuture initiatives, especially for our SMEs, so as to assess how the scheme has been effective in achieving the desired productivity increases and economic outcomes, and to better track the real value of SkillsFuture initiatives for various industries.

It will be inevitable that practical outcomes would be expected of SkillsFuture and sought after in view of dire warnings of machines replacing people and the requirement for a high level of skills to succeed in the workplace of tomorrow.

The concern I have then and as I do now is that Singaporeans do not see a qualification strategy is being synonymous with the genuine skills upgrading strategy. To that end, the review mechanism to understand the outcomes of SkillsFuture is a necessity.

As the Government has shared, SkillsFuture is more than just a movement targeted at specific age groups but across age groups and society and, therefore, it is also about the larger cultural shift towards lifelong learning.

To this end and in October last year, I asked a Parliamentary Question about the utilisation of SkillsFuture Credits. It was reported that up to August 2016, over 80,000 Singaporeans had used them. This number was later revised on the back of a similar Parliamentary Question this year which raised the number to 126,000 over the course of the entire year. Can the Ministry provide more details about this number in terms of the types of courses taken up by



Singaporeans and the age group breakdown of Singaporeans who have used their SkillsFuture Credits?

While I accept it would be more important for Singaporeans to utilise their credits carefully and thoughtfully, can the Minister comment on his assessment of the utilisation rates so far?

In reply to my Parliamentary Question, the Minister also replied that it dedicates far more funds to subsidising course fees at the supply end to make them affordable, not just SkillsFuture credits, so that there are avenues for workers to reskill or upgrade.

To this end, it was recently reported that the Government funded 920,000 training places in 2015. Can the Minister provide a breakdown of these numbers and which industries receive the most and, conversely, the least attention as well, and what are its plans moving forward?

In addition, does the Ministry dovetail newly subsidised courses with the various Industry Transformation Roadmaps under the broad strategic direction offered by the Committee on the Future Economy? If so, is the Ministry considering to step up public communication to advise Singaporeans of the options available to take up courses for new careers and for those who change careers midway through their working life?

Finally, can we expect employers to make a renewed commitment to hire Singaporean workers, even more so in the SkillsFuture environment where so much energy and resources are spent on upgrading the skills of Singaporeans?

## SkillsFuture Mommy Awards

By Daniel Goh

Madam, Singapore's Total Fertility Rate has hovered around 1.2 to 1.3 for some time. We are struggling to reach the 1.4 to 1.5 mark that Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean set as the target back in 2013 when launching the Marriage and Parenthood package.

An oft-cited reason given by young women for putting off having children is that they are concerned that parenthood may permanently derail their careers. This is not an unjustified concern. Women tend to find it more difficult to re-enter the workforce after having children. Now, with the constant stress to upgrade one's skills so as to remain competitive and stay relevant, more pressure is placed upon women who question if they can afford to take time off and still be able to keep up with their peers when they return.

I would like to propose a SkillsFuture Mommy Award to be made available to women while they are on maternity leave. The Award would be valid for one year, which should coincide with the no-pay leave period during the baby's first year – an idea mooted by the Government last year and is currently being explored. This Award will encourage mothers to take up training that may help them remain relevant to their industries, keep their skills sharp and make re-entry into the workforce a little less challenging.





## Retraining and Professional Education

By Low Thia Kiang

Madam, retraining and education are essential in this new economy where the idea of having a job for life is quickly disappearing, and workers must be prepared to switch industries and to pick up new skills if necessary.

While many local courses are subsidised for Singaporeans and the Government has provided some assistance by way of the SkillsFuture Credit, there are courses that still require hefty fees. I would therefore like to propose the Government setting up a SkillsFuture Education Loan to facilitate further and continuing education that will help workers to advance their careers or to switch career paths.

While the Government may point to the existence of the CPF Education Scheme as a similar initiative, there are several limitations of the scheme such that it does not adequately address the needs of working adults who may wish to further their education or to take up training courses.

One such limitation is the types of courses that it applies to. The CPF Education Scheme is meant for full-time subsidised courses offered at Approved Educational Institutions, and only applies for first degrees and diplomas.

On top of this, the use of CPF to fund education and training will also have an impact on the retirement adequacy of the individual and their family members, if they are still eligible to borrow from the CPF savings of their parents or spouse.

In the implementation of the SkillsFuture Education Loan, some aspects can be borrowed from the CPF Education Scheme, such as pegging of interest rates to CPF Ordinary Account interest rates, which are less onerous than rates offered by banks; and stipulating that repayment will commence a year after graduation.

The loan scheme will give individuals greater peace of mind over repayment which may in turn encourage more people to pursue retraining or higher education.

## Social Sciences Research Council

By Pritam Singh

Madam Chair, late last year, the Ministry announced a significant grant for research in the Social Sciences and Humanities to the tune of \$350 million under the auspices of the Social Sciences Research Council. I understand the first round of grant calls has closed to about 70 proposals and an announcement is due soon on the award recipients.

I know that the grant focuses on big themes with the public purpose, such as social integration and resilience, building identities, developing new models of training and education and spurring growth, productivity and innovation. I would like to enquire in awarding the grants, how does the Ministry consciously spread the awards between the Humanities and the Social





Sciences?

While these initiatives are significant, I would also like to know whether some of these grants would be available for initiatives that encourage or promote an interest in the Humanities per se, and not necessarily the Social Sciences as such and therefore lacking in the immediate societal outcome. This might include historical research on the South China Sea, urban and rural communities in Southeast Asia, Asian literature and languages which encompass a broadening of knowledge base of Singaporean researchers and institutions, thereby producing independent outcomes. Such work may not have direct relevance now, but they would be of consequence in view of our geopolitical realities.

What such funding would also do is to generate significant interest among young Singaporeans who seek to pursue postgraduate qualifications to teach and carry out research in our local universities. A community of Singaporean Social Science and Humanities scholars with specific expertise would in time also raise the quality of the standard of our research, staff and faculty in Singapore and promote a drive towards excellence.

There should be no reason why the world's pre-eminent historians, sociologists and other humanities specialists of the region should be teaching in a university or institution which is not based in Singapore. We should aim to count as many Singaporeans as we can among such a group of scholars.

# COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY:

## Ministry of Finance



## Office of Budget Responsibility

By Low Thia Khiong

Madam, I would like to call for the Government to consider setting up an independent office for budgetary responsibility that provides expert, non-partisan, open-source analysis of the Government's budgetary plans, and is accountable to Parliament.

I believe an independent fiscal watchdog is necessary since the Government has been concerned of the rising expenditure in recent years, and the Minister for Finance raises the prospect of tax increases.

The public will be interested to know the effect of public expenditure and its actual impact on fiscal position by an organisation independent of the Government by providing expert analysis.

I believe that no individual outside the Government has the expertise to analyse each year's Budget in much depth, and I believe that Parliament and Singaporeans would benefit from the in-depth analysis provided by an independent fiscal watchdog. Such an office also helps to improve fiscal governance by holding the Government more accountable through better transparency.

There are countries that have an independent budgetary office. The UK Office for Budgetary Responsibility was established in 2010, and its missions are: one, to produce detailed five-year forecasts for the economy and public finances; two, judge the Government's performance against its fiscal targets; three, assess long-term fiscal sustainability; four, evaluate fiscal risks; and five, scrutinise the Government's costing measures.

The independent analysis of such an office can also provide input to the Elected President on whether or not to veto Supply Bills, should the Government wish to draw on reserves not accumulated by the current Government. Given that this is one of most important decisions the President might have to make, there should be a non-partisan, professional and specialised outfit putting out independent assessments to assist the Elected President.

## Taxes

By Low Thia Khiong

Madam, the Minister for Finance appears to be laying the ground to prepare Singaporeans for a rise in taxes. He said, I quote, "We will have to raise revenues through new taxes or raise tax rates" to keep our finances sustainable.

I would, therefore, like to ask the Minister: What are the new forms of taxes that he is considering? What are the Ministry's considerations in introducing new taxes? And what are the principles guiding these considerations?



There has been widespread speculation that the Government is looking to raise GST, with experts and journalists suggesting that it is no longer a matter of whether the Government will do it; it is simply a matter of when.

I would like to ask the Minister: Is he planning a GST increase as a revenue measure before the end of the decade? If so, when is he looking to implement this increase in GST, and by how much?

It is widely recognised that GST is a regressive tax that hurts the poor much more than it hurts the rich, which is why the Government has been providing GST Vouchers in an effort to correct the impact on lower-income households. However, GST Vouchers do not fully offset the amount of GST paid by lower-income households. I would like to know whether the Government has exhausted all other cost-cutting and revenue measures and, hence, have to raise tax.

If the Minister is, indeed, considering an increase in GST before the end of the decade, I hope he can be upfront with Singaporeans now so that they are not blindsided by the Government as they were with the sudden 30% increase in water price.

## Retrenchment Tax Deferment

By Daniel Goh

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Madam, I would like to ask the Minister to consider temporarily deferring the collection of personal income tax from workers who have been retrenched or made redundant.

Typically, more workers are retrenched in the first and fourth quarters of each year than in the second and third quarters. This means that these workers would have earned enough income to be taxed, and their tax liability becomes an additional drain on savings that they have to factor in. Workers who have signed on to GIRO payments will experience ongoing tax deductions even during the period of unemployment, either monthly, or in a lump sum, and if they are unable to pay up, they are slapped with a late payment penalty.

I would like to propose that workers who have been retrenched or made redundant be allowed to defer payment of all personal income tax for a period of six months, or until the worker receives fresh CPF contribution for the new job, whichever is sooner. The six-month deferment would be in line with the duration used in labour policy for retrenchment.

Giving laid-off workers the option of deferring payment of their personal income tax would help to alleviate some financial stress, especially for middle-class workers. It will give them room to plan their finances so that their families can be better prepared to tide over the period of unemployment. It will also give them some psychological security during the transitional period to focus their energies on training and seeking re-employment.



## Leadership in Government-linked Firms

By Leon Perera

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Madam Chairperson, there are many prominent examples of former civil servants and military officers who have taken up senior appointments in Government-linked companies (or GLCs). Often, such transitions happen when the individual is in his 40s. There are many examples of such appointments in the past, and some are also still currently serving.

Madam, I have no doubt that the possibility of senior civil servants and military officers moving to GLCs when they reach a certain age helps us attract good talent to the civil service and armed forces, and that is not a negligible benefit. Young people contemplating a career in the civil service and armed forces would know that there is a pathway to enable them to move into the private sector should they choose to do so.

However, has MOF considered if this benefit outweighs the potential downside which is that our GLCs' senior posts may be filled by individuals who lack experience in their respective industries? Has the MOF analysed the performance of GLCs during periods when they are headed by a former civil servant or army officer versus periods when they are headed by an industry veteran or a private sector veteran to see if there are any differences in business performance and organisational effectiveness? And, if so, what have been the findings? If not, would the Ministry consider doing such an analysis?

## Local Firms in Government Procurement

By Chen Show Mao

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Madam, the importance of Government-led demand to our small and medium enterprises has been very much rehearsed in these Committee of Supply proceedings for other Ministries.

Through the Government procurement experience, SMEs get to build not only the track record, but also the capabilities they need to be competitive at home and outside Singapore in the internationalisation drive. Could we complement these efforts and facilitate these outcomes by refinements or enhancements to our Government procurement practice? Subject to, of course, alignments with international standards and obligations and the underlying principles of fairness, transparency and value for money.

Could the scope of work be more finely delineated, for example, by specific types of requirements so that different SMEs may take on different parts of the work? This could help them enter into collaborations and form consortiums to bid for higher value contracts in the future. Could SMEs who have niche technologies relevant to the work be engaged through research partnerships with GovTech or other agencies?

Madam, our SMEs contribute half of our GDP and employ 70% of our workforce, and have won



the substantial majority of Government tenders under our open procurement system in recent years, both by number and the value of contracts. Due, however, to their large numbers and their variety, it is estimated that less than 5% of our SMEs secure Government projects. Last year, the first Government procurement fair was held in part to encourage SMEs to participate in the Government procurement process. Could we look into possible enhancement and refinements to the process that could help that even more of them to do so?

# COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY:

## Ministry of National Development



## Rental Flats and Non-citizen Spouses

By Pritam Singh

Madam Chair, HDB rental flats can be a life saver for many vulnerable families. They also represent an important safety net for the children of rental lessees or their next generation. I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge the flexibility granted by the HDB and compassion extended to rental flat applicants for my Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS) cases who narrowly missed the qualification criteria and to single mothers and divorced spouses in particular.

In this context, I have noted a small group of new rental flat applicants coming to my Meet-the-People Sessions with increasing frequency. These are foreigners who were either married to Singaporeans in the past and who have Singaporean children, or separately, low-wage earning Singaporeans married to foreign spouses.

As the rule stands today, neither group qualifies to apply for rental units and many are told of this when they visit HDB Branch Offices. More generally, the Government has reported a rise in the number of citizens marrying non-citizens.

While I recognise the limited number of rental units available for needy Singaporean families, the non-citizen spouses, I spoke of earlier, have a very close connection to Singapore by way of their children's place of birth or by way of marriage to Singaporean.

Would the HDB allow such individuals to apply for a rental flats? There is some policy justification in favour of this by virtue of the non-citizen spouse scheme which recognises Singaporeans married to foreigners can buy a HDB flats. But I am just referring to the rental market right now. I hope the HDB would allow foreign spouses or ex-spouses to rent directly from the HDB so as to allow the individuals concerned and their families to get back on their feet.

## Upgrading/BTO Design and Maintenance

By Png Eng Huat

Madam, The Senior Minister of State for National Development had said that HDB adopts a comprehensive management system to track construction process of all BTO projects. In an answer to a Parliamentary Question in January 2016, the Senior Minister of State outlined 10 stages of checks and monitoring to ensure BTO projects are properly supervised, building materials and equipment are of acceptable standard, and potential design, safety, and maintenance issues are identified. In addition to this, this House was also informed that HDB conducts regular audits at different stages of construction to ensure compliance and quality control.

While it may be good to know that HDB takes a no-nonsense approach to ensure build quality





of its projects, the reality on the ground can be a big let down at times. Some of the designs and quality of BTO flats and upgrading projects I have encountered in Hougang are not acceptable. At Hougang Dewcourt, a mixed development of 4-room flats and studio apartments, the design is not even elderly friendly. The lift lobby lacks natural lighting in the daytime, which is a safety concern for senior citizens living there. Were these potential design, safety and maintenance issues identified early as mentioned by the Minister? Does HDB expect the Town Councils to turn on the lights 24 hours a day at such lobbies to address the design concern?

The town council also found undulating corridors due to poor workmanship, garden areas that do not have adequate sunlight, and designs that do not make sense. One such design is the sheltered linkway connecting Dewcourt to the older part of the estate. The overhang of the shelter falls so short of the apron drain that when it rains, the water hit the walkway directly and turns it into a flowing river. Instead of protecting residents from the rain, a few senior residents had fallen navigating that link as a result.

The Lift Upgrading Programme is another project with diverse designs and quality issues. Some are well designed while some are not. Some are just plain bewildering. We have lift lobbies that are too small to be effective and shelters that are not consistently applied across the estate. Some blocks have them and some do not, for no apparent reason.

Madam, in some of the new lift shafts, we found water on top of the lift cars, at the bottom of the lift pits, in the controller panel, and in places you never thought water could get in. Yet, some lift shafts are so well built that Town Council has very little issue maintaining them. So, where and when do the assurance in quality and control come in?

To further compound the issue, the Town Council has to take over a project whenever the HDB says so. Is the Town Council expected to do a thorough check for defects when it has neither control over the design nor oversight on the work progress and workmanship? Is it even proper for HDB to hand over an incomplete project to Town Council to maintain in the first place?

While some of the issues I mentioned are being rectified at this moment, either by the contractors or Town Council, why are these issues not picked up during the regular audits at the different stages of construction, as highlighted by the Minister? A lot of time and effort were wasted trying to chase down contractors to make good the defects and design anomalies. I have residents who asked me how did their BTO flats pass the BCA standards in the first place.

Madam, wear and tear does not happen within a year or two upon completion of the projects. It certainly has something to do with the design, inferior materials used, or ineffective quality control on the ground. The comprehensive management system implemented by HDB to oversee its projects is all good but it must translate into acceptable results and quality on the ground consistently.



## Estate Privatisation Planning

By Png Eng Huat

Sir, the last of the HUDC estates has been privatised but for many HDB residents living in the vicinity of the privatised estates, they have to grapple with safety issues and unexpected challenges they never thought existed.

HUDC estates are an integral part of the HDB towns. Many common areas, facilities, footpaths and road access are shared by residents living in both estates. More thought have to be put into estate planning post-privatisation or else such issues will surface.

Let me highlight some of the problems faced by residents after the privatisation of the HUDC estates in Hougang. For the estate at Hougang Avenue 2, HDB residents living at one block of flats suddenly found themselves cut off from the road that is listed as their legal address in their NRIC after the privatisation of the HUDC cluster. There is no way to access Block 712 Hougang Avenue 2, from Hougang Avenue 2. Calling a taxi, ordering a delivery or having friends over for a party requires precise directions to be given.

Over at Hougang Avenue 7, a whole new set of issues surfaced after the fencing of the privatised HUDC estate went up. Residents living in the surrounding HDB estate no longer have a safe passage to the main road. The original footpath used by all residents for over three decades is now sitting inside a private estate. Residents are forced to walk on the fringe of the fencing or on the service road to get to Hougang Avenue 7. It gets more challenging for residents on wheelchairs or with baby prams as they have to navigate a narrow zig-zag two-way traffic road. At times, vehicles have to stop to allow these residents to pass safely.

The Town Council and HDB could not even cut the shrubs and lay some concrete slabs to create a simple footpath at the fringe of the private estate for residents to walk safely as the turf is now sitting on private land as well. Three lamp-posts, lighting that service road there, had their power cut off a couple of times as these lights were tapping electricity from the private estate.

The Town Council has to re-patch the power supply from one of the nearest HDB blocks in the estate or else residents, especially school students, will have to walk in the dark every morning to the bus-stop at Hougang Avenue 7.

Sir, in the privatisation of HUDC estates island-wide, was there any planning done to ensure HDB residents will not be inconvenienced in any way with the redrawing of the boundaries caused by the privatisation process? And who is responsible to maintain the HDB car park service road now that it is made to serve both public and private estates after privatisation? Was there any consideration given to replace footpaths for residents due to safety concerns? What should residents do when the road addressed in their NRIC no longer means what it says?

This Government prides itself on planning ahead. I certainly feel that there was not enough planning done or consideration given to the surrounding estates affected by the privatisation of HUDC estates. I urge the Ministry to look into this and address the safety issues as soon as



possible.

## Design of Lift Shaft

By Muhamad Faisal bin Abdul Manap

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Sir, I have been receiving feedback from a number of Kaki Bukit residents mentioning that their blocks' newly-built lifts constructed under the Lift Upgrading Programme is warm and stuffy especially during hot days. Aljunied-Hougang Town Council (AHTC) has also been receiving similar feedback from residents living in other parts of the town. The Town Council has conducted checks on the in-car fan system for these respective lifts and found that everything is good and running well.

After much observation, it was suspected that the metal lift shaft might be the main contributing factor. AHTC had highlighted the matter to HDB twice, informing the warm air might be due to the metal lift shaft which resulted in conduction of heat, hence, causing the air inside the lift to be warm. I am quite confident this could be the reason because for Kaki Bukit ward, the affected residents who feedback on this issue stay in blocks where the lift shafts are exposed to direct afternoon sun.

During my recent house visit to one of the affected blocks, a resident expressed concern over this matter. He cited an example of a man trapped situation during a hot day. A trapped passenger, especially one who is an elderly or an individual who has medical conditions, may experience related complications such as dehydration, respiratory problems and in a worst case scenario, a heat stroke, due to the condition of the lift.

Sir, I do hope HDB could address this issue so as to avoid any unwanted incidents.

## HDB Tree Replacement Guidelines

By Pritam Singh

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Chairman, trees and greenery are an unmistakable part of the Singapore story since Independence. Many HDB flats built in the 1970s and 1980s today host trees that have grown very large and are an indelible part of the community.

However, a percentage of these trees whilst aesthetically pleasing and growing healthily, have started to host overgrown roots, damaging common property and increasing maintenance cost significantly, and also posing a safety hazard in some cases, especially to the elderly and infirmed.

However, removing a tree is probably one of the hardest things to do for any Town Council. My understanding is that HDB and NParks officers tend to err on the side of caution and would



prefer to leave a tree in its place and take the position that a mature tree should not be cut down if that outcome can be avoided; and I can understand this position.

However, exceptions should be made in selected cases and one occasion is during the HDB's periodic cyclical HDB car park upgrading exercises. A few years ago, the surface area at Block 601 Bedok Reservoir Road was upgraded by the HDB, upgrading that comes by once every 25-odd years.

A mere two years later, the Town Council has started to receive feedback about dislodged carpark slabs as the surrounding trees continue to grow and their roots expand further, encroaching into the car park. Chopping off a part of the route by the Town Council contractors to reinstate the car park slabs and prevent slabs from popping up pose a high risk of destabilising the tree. As this problem is more unique to mature HDB estates, a parallel concern is the increasing number of elderly who misjudge the height of curbs, damaged by overgrown trees.

This problem should be addressed with a holistic assessment that is not encumbered by conservation concerns alone, but take safety considerations and the long-term maintenance costs to the town Council in mind as well. The current HDB requirement to plant three new trees for every one fell would ensure that Singapore remains a city full of trees and greenery.

## Handling Fallen Trees

By Dennis Tan

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Sir, recent incidents relating to fallen trees, especially the fatal incident at Botanic Gardens and two days later, a serious case at Yuan Ching Road, have brought closer scrutiny on the inspection and care of our trees, of which there are about two million in Singapore. In a reply to my Parliamentary Question last week, the Minister said that NParks currently employs 200 arborists, and NParks and MND continually review resources to ensure that there are sufficient arborists to handle the work requirements. I am happy to hear that.

I would like to seek a clarification from the Minister. I understand from NParks' Tree Management Programme published in January 2013 that tree inspection details are recorded and entered into a database. For how long are these records required to be kept in the database?

Further, to complement the work of the arborists, I would like to ask the Government to consider engaging external tree experts to conduct independent investigations in cases where fallen trees have caused significant damage to property or have led to personal injury or death, as I understand is the practice elsewhere.

The process should be a fact-finding exercise, and evidence such as the manner in which the inspections were conducted and what was looked for during those inspections should be preserved to ensure the integrity of the fact finding process during investigations. In cases of injury or death, a rigorous investigation into the facts of the case conducted by an independent



third party may also better assist affected families to seek closure.

## Naming of Public Buildings

By Sylvia Lim

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Sir, a nation is grounded in its history and common frames of reference. The names we put on public buildings become part of our nation's consciousness, a collective memory for present and future generations.

Today, we see the commercialisation of facility names all over Singapore. We have the DBS Singapore Gallery and the UOB Southeast Asia Gallery at the National Gallery Singapore, the Far East Organization Children's Garden at Gardens by the Bay, the OCBC Arena and the OCBC Aquatic Centre at the Singapore Sports Hub.

Had there not been a public outcry over naming rights, the sports hub and facilities flanking our National Stadium might be known as OCBC World today. Our public universities too, are dotted with many examples, like the College of Alice and Peter Tan, and the Mochtar Riady Building. While the generosity of donors should be encouraged and accorded due appreciation, what kind of message are we sending by naming even a children's playground after a corporate entity?

Some clarity from the Government was seen in 2013 when it came to national icons such as the National Stadium and Sports Hub. Then, Acting MCCY Minister Lawrence Wong, noted in a Parliamentary answer that while OCBC had donated significantly to the project, the names of such national sports icons would not be commercialised.

Apart from sports, what about the naming of other landmark facilities, such as our public hospitals? We now have the Khoo Teck Puat and Ng Teng Fong General Hospitals. These hospitals were fully-funded from Government grants, with the donors reportedly giving a fraction of that towards various healthcare programmes. Understandably, naming these hospitals after the two donors has caused controversy, with public chatter that the naming rights were sold relatively cheaply. Could and should the hospitals have been named in a more meaningful way?

The URA has guidelines for the naming of buildings, which say that the names of persons, living or dead, should not be used unless there is significant cause to do so. Persons who are honoured have to be "outstanding persons who have made significant contributions to Singapore."

Before granting approval of names, how carefully does the Government assess the reputation of donors? What safeguards are there against donors who may be trying to shore up their reputation in the name of philanthropy? The issue is even trickier when the donor is a living person, as his legacy could always turn from good to bad if he gets into personal, financial or legal problems later.



The question is to what extent the names of our public buildings should be sold to the highest bidder. Should we have loftier aspirations instead, by naming public facilities to reflect ideals rather than wealth? In comparison, names like the Lim Bo Seng Memorial bring abundantly more to the national consciousness and to future generations.

# COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY:

## Ministry of Transport



## Train Disruptions

by Dennis Tan

Madam, at COS 2016, I highlighted the alarming regularity of train faults, breakdowns and disruptions, and asked for the Ministry's plans to abate these unacceptable occurrences.

Unfortunately, I have to repeat the cut again this year. Contrary to recent survey findings, train breakdowns and delays have been happening so frequently that commuters are getting increasingly frustrated. For Example, half a dozen track circuit-related delays on the Clementi-Joo Koon stretch of the line have occurred in the past one and a half months, while a quick search on The Straits Times and TODAY from May to December 2016 brought up at least 18 times a train breakdown was reported – there are at least two breakdowns or more a month and that does not include the train faults and delay that were not reported.

It seems like train faults are becoming the norm for us now, which is not where we want our Singapore transport system to go.

As I have said at the COS last year, Singaporeans should not have to get used to this regularity of disruptions. We should expect our system to have far fewer disruptions. We should also be greatly concerned with the loss of productivity to all our workers and our economy arising from the man-hours lost to all delays.

So, I would like to ask the Minister what is the Ministry's assessment of the recent breakdowns? What are the Ministry's plans to improve the situation and will commuters see a significant decrease in the number of train delays, faults or disruptions this year?

## COE for Motorcycles

By Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

I welcome the move by the Ministry to exempt the contribution of motorcycles to a quota in the open COE category. Hopefully, this move may help to ease the motorcycles' COE price dilemma.

Madam, I still receive grievances expressed by motorcycle owners, specifically our fellow Singaporeans, who depend on their motorcycles for their family livelihoods, on the exorbitant motorcycle COE prices that have been going on for many years.

I believe more encompassing and inclusive measures can be introduced and implemented to regulate the motorcycles' COE prices. I would like to reiterate my call made at last year's COS debate, that is to breakdown the motorcycle COE according to the different engine capacity and also to allocate the number of quota according to the percentage of these motorcycles on our roads.





If the COE forecast can be categorised in such a manner, why can't it be the same for motorcycles? I still think it is one of the better ways to mitigate the issue of high motorcycle COE prices.

I have two clarifications for the Ministry.

First, observers and commentators viewed the introduction of tiered ARF as being meant to mitigate the high motorcycle COE prices. Can I have the Minister's confirmation as this was not mentioned explicitly during Minister Heng's Budget Speech. If the answer is yes, how this can be achieved and, if no, what is the actual purpose of this implementation?

Secondly, with a tiered Additional Registration Fee (ARF) imposed on motorcycles, would the Ministry consider having paid Preferential Additional Registration Fee (PARF) rebate for motorcycles, similar to that for cars?

## Public Transport for Disabled

By Sylvia Lim

Madam, we have made concrete progress in recent years in making public transport more accessible to disabled persons. There are two areas I wish to highlight for further review.

First, the space available on buses for wheelchairs. The Minister previously confirmed that 92% of public buses today are wheelchair-accessible and the goal is to make this 100% by 2020. While certainly welcome, the fact is that the number of wheelchairs that a bus can accommodate is very limited. According to the operators' websites, SMRT buses can accommodate two wheelchairs, while some SBS Transit buses can only accommodate one.

I have received feedback from disabled persons living in a charitable home about the difficulties posed when a few wheelchair-bound persons need to travel at the same time. Due to the limited space on board, they would need to board the buses in turn, and wait at their destinations for subsequent buses carrying their friends to arrive, greatly increasing their travelling time.

Besides their personal situation, they also rightly point out that as the general population ages, we can expect that a few wheelchair-bound persons may need to be on board the same bus at the same time. Now with the Bus Contracting Model, where the Government owns all operating assets, I ask the Government to look into having buses with more wheelchair space. Secondly, while we may have made good infrastructural improvements and removed physical barriers, it is vital that our public transport emergency plans provide for the safety and safe evacuation of persons with disabilities. Should a contingency arise, say, in the MRT system that requires evacuation or diversion of passengers, do our emergency plans spell out how we will communicate and protect those who are physically or mentally impaired including the wheelchair-bound or those impaired in vision or hearing? To what extent have such plans been exercised?



## Silver Zones – Design and Education

By Png Eng Huat

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Madam, the Land Transport Authority said last December that the Silver Zone initiative will be rolled out to many parts of Singapore by 2023. While there are merits to the Silver Zone initiative, there are also safety concerns and operation issues that need to be resolved.

First, the implementation of the Silver Zone programme must go hand-in-hand with the widening of the pedestrian footpaths in the area. This is because the roads in the Silver Zone will be narrowed substantially to slow down traffic in the area. This will leave very little room for cyclists to manoeuvre. As some pinch points along Hougang Avenue 5 are designated Silver Zones, there is virtually no room for cyclists and buses to co-exist. Due to the safety concern, cyclists may take to the footpath, and this will create another set of problems. The elderly, expectant mothers and young children are all at risk when cyclists are forced to share footpaths that are not designed to be shared in the first place. Without the widening of the pedestrian footpath for Silver Zone, it is an accident waiting to happen, either on the narrow road or on the narrow footpath.

Second, the courtesy crossing is probably one of the most misunderstood features of the Silver Zone initiative. Some courtesy crossings are designed to look like zebra crossings without the white stripes and light poles. In fact, when the Silver Zone was done up in Hougang, a few residents told me the contractors forgot to paint the white stripes and left.

Who is supposed to show courtesy at such crossing – the pedestrian or the motorist? According to LTA, it is the responsibility of the pedestrian to keep a look-out for on-coming vehicles at such crossings. Madam, here lies the confusion. I have seen motorists stopping for pedestrians to cross, while others did not. It is made more confusing when motorists have to slow down at such crossing due to the pinch points and the elevated crossing, but they may not have the intention to stop for pedestrians to cross. Furthermore, motorists may show courtesy on one side of the road while on the other side, they may not. How would the pedestrians know who will stop for them? There is too much second-guessing at courtesy crossing, and that is the recipe for accidents to happen.

The term "courtesy crossing" is a misnomer to begin with because there is no change to the way pedestrians are supposed to cross the road. We look left, look right, and look left again before we make a judgement call to cross the road. The pedestrians still have to stop for vehicles to pass. So, what is this added courtesy all about?

The Silver Zone is a good initiative. The safety concerns for cyclists and pedestrians over the narrow footpaths can be easily addressed. The confusion over the courtesy crossing, however, needs to be addressed sooner rather than later. Residents have shared incidents of near-misses at such crossings, and I hope LTA will look into resolving this confusion soon.



## Promoting Electric Vehicles

By Daniel Goh Pei Siong

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Madam, gasoline and diesel powered vehicles are key contributors to air pollution in cities around the world. Recently, the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources was quoted in a newspaper article stating that Singapore was not on track to meet our 2020 targets for reducing air pollutants.

Electric vehicles are seen as a solution to this problem and some are promoting it as a game-changing growth industry, especially if it is coupled with self-driving technology in the near future.

The electric car-sharing scheme that is being rolled out this year is an excellent programme in terms of scale and scope. The fact that the public can use up to 20% of the 2,000 charging points is a good move to encourage private electric car ownership. Other than the sharing of charging points, does the Ministry have plans to promote private electric car ownership?

However, since the Government's approach is to encourage public transport usage rather than private car usage, the key question when it comes to electric vehicles is whether our public buses would make the switch from diesel to electric. LTA announced in August last year that Go-Ahead Singapore was putting an e-bus on a six-month trial. I would like to ask the Minister what is the conclusion from the trial and whether it indicates a go-ahead for more e-buses to hit our roads.

## Safety of Footpath

By Dennis Tan Lip Fong

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Madam Chair, the Ministry is allowing certain footpaths to be shared by cyclists, users of personal mobility devices (PMDs) and pedestrians. Allowing shared use of footpaths may invariably increase the risk of accidents. Besides suitable sign-posting, footpaths should always be sufficiently wide to allow for such safe shared use.

Last year, I filed a Parliamentary Question asking the Minister about the recommended width for footpaths and whether the Ministry will conduct an island-wide review to ensure that existing footpaths which are often used by cyclists are widened in accordance with the minimum width.

Minister Khaw replied to say, and I quote, "most of our footpaths are at least 1.5 metres wide". I assume the Minister meant that 1.5 metres is the "recommended" width.

In reality, there are some footpaths which are often used by both cyclists and pedestrians



which may be narrower than 1.5 metres. One example is the footpath along Bedok North Avenue 4, specifically around the bus stop opposite St Anthony's Canossian Secondary School, right next to Block 95. It is 1.2 metres wide at least along certain parts of the path leading towards Bedok North Industrial Estate. This footpath is heavily used by cyclists and PMD users travelling between Bedok and the industrial estate, as well as pedestrians.

Some residents have shared with me during my house visits that there is a dangerous choke-point at the location around the bus stop where the footpath connects to the staircase leading to Block 95, right by the bus stop. Coming from the direction of the industrial estate, the footpath curls left round the back of the bus stop, effectively creating a dangerous blind spot made worse by the advertisement billboard which obstructs the view of both cyclists and people at the bus stop. According to the residents I spoke to, there have been accidents and near misses. I wrote a letter to LTA on 7 July 2016 but I have yet to hear from them on the action they may have decided to take or the reasons for not taking any action.

I urge the Ministry to carefully review the width of all footpaths which are often used by cyclists or PMD users, to ensure the safety of all users.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY:**  
**Ministry of the Environment and**  
**Water Resources**



## Curbing Roadside Pollution

By Daniel Goh Pei Siong

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Madam, in September 2016, a research scientist from the Singapore-MIT Alliance for Research and Technology (Smart) found that commuters who wait at bus stops could suffer more from the pollution of the toxic ultrafine particles emitted by vehicles. His research showed that a two-way bus journey five days a week could lead to a commuter inhaling about 3.5 times more tiny pollutant particles than at ambient level.

The Singapore Air Quality Data, provided by the NEA, only measures up to PM2.5. However, the particles found in vehicle emissions are 100 times smaller, and thus are not currently captured in our air quality indices. Also, in many cities around the world, curbside pollution along main trunk routes are included in air quality indices. We should develop our own roadside index as part of our slew of air quality indices. Other than the informational function, the roadside air quality index will serve an educational purpose and as a progress tracking instrument in our fight against this specific pollution.

Vehicular emission control is the ultimate solution to this problem. But even as we make progress on this front, would the Ministry work with the relevant agencies to promote technological and design innovations to mitigate the effects of curbside pollution on bus commuters?

Recently, the experimental next generation bus stop in Jurong made the news. Equipped with a swing, rooftop garden, artwork, library books and broadcast screens, the bus stop makes waiting productive and may even encourage more waiting. But this is actually a dangerous proposition given curbside pollution. I hope such experimental bus stops would also test technologies and designs to mitigate curbside pollution.

## Littering and Tray Return Initiatives

By Png Eng Huat

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Madam, when the tray return initiative was launched in 2012, it was briefly touted as a success in the early days, but with a caveat – the high return rates came only when volunteers were around to encourage patrons to return trays. Back then, NEA acknowledged that the tray return initiative had still some way to go before the practice takes root.

It has been more than four years since the return tray initiative was launched. I am not sure if my experience and observation at hawker centres is an outlier, but the practice has not taken root and the initiative does not seem to achieving its objective. Tables at hawker centres and food outlets continue to be cluttered with leftover food, dishes and trays, regardless of peak or off-peak hours.



I seek an update from the Minister on the progress of the roll-out of the return tray facilities in all hawker centres and the effort NEA intends to take to make this initiative work. Without a sustained effort to promote this facility, which cost an average of \$11,000 per hawker centre, it will not be money well spent.

Next, I wish to seek an update from NEA on its anti-littering campaigns. The 2010 campaign "Do The Right Thing. Let's Bin It!" was rather mouthful and forgettable as the message was not sustained as well. Littering remains a problem in our city state despite the many years of effort to educate the public on the anti-social behaviour.

As a first-world country, we are certainly not living like one in the area of cleanliness. Madam, the success of the tray return initiative and anti-littering campaign is an important part of the equation in our effort to keep bird nuisance and rodent infestation at bay. I urge the Ministry not to let up in its effort to imbue the public with social responsibility for the good of the country.

## Fair Rentals for Hawkers

By Daniel Goh Pei Siong

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Madam, it has been three years since the social enterprise model for managing hawker centres was piloted. Recently, in December 2016, NEA announced that it was moving forward with the next phase with two components.

The first component is the call for social enterprises to tender for the management of two new hawker centres at Yishun and Jurong West. The second component is the appointment of NTUC Foodfare to manage what NEA calls a "pilot group" of two new hawker centres in Woodlands and Pasir Ris, and five existing hawker centres in Toa Payoh, Old Airport Road, Whampoa and Chong Pang. NEA believes this would offer NTUC Foodfare economies of scale and greater flexibility to experiment with new ideas and operational processes.

I have several questions. Concerning the "pilot group", given the geographical spread of the hawker centres, how are economies of scale achieved? Why is there a need, in the first place, for economies of scale? Is the operator under cost pressures and what are these? Have rental rates at the Bedok Interchange Hawker Centre gone up in the last three years? Similarly, have the prices of the food there gone up in the last three years?

For the two new hawker centres in the group, will there be a mix of subsidised and non-subsidised stallholders paying market rentals?

The same question applies to the two new hawker centres being tendered out for social enterprise management. Also, would NTUC Foodfare be excluded in the interest of allowing for a diversity of operators to experiment with new ideas and operational processes and to develop expertise? If NTUC Foodfare requires economies of scale, then what about the new operators

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY:**  
**Ministry of Social and Family**  
**Development**





## ComCare

By Sylvia Lim

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Madam, there are two broad ComCare schemes to assist those in financial difficulties – Temporary Assistance via the Short to Medium Term Assistance Scheme, and Long Term Assistance, the latter commonly known as the Public Assistance (PA) Allowance.

Regarding Temporary Assistance, I would like to clarify how the Government tracks its success. Is it simply based on the number of persons helped, or is there tracking as to how many persons managed to attain self-sufficiency to no longer need the scheme? Based on the cases I have encountered, there seems to be a rule or guideline that after a number of months, the quantum of help is reduced and then help is refused altogether. While I support the rationale of incentivising persons to be self-sufficient, we sometimes see families stricken with illness and mental problems who have limited means of helping themselves.

Another issue about Temporary Assistance that has recently cropped up is how it interacts with the Silver Support Scheme. Some Singaporeans who receive both Silver Support and Temporary ComCare assistance were apparently advised that their Temporary ComCare assistance might be reduced in view of the Silver Support payments. Could the Ministry please clarify this?

Finally, I move to the Long Term Assistance scheme. Currently, the Public Assistance allowance of \$500 for a single person is meant for the person to defray his living expenses. The PA allowance is usually given in a cash lump sum, from which the recipient is expected to pay his bills, such as rent, utilities and Town Council S&CC. This is different from those on Temporary Assistance, where the Government commonly makes direct payment of utilities and S&CC bills to agencies. Many on Public Assistance are elderly and/or permanently unable to work, are usually not in robust health and have no relatives to help them. Would it not be more efficient for the Long Term Assistance scheme to make direct payment to the relevant agencies?

## Comcare Supplement

By Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

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Madam, ComCare Short to Medium Term Assistance (SMTA) currently includes help for rental, utilities, S&CC, monthly cash grants, medical assistance and employment assistance, such as training. However, there are SMTA recipients who still struggle with additional expenses and who have few alternatives to turn to.

Although SMTA is able to cover basic daily expenses, it is still lacking in terms of ad-hoc big ticket expenses, for example, repairing of damaged household appliances or items, and repairing damaged spectacles. These are expenses that do not occur daily but can rack up



substantial costs when they do. I would like to ask the Minister if he will set up a special claim fund to provide additional assistance for ad-hoc repairs and one-off expenses.

This can be modelled on the discretionary assistance under Public Assistance. I am putting up two recommendations for consideration.

First, allow recipients to claim up to 70% funding for ad-hoc repair expenses, such as broken shoes, spectacles, damaged appliances, replacement of faulty light bulbs, up to a maximum claim of \$300 annually. By allowing only up to 70% claim for annual repairs allowance, recipients still have to take responsibility for 30% of the expenses, and the annual cap prevents excessive spending and abuse of the system. However, a more in-depth review should also be done to understand the amounts that these groups have to fork out for such expenses.

Second, allow recipients to claim a one-off 100% funding for household item purchases, such as beds, furniture, and so on. This can have a maximum lifetime cap of up to \$300 per recipient. For one-off claims, it will be administratively more efficient to allow a 100% claim, since it is only a one-time funding and cannot be reclaimed.

This is to emulate part of discretionary assistance under PA to extend additional coverage support for SMTA recipients who are unable to qualify for additional welfare programmes.

These claims can be disbursed 30 days after the SMTA recipient files for it with proof of receipts at their respective ComCare branches. Madam, with that, I would like to urge the Ministry to start looking at the possibility of expanding the current scope of assistance.

## Update on Social Service Office

By Muhammad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

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Madam, the establishment of Social Service Office (SSO) in 2013 is with the objective of providing better accessibility for low-income families who need assistance and also to play a role in integrating the social service delivery in their respective towns. I would appreciate if the Minister can provide updates on the SSO meeting its objectives, in particular, its role in integrating the social service delivery.

In addition, I have two questions and one suggestion to make.

First, in reply to my 2013 Parliamentary Question (PQ) on whether SSO will be staffed with social work-trained officers and what is the proposed number, the Ministry mentioned that some of the staff may have social work training. It was further mentioned that the Ministry will provide the requisite training to enable all staff to perform their roles. Can the Minister share how many of the current SSO officers are social work-trained and also what are some of the requisite training provided to the staff?

My second question is whether SSO practices making referrals to ECDA (Early Childhood Development Agency) to assist with childcare related matters such as placement and grants



assistance for those low-income young parents who are open to seek employment. I am asking this because I have come across many such cases where these young parents are receiving financial assistance from SSO but came to me to seek help with childcare placement.

As for my suggestion, can each SSO produce a mini directory with a map, on all the social and community services available within its boundary so as to better assist residents to locate these services, especially for elderly residents.

## Women's Charter Maintenance Payments

By Leon Perera

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Mr Chairman, last year, my colleague, Assoc Prof Daniel Goh suggested establishing a Commissioner for the maintenance of families, empowered to recover maintenance on behalf of families and provide means-tested support where needed during the process. Today, coincidentally it is International Women's Day. I would like to repeat this call.

The Department of Human Services Child Support in Australia can collect child support payments on behalf of the parent, investigate cases of non-payment and issue overseas travel bans amongst other actions. The UK too has a child maintenance service that is empowered to take action against the defaulting party if maintenance is not paid.

In our system, the onus still lies mainly on the claimant to make trips to court to enforce the maintenance order. This can take a toll on the emotional well-being of spouses who are affected and may even affect their earning powers if they have to repeatedly take leave from work to make visits to the court. The current enforcement process is one that punishes claimants with unrepentant or spiteful ex-spouses. A central agency would help relieve this unjust burden.

I would like to ask the Minister if the situation in this regard has improved since new measures were introduced in 2011 to strengthen maintenance enforcement.

And lastly, the Minister also said last year that a maintenance records officer would be appointed to facilitate firm court action against incorrigible defaulters. Has this officer been appointed? Can the Minister share more details on this office including the staff and number of investigations that have commenced and concluded as well as an assessment of the initial impact?



## Assistive Technology Fund

By Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Sir, the Assistive Technology Fund provides means-tested subsidies of up to 90% for persons with disabilities to purchase assistive technology devices, such as motorised chairs, wheelchairs, hearing aids and screen readers. The fund has a fixed lifetime cap of \$40,000 per person.

While the changes that have been made to the scheme are encouraging, we believe that the Assistive Technology Fund can be enhanced if the financial burden for persons with disabilities and special needs is over their lifetime. Somebody who is diagnosed with special needs or has a disability from a young age will use up the grant much faster than a person who is diagnosed later in life, as will a person whose disability may require more expensive assistive devices. If required, is it possible for the Ministry to assess the needs of these individuals on a case-by-case basis and exercise flexibility, even if they have exceeded the cap?

The purpose of the fund will be better served if it can be made more flexible to take into consideration the lifetime needs of individuals. It is also stated that after the approval of an application to use the fund, touch-points such as hospitals and VWOs will assist individuals to purchase the devices and reimbursement will either be made to the touch-point or to the vendor. Will it be more cost effective for SG Enable to consolidate these orders, so that it can negotiate with vendors and pass cost savings to the end-consumers?

The benefits of bulk purchasing assistive technology devices could be extended to those whose household income puts them just above the income eligibility cap but who will still find it onerous to fork out thousands of dollars for an assistive device.

## Professionalisation of Social Work

By Daniel Goh Pei Siong

Sir, I would like to call out for better pay structure and pay increments for our social workers, as well as increased professionalisation of the social work profession.

According to figures released by MSF last year, the number of social workers doubled from 2012 to reach 1,600 in 2016. However, this number is still far from what Singapore needs. Social workers play an integral role in alleviating the problems faced by vulnerable members of our society, and they deserve remuneration that reflects the job complexity and high amounts of stress they face in their line of work.

Despite pay increments announced in Budget 2015, the wages of fresh graduates in social work are still a distance from the overall median wage of fresh graduates. Even though the Government has pledged to review and provide salary guidelines "based on market data and



benchmarks", it is not clear exactly how the benchmarking is conducted.

I would like to propose that the Government benchmark the pay of social workers to another noble profession – teachers. Back when the Government was looking to make teaching an attractive profession, it raised the salaries of teachers and increased the quality of their training. I ask that the Government do the same for social workers. I would also like to appeal to the Government for transparency in the salary benchmarking process and to set a timeline for regular wage reviews for social workers.

## Helping and Funding VWOs

By Png Eng Huat

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Sir, in a newspaper article in June 2015, it was reported that the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) was looking into ways to help smaller voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) with weak or no fund-raising capabilities. It was stated that NCSS intends to help these VWOs strengthen their organisations and develop alternative resources to support their functions.

The same report cited that in 2012, less than 1% of the total funds raised went to small charities with annual receipts of less than \$250,000 while large charities with annual receipts of above \$10 million took the lion's share of 85%.

Hougang has been blessed with the presence of these small charities. I am sure these outfits are doing good work in other parts of Singapore as well. These smaller VWOs are able to complement and contribute to the collective effort of big charities and the Ministry to help needy Singaporeans in filling the gaps and providing very targeted assistance at times. They are able to reach out to the needy at a personal level and with great speed. Thus, I wish to seek an update from the Ministry on the reported effort to help these smaller charities serve the community. What are the possible alternative ways to help them raise the much needed funds effectively?

It was reported that grassroots organisations raised about \$7 million from community trade fairs in the last financial year. The GROs were also given \$206 million to spend the same year. Would the Ministry consider allowing smaller VWOs to raise funds through trade fairs instead, as these charities do not have many opportunities to raise meaningful donations effectively? Giving the trade fair quotas to these VWOs will also help bring awareness to the presence in the community and the good work they have done to serve the needy residents there.

# COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY:

## Ministry of Health





## Cost of Medicine and Vaccines

By Low Thia Kiang

Madam, the Government has been talking about keeping long-term healthcare costs affordable for Singaporeans. Based on feedback from residents, some Singaporeans still find the cost of medicine high. I believe this is partly due to doctors prescribing drugs for a long duration or prescribing non-standard drugs. I would like to ask MOH what measures have been taken to reduce the cost of medicine for patients, and how effectively have these measures lowered the cost of medicine for patients, especially those with chronic diseases.

The Minister said in 2012 that the profit margins for drugs sold in public hospitals typically range from 5% to 30%. I would like to ask if the profit margins today are still the same, and what are the profit margins for drugs sold in polyclinics.

Two years ago, the Workers' Party (WP) suggested that the Government look into publishing drug prices for public hospitals. The Minister rejected this saying that, "drugs constitute only one aspect of the overall treatment." I would like to repeat the call to publish drug prices at public hospitals for better transparency.

Next, under the National Childhood Immunisation Programme, all recommended vaccinations are fully subsidised and provided free of charge at all polyclinics for children who are Singapore citizens, except pneumococcal vaccinations.

Pneumococcal disease manifests in illnesses such as pneumonia and meningitis, and is the leading infectious cause of death in children and adults worldwide. According to MOH's figures, pneumonia is the second most common cause of death in Singapore, and one of the top five conditions of hospitalisation. I understand that pneumococcal meningitis is a disease that is difficult to detect in early stages, but progresses rapidly and could result in death or cause long-term health complications such as paralysis or brain damage. Children below five years old and adults above 50 years old are at greater risk of being affected by such disease.

In 2013 and again in 2015, when WP called for fully subsidised pneumococcal vaccinations, the Minister said that this was not necessary since "the potential for a public health epidemic or outbreak is relatively low." Madam, a complete series of the vaccine doses costs around \$500, which is costly for parents. I ask the MOH to consider providing subsidy to encourage parents to use it.

I believe that the Government stands to benefit from providing subsidised pneumococcal vaccinations in the long run through the reduced burden on Medisave and MediShield Life. It could also save on expensive treatments, hospitalisations and medications down the line.

## Means Testing

By Dennis Tan Lip Fong

Madam, the Government provides means-tested subsidies for MOH-funded Intermediate and Long-Term Care (ILTC) facilities as well as treatments at public hospitals. I am appealing





to Ministry of Health (MOH) to implement a grace period for the withdrawal or reduction of subsidies instead of effecting the changes immediately when the per capita household income rises.

Let me give an example of a household with per capita monthly income of \$650. Under the current framework, a Singapore citizen will qualify for 75% subsidies. Subsequently if the per capita monthly household income rises to the next tier that is, between \$701 to \$1,100, due to salary increment, bonus, or commission, subsidies will drop to 60%. This is a 15% decrease, which is considerable especially since we are talking about Singaporeans with lower household per capita monthly income. This would apply even if their income only rose by about 10% to \$710.

For Singaporeans who are at the receiving end, this can be very discouraging and could feel like two steps forward, one step back. A grace period should be given before the subsidy is withdrawn or reduced. This will give people some breathing room to consolidate their finances or even pay off some lingering debts, instead of hitting them with an immediate cost increase for medical expenses. I would like to call for the Ministry to review this to see how best we can help fellow Singaporeans who are in such situations.

## Innovative Anti-diabetes Strategies

By Leon Perera

Madam Chair, at the last COS, I spoke about how Social Impact Bonds (SIBs) could help drive outcomes-based social policies in Singapore, such as reducing recidivism among ex-offenders. Pay for Success contracting (PFSs) and Social Impact Bonds (SIBs) have been growing worldwide since 2010. One estimate has identified over 40 SIB and PFS projects worldwide in 2015, spanning subject areas like early childhood education, healthcare and recidivism.

In Israel, a SIB is underway to help prevent pre-diabetics from contracting diabetes. The NUS School of Public Health estimates that diabetes could cause Singapore \$2.5 billion a year by 2050, not to mention the cost of human suffering.

In Singapore, MOH could explore launching a SIB to raise funds for reliable NGO partners who can then work with pre-diabetics and diabetics to improve health indicators like blood sugar levels and emergency hospitalisation events. Philanthropic donors, foundations and so on, could buy the bond. Such NGOs could then use the bond proceeds to fund programmes to help at-risk individuals manage their diets, for example. The state would redeem the bond and pay the donors only if outcomes are achieved, which makes for better use of state monies.

NGOs may be better placed than state entities to dream up and execute creative ideas that can nudge behavioural change in the face of entrenched habits, thus solving tricky social problems.

I hope that MOH will look into the possibility of launching a SIB or PFS initiative to work with NGOs over the social challenge of diabetes.



## War on Diabetes

By Chen Show Mao

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Madam, last year, the Minister declared War on Diabetes to great fanfare, as befitting the importance of the campaign. 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 the progress from the front?

On sugary processed food, would the Government consider requiring warnings on containers of sugary processed food – cans and packets of candies, soft drinks and so on? This could be similar to requiring warnings on tobacco packaging in order to discourage smoking, which is another risk factor for diabetes. Smokers are 30%-40% more likely to develop diabetes.

Similarly, would the Government consider requiring retailers to display signs that encourage shoppers to choose low-sugar options, or school canteens and hawker centres to display signs warning about the dangers of diabetes and encouraging low-sugar options?

Would the Minister consider working with the Ministry for Trade and Industry to apply existing incentives to support local food manufacturers to release low-sugar snacks and drinks? The Industry Transformation Map (ITM) for food processing is more advanced than most other ITMs, and seems well placed to develop and promote low-sugar products on an industrial basis.

## Senior Care-givers Support

By Daniel Goh Pei Siong

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Madam, care-givers of seniors need a lot of support. The stress of care-giving goes up exponentially when the elderly develops chronic illnesses, dementia or disabilities. This issue will deepen with the rapidly ageing population. I note that the Government will be setting up a Disability Care-giver Support Centre. I propose that the Government set up similar care-giver support centres for senior care-givers.

As senior caregiving is of a scale larger than disability care-giving, I believe that there is a need to set up multiple support centres to provide the same level of support to senior care-givers. These centres are a natural extension to existing Senior Care Centres (SCCs). Since SCCs are specially situated in places with higher demand for eldercare services, Senior Care-giver Support Centres can be co-located with SCCs. Like the Disability Care-giver Support Centre, Senior Care-giver Support Centres can provide information, planned respite, training, peer support and offer various VWO programmes to help care-givers.

There is one more important function the support centres can perform. Senior care-givers face greater risk of health and financial vulnerabilities as they get older due to lower lifetime earnings. Many are women who leave the workforce to be full-time care-givers and who find it difficult to re-enter the labour market. These support centres can also act as the main touch-points for care-givers to receive important health and financial assistance, and even advice on finding part-time work to support themselves.



## Nursing Homes

By Dennis Tan Lip Fong

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Madam, the Government announced in 2014 that seven new nursing homes will be built to accommodate up to 17,150 residents by 2020 to meet the growing demand arising from the rapidly ageing population.

Even as we are ramping up new nursing homes, sadly, the care model in our nursing homes remains the so-called "medicalised model" similar to hospitals. This is not the most suitable model to enhance the quality of life for our seniors who are residing in these homes. Do each of us want to live in such an environment in the winter of our lives?

Countries like US, Japan and Australia have moved away from the "medicalised" model. We should move away from the "medicalised" model now and aim for the rehabilitative model, making the living environment more like homes, and less like hospitals. We should move away from the dormitory-like environment, go beyond basic physical care to a home like environment with care specialists attending to the social well-being as well as nursing needs of elderly residents so that they can live and age with dignity.

MOH set up the Enhanced Nursing Home Standard in 2014 providing basic standards for medical and nursing care, facilities maintenance and hygiene. We should go beyond these basic standards. MOH should consult as many stakeholders as possible, as well as the specific medical interest groups most associated with the care of patients afflicted with specific illnesses, such as the Alzheimer's Disease Association, Kidney Dialysis Foundation and so on, in order to better understand how the clinical and social needs of different and specific types of patients can be best met. This would allow for a range, rather than a bare minimum standard of care in each nursing home.

The standards of nursing homes in Singapore do vary considerably. Recently a Fengshan resident shared with me her concern to transfer her mother from one nursing home to another and one of the reasons cited was poor and indifferent care by staff.

I understand that right now the Ministry conduct regular audits on nursing home. However, the audit reports are not disclosed to the public. I would like to suggest that these audit reports should be made available to the public so that families of nursing home residents are aware of the compliance standards of the homes. I believe that such measures may enhance standards and weed out operators who are not able to provide suitable services.

## Fighting Dementia

By Dennis Tan Lip Fong

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Madam, in 2012, about 28,000 people in Singapore aged 60 and older had dementia. The Minister estimated that this figure is expected to rise to 80,000 by 2030. Based on projections from the Alzheimer's Disease Association, by 2050, we will be faced with 187,000 people aged 65 and above who have dementia.



We are also starting to see growing numbers of younger dementia patients. In an article last year, Assoc Prof Nagaendran Kandiah at the National Neuroscience Institute (NNI) estimated that of the 40,000 people with dementia in Singapore, 10% are below the age of 65. The rapid increase in the number of people with dementia is a cause for concern, especially if we do not have enough resources to support them.

As such, I would like to ask the Minister for an update on the progress in preparing for the rise in dementia cases. Is enough being done to educate Singaporeans on the risk factors for dementia? There has been an initiative to build dementia-friendly communities in Singapore, piloted at Yishun, Hong Kah and MacPherson. These communities feature "community touch points" that act as go-to points for those who have lost their way, and training is provided to persons and businesses within the area so that they may render assistance to persons with dementia. What are the findings of this initiative so far, and how does it compare with plans to address dementia in other countries? Are there plans to roll out this initiative island-wide; and if so, what is the schedule for this?

I would also like to raise the issue of dementia assessments. Currently, dementia assessments are usually carried out at hospitals and IMH. Will the Ministry set a target to eventually have trained staff at all polyclinics to perform the assessment?



# COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY: Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth



## Aspirations of Malay/Muslim Community

By Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

*(In Malay):* Last November, this Chamber debated the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (Amendment) Bill. One of the issues that received attention and was hotly debated was the recommendation to hold a presidential election reserved for a minority race.

The Constitutional Commission made this recommendation because they felt the need to address the issue of perception that a minority race cannot assume the highest office in the land, that is, the President. This Chamber and Singaporeans were divided into two groups: those who supported it and those who did not support it. Those who agreed with the recommendation for a presidential election reserved for minorities argued that it is necessary to do so in order to signify and represent Singapore's multi-racial constitution. For those who opposed, the argument is that its implementation will weaken the principle of meritocracy.

Madam, Parliament, except Workers' Party MPs, resolved to accept the recommendation to hold a presidential election reserved for a minority race, in support of the Constitutional Commission's view that a presidential election reserved for a minority race will address the issue of negative perceptions that minorities are not qualified to occupy the highest office in the land. During the same debate, the Prime Minister announced that the upcoming Presidential elections will be reserved for Malays.

The decision taken to reserve the Presidential election for Malays, to me and also to many others, undeniably compromises the principle of meritocracy. I am also of the view that the decision to hold a reserved Presidential election as an effort to address the issue of negative perceptions, shows that "where there's will, there's a way."

I have said many times before in this Chamber that among the aspirations or concerns of the Malay/Muslim community in Singapore, is the sense or perception of discrimination that there are no equal and fair opportunities. For instance, there are still concerns among our community about Malay/Muslim individuals not being given equal opportunities to hold the rank of General in the army or a Permanent Secretary in a Ministry. Minister Yaacob spoke about and acknowledges this concern. During a dialogue session organized by REACH, the Minister said in English that "The Malay community is concerned not just about the President, but also Malay Permanent Secretary, Malay General... because we want to see representation across the entire Singaporean life". I would like to add that the Malay/Muslim community is also concerned about Muslim women being allowed to wear the *tudung* when serving in uniformed groups like the army, the Home team and nurses.

As I said before, Madam, "where there's a will, there's a way." I sincerely hope that the Government can do something to address the concerns of the community. Thank you, Madam.



## Tuition Centres at CCs

By Daniel Goh Pei Siong

Madam, Community Clubs (CCs) are meant to be common spaces for shared activities to promote the social bonding of all Singaporeans regardless of race, language or religion. However, the number of private tuition centres that have sprung up in the CCs raise several questions.

First, are these private tuition centres offered subsidised rent for operating within the premises of the CCs, and if so, what is the basis for the subsidy? If the private tuition centres are paying competitive market rent, then the question is: is it right for CCs to monetise the common space for private ends? What are the communal activities that are being displaced by the tuition centres?

The more fundamental question is whether this contradicts the Government's education policy. Two years ago, then-Minister for Education Heng Swee Keat, said, "Singapore needs to make the transformation from a 'scarcity mentality' that focuses on a single pathway to success to an 'abundance mentality' with multiple pathways". He was responding to concerns raised by Members of this House regarding Singapore's pervasive tuition culture. CCs should not be reinforcing this tuition culture.

## Regardless of Race, Language or Religion

By Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Madam, in November last year, this House debated on the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (Amendment) Bill. One of the contentious issues debated was on the proposal to have a reserved minority Presidential election. The Constitutional Commission has mooted this proposal as they viewed that there is a need to address the issue of perceptions of minorities not able to access the highest office in the land. The House was divided on this issue and so was the nation. Those who supported this proposal argued that it is necessary to do so to symbolise Singapore's Constitution of multiculturalism. As for those who opposed it, the argument is that such implementation will undermine the principle of meritocracy.

The decision to have a reserved Presidential election for the Malay community, to me and also to many, has to a certain extent compromised the principle of meritocracy. I am also of the view that the approach taken by the Government in mitigating the issue of perception of inequality by implementing a reserved Presidential election for Malays shows that if the Government has the will to do and chooses to do it, it can be done.

I have said this a few times and I am going to repeat it again. One of the concerns of the Malay-Muslim community that is still lingering in our minds is the feeling of being discriminated, not being given equal and fair opportunity. An example – there are still concerns from the



community that a Malay individual is not able to assume the rank of a General in the army, a Permanent Secretary in the Ministries. Minister Yaacob acknowledged these concerns during his interaction with tertiary students at a recent REACH-organised event. Minister Yaacob said, I quote, "The Malay community is concerned not just about the President but also Malay Permanent Secretary, Malay General because we want to see representation across the entire Singaporean life."

To add on to the Minister's point, I would also like to say that the Malay-Muslim community is also concerned about Muslim ladies not being able to wear the tudung while serving in our uniformed groups – SAF, Home Team and nursing. As I have mentioned earlier, when there is a will, there is a way. I do sincerely hope that the Government will address the Malay-Muslim community's concerns in entirety.

## Emigration of Singapore Citizens

By Leon Perera

Madam, according to one recent survey of a thousand Singaporeans by Ipsos SSI, 42% would emigrate if given the chance. This is alarming. I have two suggestions.

Firstly, would the Government consider a scheme to incentivise Singaporeans living abroad to return home? For example, New Zealand offers a one-off temporary tax exemption for certain types of foreign income for returning New Zealanders who did not reside in the country for 10 years prior. Malaysia has a similar Returning Expert Programme.

My second point is on the management of the arts sector. I think a free and vibrant arts scene is probably not the number one consideration for most people's migration decision but nor is it completely irrelevant. Here, I would like to return to a theme I spoke about twice last year, which is, the conditions for Government support for the arts. The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye is a wonderful Singapore graphic novel that has won many, many local and international awards over the past one-and-a-half years and, yet, the NAC withdrew its publishing grant, citing that, "...it's re-telling of Singapore's history potentially undermines the authority or legitimacy of the Government and its public institutions".

Managing the arts sector in this way risks creating a climate of self-censorship and politicisation of the arts. In so doing, it reduces one liveability factor and makes Singapore that much less attractive as a home for all its people, regardless of political viewpoint.

The same survey that I cited showed 59% of Singaporeans valuing "being just and fair to all" and 52% valuing "being progressive". I would like to urge the Government to remove political conditions attached to arts funding with exceptions solely for artworks that promote criminality, racial or religious tensions.





## National Stadium

By Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Our former, which is also our first National Stadium was opened in July 1973 and officially closed on 30 June 2007. For a period of 34 years, the former National Stadium had lived up to its name and status as a national icon. It has hosted a total of 18 National Day Parades, two Southeast Asian Peninsular (SEAP) and one Southeast Asian (SEA) Games, and many memorable sporting tournaments such as the Malaysia Cup. Our National Stadium was also the birthplace of our popular Kallang Wave. I think everyone can attest to the fact that our former National Stadium had brought Singaporeans together, feeling the oneness, shedding tears of joy and despair, especially during the soccer matches that involved our national football team.

Our current National Stadium is built on a public-private partnership model. It has been open for almost three years. Within this period, there had been media reports citing challenges faced by event organisers as well as some of our national sports associations, such as Football Association of Singapore (FAS), to secure National Stadium for our football matches involving our national team.

There was also a media report on what MINDEF, as NDP's organiser, had to go through challenging negotiation with Sports Hub Pte Ltd for 2016 National Day Parade. I understand one of the challenging factors faced by the event organisers and our national sports associations is the rental fee. I do hope that the Ministry will be able to facilitate in mitigating the present challenges faced by event organisers and our national sports associations, especially FAS, so that 30 years down the road, Singaporeans will have the same recollections of fond and nostalgic memories similar to that of our first National Stadium.

## Singapore Football

By Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap

Madam, I have two questions for the Ministry with regard to Singapore Football. Firstly, I have asked the Ministry during Committee of Supply debate 2015 for an update on Football Association of Singapore's (FAS) goal for Singapore Football. The last goal was set in 1988 by our former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, a popular one indeed – Goal 2010 – to qualify for World Cup 2010. In reply, the Ministry said that there is a taskforce that is looking at setting out the goals and the strategic directions for the Singapore Football in the coming years. May I have an update on what have been done so far and whether is there any goal set?

Madam, my second question is on the Football Association of Singapore (FAS). In Ministry's reply to my colleague Ms Sylvia Lim's query during the debate on President's Address on 29 January 2016, it was mentioned that the Football Association of Singapore would be having their AGM in June 2016. As reported in the media on 8 November 2016, FAS had an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) a day before, which was on 7 November and the meeting had decided to postpone its first ever election of Council for 30 years to a date before May this



year. Can the Ministry share the exact date for the FAS Council election and, two, what is causing the delay in the election of FAS Council?