

Singapore Democratic Party

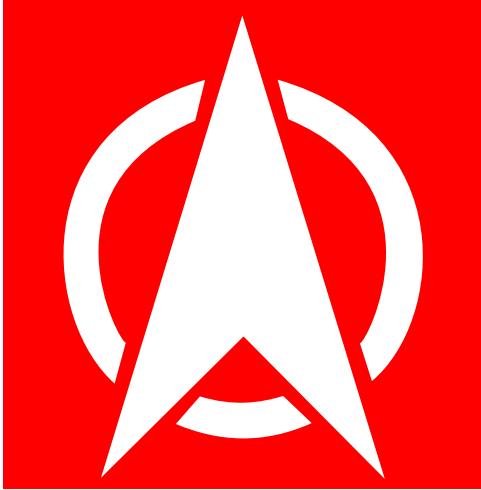
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SDP launches 10-point plan to lower cost of living

16 March 2019

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Singapore Democrats

As one of the most, if not the most, expensive cities in the world, the rising cost of living in Singapore is a central concern for the people.

This was the SDP's focus in this afternoon's launch of our policy A Better Life For All: Lowering the Cost of Living In Singapore.

Despite PM Lee Hsien Loong's to "work with you to solve problems like the cost of living" during the GE in 2015, the PAP and government increased, or intends to increase, prices on a slew of items including water, carpark, sugar, electricity, GST, etc.

This resulted in the government collecting nearly \$20 billion in budget surpluses over the last three

years.

What is particularly difficult to accept is that DPM Tharman Shanmugaratnam had declared in his Budget 2015 speech that all the increased spending were sufficiently funded until 2020.

To temper this rising cost of living, we proposed 10 measures:

- 1. Cut ministerial pay to fund assistance schemes for the poor*

Ministerial salaries be reduced with the savings channelled to fund a scheme to provide financial support for the poorest of our poor. If the salaries are reduced according to our formula proposed in our policy paper Ethical salaries for a public-centred government, the PM's salary would be reduced from the current \$2.2 million a year to about \$0.67 million a year.



The total savings from the pay reduction of the entire cabinet is conservatively estimated to be about \$10 million to \$12 million a year. This amount would go towards providing seed funding for the elderly and poor.

PM Lee said in the 2015 GE: "Let us be prepared to buckle, work even sacrifice." Our ministers must lead by example, not mere exhortations. Otherwise, they will lose even more of their fast-diminishing moral authority, and it would be difficult to govern effectively without the people's respect and trust.

- 2. Raise income tax rate for the top 1 percent*

In 2007, Singapore's highest personal income tax rate was cut from 28 percent to 20 percent. The SDP proposes that the tax bracket for the top 1 percent earners be brought back up to 28 percent. Experts estimate that raising the top marginal income tax rate by 1 percentage point could result in the government's tax revenue increasing by approximately \$300 million. The additional revenue will go a long way to provide further financial relief for low-income families.

- 3. Ensure revenue neutral budgets*

Rather than register huge surpluses every year, the government should collect in taxes only the amount that it needs. If it says, as DPM Tharman did in 2015, that the government has all its spending needs taken care of for the rest of the decade, then it should not raise taxes, fees and other charges during this period.

- 4. Scrap GST for essential items, raise GST for luxury goods*

Basic food items as well as other basic necessities such as medical treatment and school supplies should not be subject to the GST. This is to protect poorer households from regressive taxation. To offset the reduction in revenue, the GST rate for luxury items should be increased to 10 percent or more. Presently, a poor family



buying medicine or school textbooks is taxed at the same rate as a wealthy one buying a branded handbag worth thousands of dollars.

5. *Legislate minimum wage*

Legislation of minimum wage ensures that low-income workers are not exploited and that economic growth occurs in a fair and sustainable manner. Minimum wage will also help to reduce income inequality as well as reduce the demand for foreign workers.

6. *Reinstate estate duty*

The SDP proposes that the estate duty tax which was abolished in 2008 be brought back. Even PAP MPs are now calling for wealth and inheritance taxes to be reinstated.

7. *Reduce healthcare costs*

The commercialisation of medical care in Singapore as well as levying the GST on health-related expenses adds to the financial burden of the people. This issue is discussed in greater detail in our healthcare policy titled National healthcare plan: Caring for all Singaporeans. Briefly, the SDP plan proposes replacing the Medisave, MediShield, and Medifund schemes with a single-payer system to reduce the burden of health care expenditure on our people. A main feature of our policy is the provision of universal care which ensures that the elderly poor and those without income are not left behind.

8. *Lower HDB prices*

HDB flats have become unaffordable for Singaporeans. The use of our CPF savings meant for retirement to fund HDB flats means that retirees will be left with little to live on in their twilight years. To ensure that there are adequate retirement savings, the SDP puts forward our proposal of the Non-Open Market (NOM) flats. This category of flats is sold at cost (minus land cost) and will not be allowed to be sold on the open market. The exclusion of the cost of land will effectively halve flat prices, thus allowing home-owners to save their CPF for retirement. For a detailed presentation of this idea, please read our policy paper Housing a nation: Sound policies for a secure future.

9. *Return CPF savings*

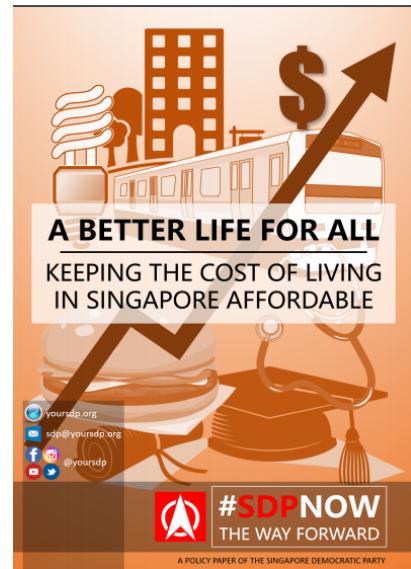
Withholding retirees' savings through the Retirement Sum Scheme makes it immensely difficult for the elderly to survive. This scheme must be abolished and the funds returned to Singaporeans at the age of 55. An "opt-in" clause could be introduced for members who wish to have their CPF funds retained and returned in instalments.

10. *Stop profligate public spending*

The government must be held to strict account how it spends the people's taxes. Lavish and unnecessary expenditure such as \$880,000 rubbish centres and \$1,500 bus-stop seats must cease. To do this, an effective opposition presence in Parliament, one that will meaningfully and competently examine records and question the ministers, is essential.

Our alternative ideas are guided by our belief that it is the people who should take the lead in driving the economy (as opposed to the current state-run affair through Temasek-owned companies) and who should have the predominant voice in how their wages are taxed and CPF savings used.

Under the present autocratic system, however, the people have little say in how their lives are run.



Decisions on financial matters, especially regarding taxes, fees and CPF savings, are dictated by the elite few in the PAP.

With this alternative policy on the cost of living, the SDP aims to change such a political arrangement and return the power to the people and, in the process, make living in this country more affordable and less stressful – in other words, a better life for all.

You can read the full policy [A Better Life For All: Keeping The Cost Of Living In Singapore Affordable here.](#)

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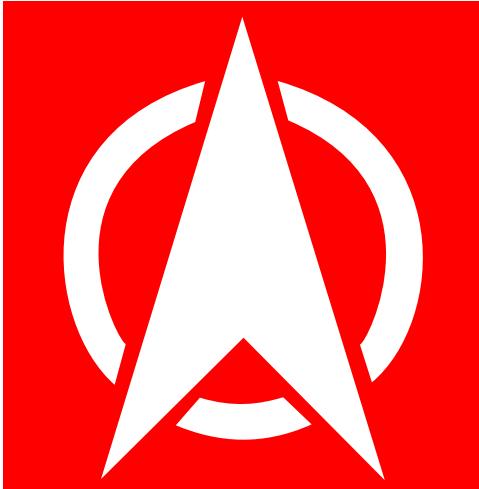
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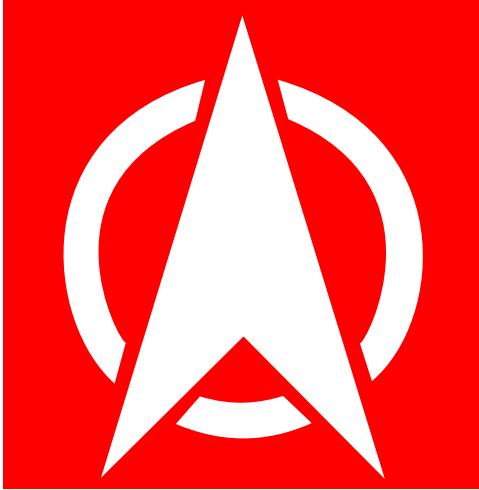
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Policy: Economy

6 August 2015

The Problem

Singapore's economy has registered dramatic growth in the last half century. This expansion has, however, come at a cost. It has been driven by the PAP which pays scant regard to democracy and the rights of Singaporeans. Because of this, problems have been emerging.

Income inequality, a dispirited workforce, the absence of an entrepreneurial class, our reputation as a tax haven, and the unhappiness of the local populace with the influx of foreign labour have raised questions about the sustainability of the country's current economic model.



SDP's Solution



The SDP has drawn up an alternative economic programme to chart a different course for our economy. Our programme emphasises fairness and promotes equality and equal opportunity for all. It is one that is people-centric and has as its prime objective the well-being and happiness of Singaporeans. It is also an alternative that is both realistic and sustainable.

Our vision is to create an economic system that benefits all Singaporeans, one that makes our society more egalitarian by tapping on the people's innovative best. We seek to level up society. We need a system that works for the people, not vice versa.

At a glance, this is the SDP's plan:

1. Redefine economic progress

We propose an alternative indicator of economic progress. The PAP relies on GDP growth as a measure of society's wellness. The problem is that GDP is a misleading indicator that does not take into account the cost (social, environmental and financial) of production. With an alternative index, such as the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), that comprehensively measures the cost and benefit of economic growth, we can better gauge the efficacy of our policies. Under our programme, the quality of life and overall happiness of our citizens will be the guiding factor for economic growth.

2. Reduce income inequality

As Singapore's GDP growth rate rises, so has income inequality and poverty in the country. To ensure that workers are not exploited, we propose the legislation of a national minimum wage. Retrenchment insurance will also be introduced to provide retrenched workers with support while they look for re-employment.

3. Encourage entrepreneurship

Our workers' productivity has been falling to dismal levels. To address this problem, we will work to ensure that our society is free and open so that innovation can thrive. Workers must be intrinsically motivated; only this will ensure that they excel in whatever they do and add value to the goods and services they produce. We also aim to cut down on importing cheap foreign labour and ensure that employers employ Singaporeans first. Only when local talent cannot be found should foreigners be employed.

4. Eliminate GLCs, increase SMEs

We aim to encourage enterprise by divesting inefficient government-linked companies (GLCs), which are competing with and slowing down the growth of our small and medium enterprises (SMEs), of their untouchable status. One effective way to help local SMEs grow is to reduce land costs and rentals. We will also work towards weaning our economy off its addiction to multinational corporations (MNCs).

5. Remake the GIC/Temasek model

Singapore's reserves are, effectively, kept with the government through two conglomerates: the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation (GIC) and Temasek Holdings (TH). These entities are currently being run in a less than transparent manner. The SDP believes that our country's reserves should work for the people, not the other way around. TH should be eliminated and the GIC's operations must be made transparent and its accounts made public. The GIC must be restructured to function independently of the ruling party – no member of parliament or their relatives should hold governing positions in the company.

6. Increase social spending

We recommend allocating more resources to help the most vulnerable segments of our society. We believe that social welfare assistance for the poorest of our poor must increase in order to reduce poverty. The SDP does not advocate deficit spending on a continual basis, but we are convinced that the national budget for social programmes and health care must be increased in order to support the needy and elderly.

7. Abolish the CPF Minimum Sum Scheme

Retirees depend on their CPF savings to meet living expenses. Withholding their savings through the Minimum Sum Scheme is not only impractical but also immoral. The scheme must be abolished and the money returned to members when they turn 55 as originally promised.

8. Empower workers

Beyond a certain level, no amount of coercion can bring about higher-quality output and productivity. We must empower our workers and upgrade their minds and attitudes by returning them their freedom; it is when they feel a sense of belonging to society that they will be motivated to contribute more than what is asked of them.



Singapore needs a new economic model that will take us into a new era of sustainable growth – one that will allow us to compete on the international stage instead of consigning our workers to a cycle of working harder and longer for less and less; one that uplifts our people instead of dumbing them down; and one whose priority is the well-being of all Singaporeans, not just the rich.

We must work towards an enlightened economic system.

Read the full paper [A New Economic Vision: Towards Innovation, Equal Opportunity and Compassion](#) [here](#).

Read also:

- [This is how our CPF and GIC should be managed](#)
- [Here's how we can boost productivity and foster innovation](#)
- [This is how SDP will set up minimum wage](#)
- [SDP's plan: Ban ministers, MPs and relatives from GIC](#)



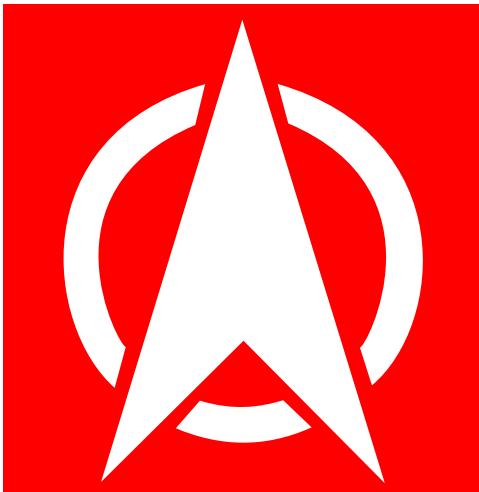
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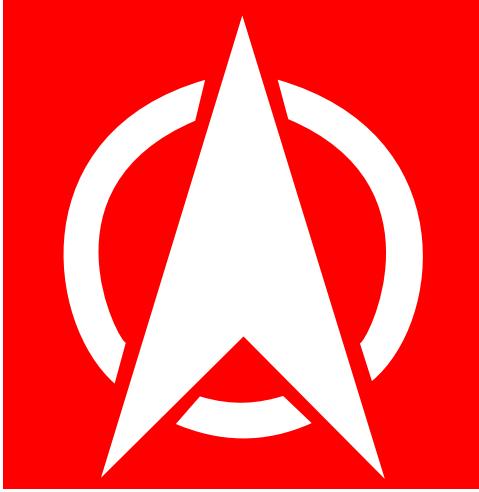
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SDP: Our education system in dire need of reform; shows how to do it

13 July 2019

Singapore Democrats

Our education system is outmoded and does not prepare our students for the future. It is in dire need of reform.

This case was made by the SDP at the launch of its education policy *Educating for Creativity and Equality: An Agenda For Transformation*. SDP Chairman Paul Tambyah and Mr Ben Pwee, who joined the SDP earlier this year, presented the party's case.

Mr Pwee highlighted the system's dependence on exams and rote-learning. In this day and age, such an approach does not prepare our students for a world that emphasizes creativity and innovation.

Mr Pwee also pointed out that the current system contributed to the growing inequality in Singapore. Because of the intense syllabi, teachers are under pressure to complete the list of

required topics regardless of whether the students understand the material or not.

Parents then seek private tuition, a billion-dollar industry, to help their children cope. Richer families can afford such expensive tutoring, leaving poorer families at a disadvantage. This exacerbates the growing divide in socio-economic class in our society.

To remedy these problems, Prof Tambyah listed a series of proposals to revamp the education system.



Among some of them are to foster students' independent and critical thinking. Dependence on memorisation is a thing of the past as information is readily available at one's fingertips. "We must teach our students how to think, not what to think," Prof Tambyah said.

The SDP also proposes to abolish the PSLE, and this should be complemented by broadening the curricula and reducing the workload. He added: "Such an approach will enrich our students' educational experience and prepare them for a future that will require them to be well-rounded, intelligent individuals."

He also said that class-size should be reduced to no more than 20 students per teacher. This will enhance teacher-pupil interaction.

On using education to reduce inequality, Prof Tambyah pointed out that school- and class-ranking be scrapped. Schools will not segregate pupils according to their examination results.

"This is because education is not about competition with one's classmates but learning through collaboration and teamwork with one's peers," he noted. Competition for top-ranked schools is unhealthy and has inflicted serious psychological damage, according to mental health professionals, on our children.

The SDP believes that education must be the process where an individual learns to discover oneself and, in doing so, endeavour to improve the human condition. For the sake of our nation's future, it is important that we teach our children that reading and learning can be enjoyable and intrinsically rewarding.

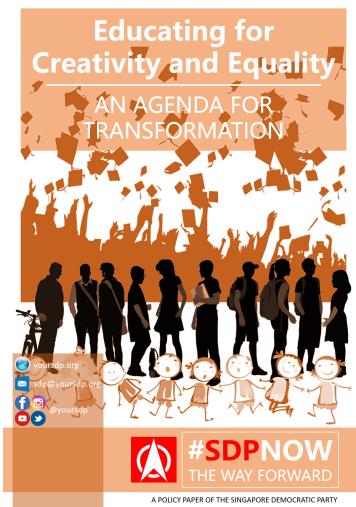
We must let our children be children. They should be encouraged to read, play, discover themselves and for themselves, and develop a love for books.

The goal should be to lead our students to learn, not push them to study. The former will open up their naturally enquiring minds; the latter will kill curiosity.

If we are able to achieve this goal, we will reap the benefits of not just a talented workforce but also, and more importantly, a thinking and caring people.

The full SDP's education policy paper, Educating for Creativity and Equality: An Agenda For Transformation can be found [here](#).

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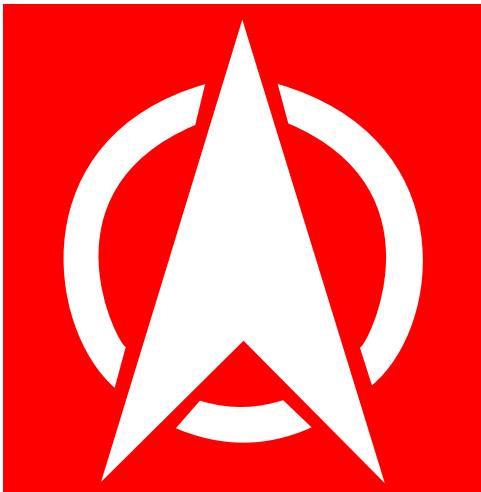
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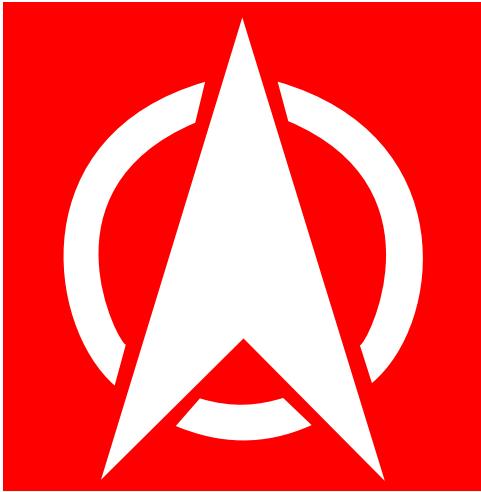
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SDP's alternative healthcare plan will lessen financial burden on S'poreans

11 May 2019

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Singapore Democrats

Do away with the 3Ms (Medisave, Medishield and Medifund) and introduce a single-payer insurance scheme for Singapore's healthcare system.

This was the main proposal by the SDP which launched its healthcare plan at its office this afternoon.

Presented by its Chairman Professor Paul Tambyah and CEC member Khung Wai Yeen, the SDP said that the 3M system did not meet the healthcare needs of Singaporeans.

Mr Khung pointed out that Medisave is funded by taking a significant chunk from the people's CPF funds, further eroding savings needed for retirement. At last count, reserves in Medisave stood at

\$88 billion.

Medishield Life is also lacking in that the deductible is as high as \$3,000 which makes it hard for less well-off patients. The scheme also under-insures Singaporeans which is why we have to maintain a large Medisave account of about \$50,000 per person.

The fact that numerous packages need to be introduced on an adhoc basis like the Merdeka and Pinoneer packages is evidence of the problems with the current 3M system.



Prof Tambyah said that the SDP Plan would do away with the 3Ms and the funds in Medisave would be returned to the people's CPF accounts.

These complex schemes would be replaced with the National Health Investment Fund, or NHIF, to which everyone Singaporean contributes an average of \$50 a month (depending on income levels) through their CPF. This amount is lower than the current Medishield Life premiums.

The rest of the healthcare budget under the NHIF would be paid for through taxes collected by the government. The NHIF would cover every Singaporean for basic healthcare including accidents and pregnancy.

"This payment from a single source rather than multiple sources from the 3Ms eliminates the present complicated subsidy system," Prof Tambyah explained.

And how would payments be made under the NHIF?

A patient pays only 10 percent of the hospital bill and the amount is capped at \$2,000 per year. The remainder will be paid by the NHIF.

Prof Tambyah said that patients will co-pay hospital bills to "emphasise personal responsibility and reduce abuse by providers."

The SDP Plan differs from the PAP's system in one crucial aspect. The latter runs hospitals as profit-making ventures which consistently collect surpluses far in excess of the money spent taking care of patients.

"Healthcare is treated like a commodity where people avoid important primary healthcare services because of the costs and end up spending a lot of money treating complications that could have been prevented," Prof Tambyah said. "As a medical professional, I feel that this is not right. We should ensure that there is equal treatment for all, care based on clinical need and not on ability to pay."

Details of its policy are spelt out in its paper *SDP's National Healthcare Plan: Caring For All*. The paper points out that under the current system, the financial burden is unfairly placed on the people through out-of-pocket payment, Medisave use or Medishield Life premiums.

The SDP is confident that the groundbreaking nature of our Plan will take the nation in the right direction. Its truly universal healthcare approach puts the people's well-being at the fore and centre of our policy.

The aim is to bring about a healthier, happier populace working hand-in-hand with a

compassionate and responsible government to ensure that no one who is in need should ever be denied medical treatment, that the greatness of our society is vouchsafed only by the care we give to the least among us.

The full paper can be read [here](#).

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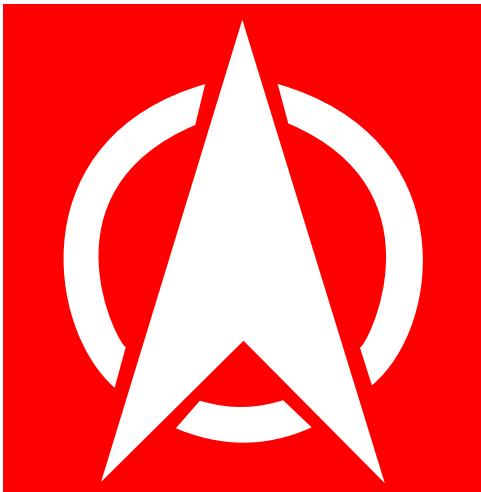
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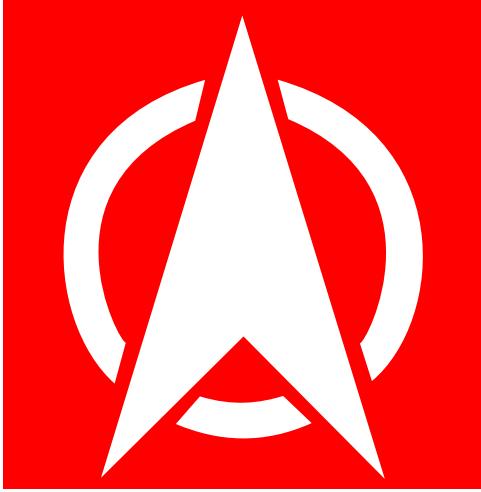
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SDP proposes Non-Open Market flats to address HDB's 99-year lease crisis

6 April 2019

This post is at least a year old. Some of the links in this post may no longer work correctly.

Singapore Democrats

Non-Open Market, or NOM, flats that do not include land costs in their price should be introduced into the public housing system in Singapore.

This idea was raised at the SDP's launch of its housing policy *Housing A Nation: Holistic Policies For Affordable Homes*. Party Vice-Chairman, Mr John Tan, and Treasurer Mr Bryan Lim presented the landmark policy paper this afternoon.

Such a scheme would resolve the problem over the depreciating value of HDB flats due to the 99-year lease of the land.

National Development Minister

Lawrence Wong caused a stir in 2017 when he said that “As the leases run down, especially towards the tail-end, the flat prices will come down correspondingly.”

Singaporeans have expressed much concern over the matter as many hope to sell their flats at a profit that they can use for retirement.

“But depreciating values, especially of ageing flats, mean that owners cannot depend on their flats as a nest-egg,” Mr John Tan said during the launch. “The problem is compounded by the fact many Singaporeans have depleted their CPF savings to pay for their flats.”

The NOM scheme will price new HDB flats to include administrative, material, labour costs only but without land “cost” that is currently the practice.

As a result, prices of flats will be substantially lower, ranging from \$70,000 for 2-room flats to \$240,000 for 5-room flats or even less.

“As the name implies, however, flats bought under this scheme will not be allowed to be re-sold in the open market,” co-presenter Mr Bryan Lim said.



Owners wishing to dispose of their NOM flats will have to sell them back to the HDB, he added.

Singaporeans who purchase these flats can expect to take 9 to 15 years to pay off their housing loans (based on an interest rate of 3 percent) using no more than 20 percent of their gross income.

This further reduces the financial burden of home-buyers many of whom currently service their loans on a 30-year basis.

The lowered housing expenditure will free up capital for homeowners to save for their retirement.

The rationale for NOM flats, Mr Lim pointed out, is that the government should not profit from Singaporeans when it comes to public housing and Singaporeans should not use it as a means of investment for capital gain.

Public housing is a social good and should be used to meet the housing needs of the population, not profit-making for the government or citizens.

Current homeowners

Existing HDB owners can continue to sell their flats in the open market (OM). Of course, they are subjected to the vagaries of the prevailing market.

However, those who wish to take advantage of the NOM scheme can convert the status of their existing flats.

In such a case, the government will return the difference between the original price of their flats (as purchased from the HDB) and price of an equivalent NOM flat subject to a cap. This money will be credited back to the owner's CPF account or used to pay any outstanding housing loan that one may have taken.

The converted flats will then be subjected to rules governing NOM flats.

The NOM scheme essentially gives Singaporeans an added option of buying a home at a greatly reduced price. First-time HDB buyers can choose to buy an OM or NOM flat.

Ensuring a stable housing market

The NOM system will be introduced in a gradual manner to prevent a shock to the existing system and a sudden market correction.

This will provide stability to the OM prices while making NOM flats affordable for those who want it. The market correction of prices will take place in a gradual and measured way that will not cause financial distress to current homeowners.

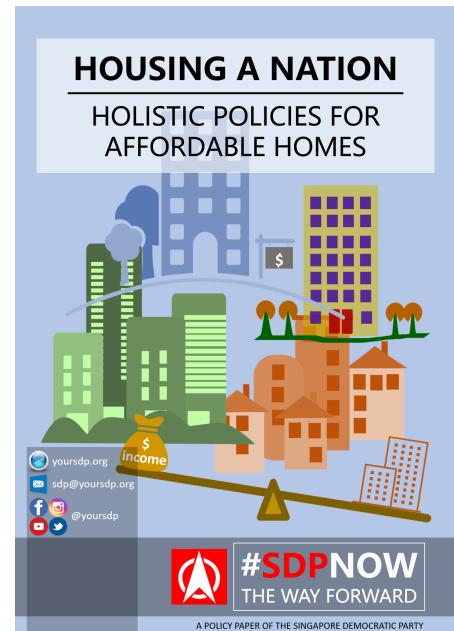
Other policy initiatives presented by the SDP include:

1. Implementing the Young Families Priority Scheme (YFPS), a targeted priority scheme that grants balloting priority for first-timer families with children or couples who are expectant for Balance Flats or new Built-To-Order Flats in non-mature estates.
2. Increasing the inclusiveness of public housing by enabling single-parent families with children as well as singles to purchase and own their flats. The SDP plan will also increase the range of lower-income Singaporeans for housing rental.
3. Enhancing the Lease Buy-Back Scheme to more effectively assist needy senior citizens to have a secure retirement.
4. Barring Permanent Residents and non-citizens from buying or renting NOM flats.

Collectively, these SDP policies can contribute towards resolving some of the major problems affecting public housing in Singapore today and ensuring that our public housing system is compassionate and inclusive.

To read the full policy paper *Housing A Nation: Holistic Policies For Affordable Homes*, [click here](#).

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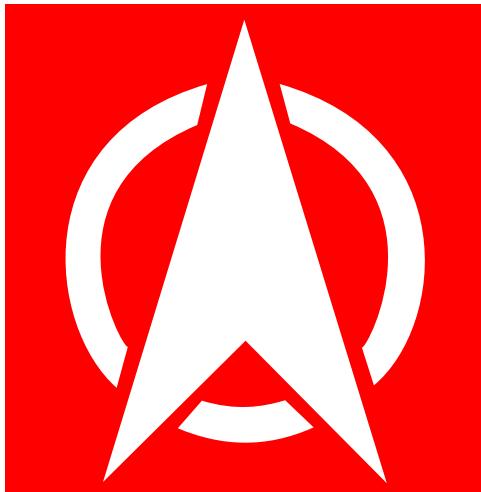
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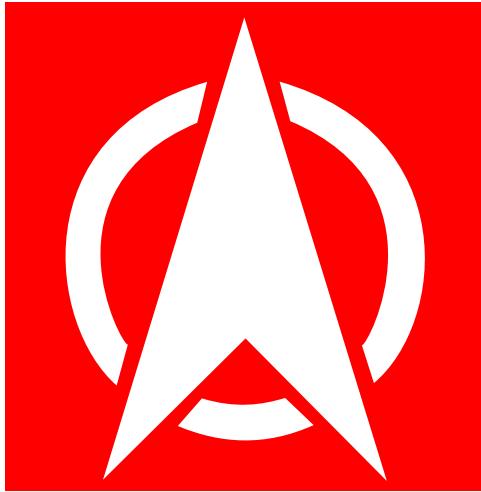
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Policy: Malay community

6 August 2015



A SINGAPORE FOR ALL SINGAPOREANS

Addressing the concerns of the Malay Community



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The Problem

Singapore's socio-politico-economic system places unnecessary obstacles in the way of the Malay community and thwarts its progress in society. As a result, Singapore is not only not developing its full potential but also losing an integral part of our national identity.

On the economic front, for example, the Malay community lags behind our other ethnic communities and the wide income disparities seen nationwide affects Malays more than our other ethnic groups. The education system also puts Malays at a disadvantage.

These issues have resulted in great unhappiness within Singapore's Malay community. Left unaddressed, this unhappiness will grow, cause friction in society and divide Singaporeans.

This is not a Malay problem or a Chinese problem or an Indian problem or a Eurasian problem – it is a Singaporean problem that requires the attention of all Singaporeans.

SDP's Solution

The SDP has proposed a 10-point plan to improve the conditions of the Malay community in Singapore:

1. Improve economic conditions

A paper published by the Nanyang Technological University found that 20 percent of Malay families live on less than \$1,500 a month. The SDP's recommendation of a Minimum Wage law will help to uplift the Malay community economically.

2. Nationalise preschool education

Researchers at Harvard University found that kindergarten education can affect learning and classroom achievement of students. The Government should take charge of kindergartens and provide trained teachers and inexpensive fees instead of leaving preschools unregulated.

3. Lower tertiary education fees

Malays make up only 5 percent of university students, compared to 22 percent for the Chinese and 35 percent for Indians. To help reduce this gap, the SDP proposes that tertiary education fees be lowered so that students from needy families can afford it.

4. Fund madrasahs



Presently, madrasahs do not receive state funds even though their students sit for the PSLE and the O-levels. Madrasahs should receive state funding, consistent with the Government funding of missionary schools. In return, madrasah schools will recruit non-Muslim teachers to teach secular subjects.

End discrimination in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF)

Distrust of Singaporean Malays who serve in the SAF will breed disloyalty and negatively affect our country's national security. Recruitment and promotion of SAF personnel, including NSmen, should be based on performance and not race.

6. Introduce the Fair Employment Act

Anti-discrimination legislation should be introduced to minimise workplace discrimination against minority ethnic groups, including hiring practices in institutions like the SAF.

7. Abolish the Ethnic Integration Programme (EIP)

The EIP restricts where ethnic minorities may live which negatively affects the re-sale prices of their HDB flats. The EIP should be abolished.

8. Make Yayasan MENDAKI non-partisan

MENDAKI was set up more than 30 years ago to raise the level of education of Malays. After three decades, the majority of Singapore's Malays are still lagging behind in the educational field. This is because the organisation's leadership has been politicised – the organisation is chaired by PAP minister Dr Yaacob Ibrahim. MENDAKI's governing body should, instead, be chosen from civil society and Malay-Muslim organisations.

9. *Make housing affordable*

As Malays disproportionately occupy the lower strata of income-earners, increases in basic necessities such as housing affect them the most. To resolve this problem, the SDP has proposed the Non-Open Market (NOM) flat scheme where HDB sells flats without adding the cost of land. (See our proposal on housing [here](#).)

10. *Make health care affordable*

Like housing, expensive health care affects lower-income Singaporeans the most. As a disproportionate number of Malays find themselves in this category, an affordable health care system goes a long way to alleviate the economic problems faced by the Malay community.

Read the full paper A Singapore For All Singaporeans: Addressing The Concerns Of The Malay Community [here](#).



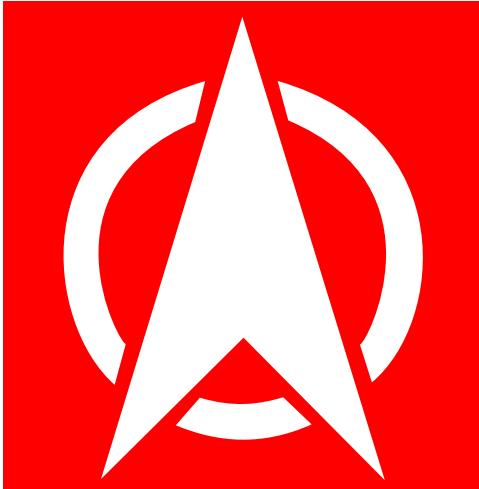
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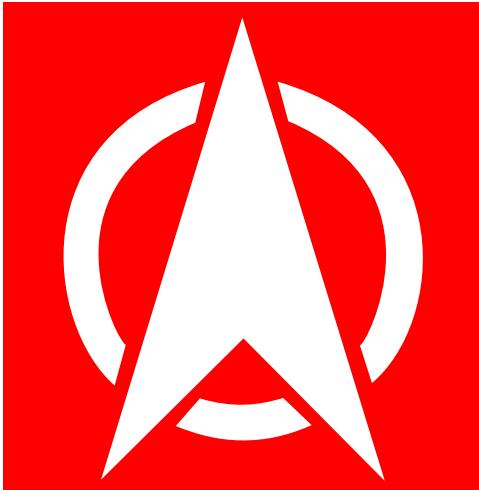
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Policy: Ministerial salaries

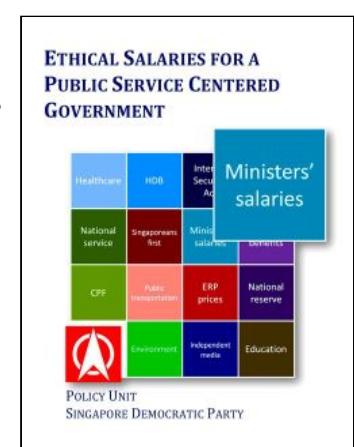
06 August 2015

The Problem

PAP ministers are the highest paid politicians in the world, earning millions of dollars a year. In 2011, the ministers were paid an incredible 24-month bonus! Because of this, they live in a completely different world from the average citizen and don't understand our difficulties and worries.

SDP's Solution

We in the SDP believe that those who aspire to govern a country must be imbued with a strong sense of selflessness and love for the nation. To enrich oneself financially while claiming it is one's due for service to the country is incompatible with true leadership.



To determine the appropriate ministerial salary level, the SDP recommends the following measures:

1. Establish an independent ministerial salary commission for each financial year. Such a commission shall compile and publish annually the salaries of ministers, along with their other commercial interests.
2. Do away with variable bonuses such as the GDP Bonus and the Performance Bonus which together can come up to as much as 22 months of a minister's basic salary. Instead, ministerial pay should comprise fixed salary components.
3. Peg ministerial pay to the bottom 20 percent of Singaporean wage earners.
 - i. i. MPs' allowance should be 10 times the mean wage of the bottom 20th percentile (based on the assumption that there is a minimum wage in place).
 - ii. Ministers should be paid three times the MP allowance; the prime minister should be paid four times that amount. Based on our recommendations the prime minister would likely paid \$56,000 a month and a minister \$42,000. These wages are more than fair.
- ii. Provide ministers with allowances for expenses incurred while performing their official duties. The claims should be published to ensure transparency and accountability.
- iii. Move the Corrupt Practices Investigation Board (CPIB) out of the Prime Minister's Office and empower it to investigate all ministers without needing the approval of the President of Singapore.

Read the full paper Ethical Salaries For a Public-Centred Government [here](#).

Read also:

- [Ministerial Pay Cut: Singaporeans Cannot Be Fooled](#)
- [Do Away with Variable Bonuses In Ministerial Salaries](#)



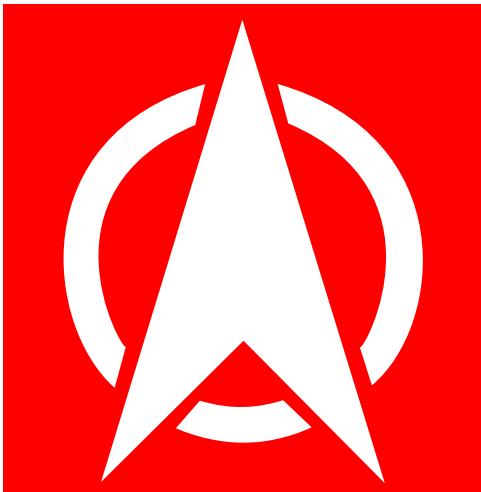
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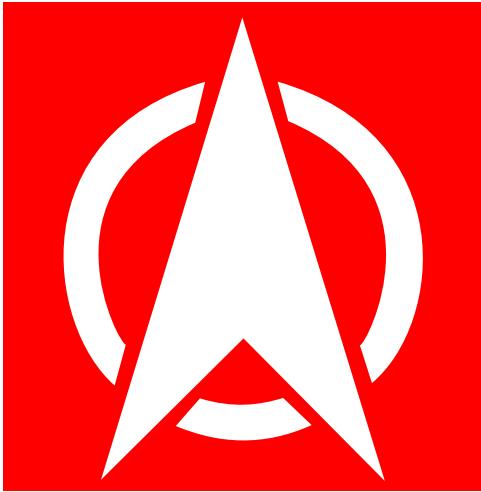
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SDP population policy: Hire S'poreans first, retrench S'poreans last

8 June 2019

This post is at least a year old. Some of the links in this post may no longer work correctly.

Singapore Democrats

CORRECTION NOTICE: This post contains a false statement of fact. There is no rising trend of local PMET retrenchment. Local PMET employment has in fact increased consistently and continues to do so today. For the correct facts, click here:

<https://www.gov.sg/factually/content/corrections-on-falsehoods-posted-by-SDP>.

NOTE: As you can see, the above Correction Notice is placed as specified by MOM. However, as stated in our statement, <https://www.facebook.com/yoursdp/posts/10158399553898455>, the conclusions that Manpower Minister Josephine Teo arrived at are disputable. Under POFMA, we have to comply with the order but we will be applying to cancel the Correction Directions.

The SDP pushed for reform of the immigration policy which it says allows in too many foreign workers into Singapore to displace local PMETs.

The party made this proposal when it launched its alternative population and immigration policy [Building A People: Sound Policies For A Secure Future](#) at its office in Ang Mo Kio this afternoon.

The proposals, introduced by a new face in the party Ms Joyce Tan, would take a more measured approach towards allowing foreigners to work in Singapore.



One idea is to adopt a points-based system called the Talent Track Scheme where foreign PMETS wishing to work in Singapore have to apply to. The applications will be assessed based on their qualifications, skills, and experience.

Only those who meet the required number of points will qualify for a list of potential employees.

Employers will then be allowed to hire foreigners from this pool but will have to demonstrate that no Singaporean is available or qualifies for the position before that.

"This will prevent firms hiring foreigners based solely on their ability to accept lower wages," said Ms Tan, a communications professional who has held executive positions in local and international corporations. She currently works in a regional company.

The SDP's proposal comes amidst a rising proportion of Singapore PMETs getting retrenched. Such a trend is partly the result of hundreds of local companies continuing to discriminate against local workers.

Ms Tan also took issue with the idea that Singapore can accommodate a 10 million population. The idea was raised by Mr Heng Swee Keat recently.

With a population density that is one of the highest in the world, Singapore can ill-afford to grow a population of 10 million by bringing in more foreigners.

As it is, Singaporeans are one of the unhappiest and most stressed out workers in the world. By not taking into consideration the physical and mental well-being of the people, the PAP's current approach of cramming more foreigners onto this island is counter-productive.

CEC member Mr Khung Wai Yeen, who presented the policy with Ms Tan, pointed this out. He also noted the low birthrate and high emigration rate that is causing the Singaporean population to shrink.

He cited the high cost of living and stressful lifestyle as causes of younger Singaporeans leaving the country or having fewer children.

To address this problem, the SDP has proposed a 10-point plan under another policy [A Better Life For All: Keeping The Cost Of Living In Singapore Affordable](#) to make Singapore less expensive.

"Raising taxes and fees on a slew of items in the last couple of years makes Singapore even more expensive and, hence, exacerbates the problem of a shrinking population," Ms Tan pointed out. "This is why the raising of the GST to 9 percent from the current 7 percent is a bad idea."

One suggestion in the proposal is to abolish the GST for basic necessities like food, medicine and school supplies.

It points out that the intent of the PAP is to increase GDP growth at all cost, adding that it is misguided for the Government to think that having a larger population, even one made up of a disproportionate number of foreigners, will achieve this goal.

A large population, the SDP says, achieved at the expense of the well-being of Singaporeans is a recipe for disaster. Not only does it hurt the people but it will make Singaporeans even more alienated and disengaged from society.

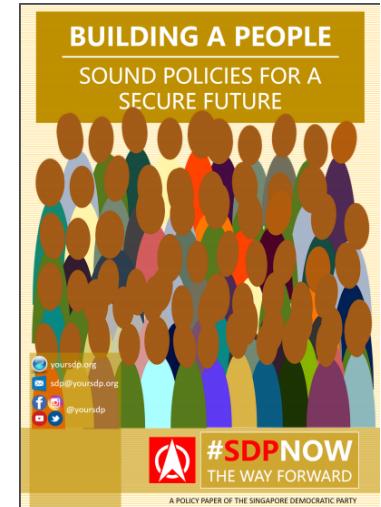
The party has therefore proposed using the Genuine Progress Index (GPI) which measures economic progress by also taking into consideration social and environmental factors.

The alternative also proposes the removal of race identity in our Identity Cards as this serves only to divide Singaporeans when we should be fostering one single Singaporean identity.

The SDP has previously launched other alternative policies in [housing](#) and [healthcare](#).

You can read SDP's population and immigration policy *Building A People: Sound Policies For A Secure Future* here: <http://yoursdp.org/Policy-2019/Building-a-people.pdf>

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A PROMISE TO THE RESIDENTS



THE SDP TOWN COUNCIL MANAGEMENT PLAN



Singapore Democratic Party
Your Voice In Parliament

YOUR VOICE IN PARLIAMENT



Singapore Democratic Party
May 2015

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PREAMBLE

The Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), if given the honour and privilege of serving the constituencies we contest in at the next general elections, hereby pledge that:

1. Our MPs will dedicate themselves full-time to running an efficient town council.
2. We will cut out unnecessary costs and pass on the savings to residents.
3. We will put in place a transparent and accountable system where residents will be able to track developments and actions of the town council.
4. Our team will work to foster a community that values compassion and graciousness towards fellow residents especially the elderly and those in need.
5. We will develop and conduct programmes for our children and youths to learn and thrive.

We will strive to set new standards in town council management by adopting best practices in transparency and accountability. It is only through confidence in the SDP working for the people at the constituency level will Singaporeans gain trust in our party to eventually take over as government.

We put forth this manifesto and declare that we will dedicate ourselves to serving our residents by performing at the highest levels.



1. How Town Councils Came To Be

1.1 Before the town council concept was introduced, public housing estates came under the management of the Housing and Development Board (HDB). The idea of decentralising the running of housing estates was mooted in 1986 with the first town councils set up in the Ang Mo Kio estate as a pilot project. Elected members of parliament (MPs) would administer the municipal needs of the constituencies they won. Ostensibly, the People's Action Party (PAP) depicted the move as devolution of power to MPs who now had the responsibility of managing the housing estates.

1.2 However, the initiative was widely seen as a political measure introduced by the PAP to discourage voters from electing opposition MPs. The ruling party believed that the opposition was not capable of effectively meeting the responsibilities demanded of MPs. Lee Kuan Yew said in 1988 when he was the prime minister:

If your MP is not honest, or not competent, you will know it soon enough. And if your estate is poorly run, repairs slow, and lift maintenance poor, you will be inconvenienced and worse, the resale value of your flat will be affected... Your personal well-being will be at stake when you choose your MP.

1.3 At the beginning, responsibilities and duties of town councils included installing electrical equipment at hawker centres, providing public walkways, taking care of landscaping and horticultural projects, and so on. Apart from these duties, town councils were also charged with organising community-related activities.

1.4 The [Town Councils Act](#) (TCA) was enacted in 1988, which spells out the regulations of town council management and the responsibilities of town council personnel.

2. The Foundation

2.1 Vision

The SDP will foster a community, not just run a constituency, where our residents are actively and democratically engaged in the running of their homes, and to create a living environment where people find meaning and belonging.

2.2 Mission Statement

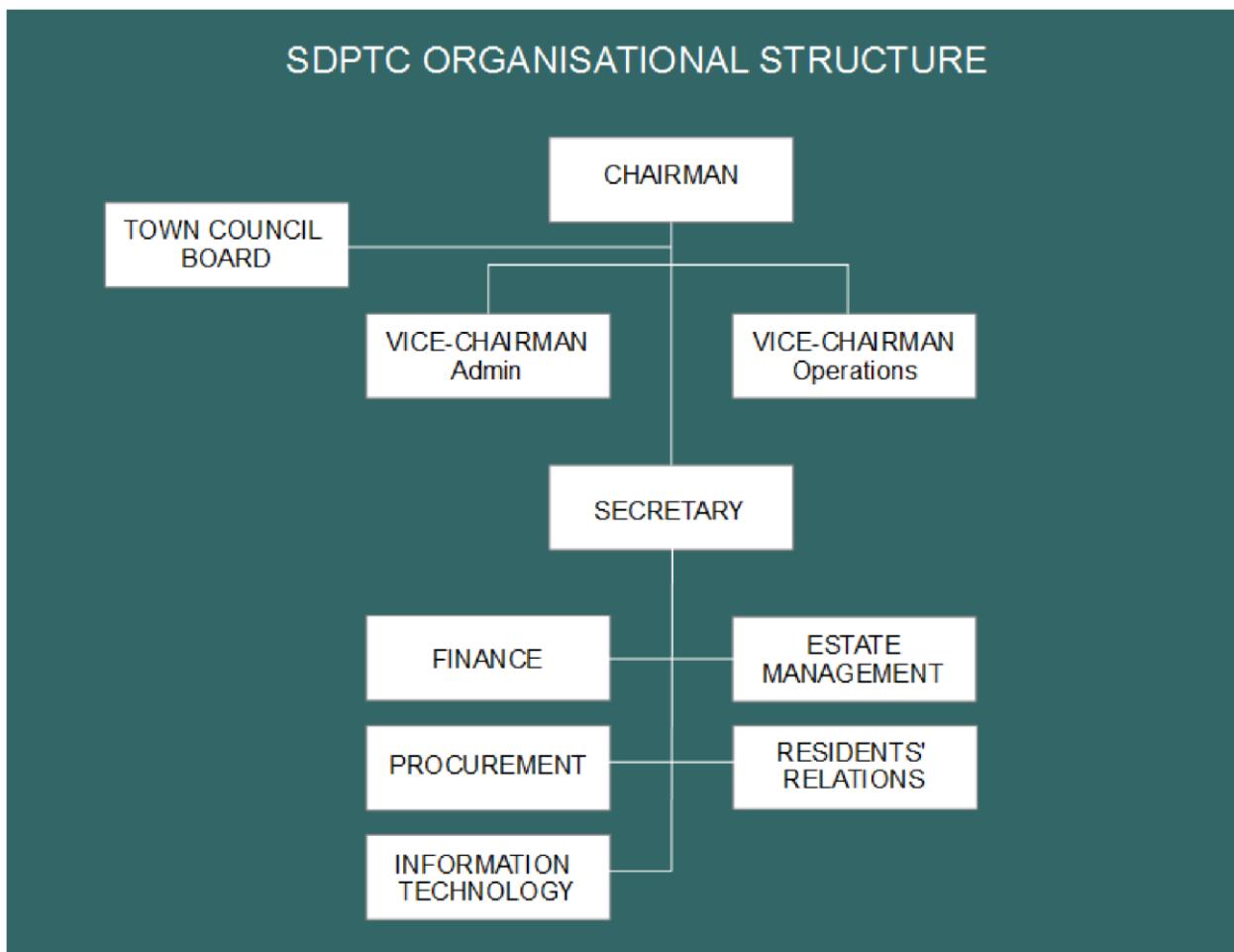
Keeping our estate clean and well-maintained will be our priority. Our mission is to keep costs down and Conservancy and Service Charges (C&SC) low by running an efficient and transparent town council.

3. The Transition



- 3.1 Our first objective is to ensure a seamless take-over of the town council management. To do this, we will establish a Transition Team which will comprise the Town Council Chairman and two Vice-Chairmen as well as an interim Town Council Board within three working days following the election.
- 3.2 The SDP-run Town Council (SDPTC) will not engage a managing agent. We will, instead, employ qualified professionals to manage the town. These professionals will be overseen by our MPs who will apply themselves on a full-time basis to running the town. Such an arrangement has two advantages: One, it helps to keep the expenses to a minimum as managing agents are profit-making enterprises which add to the town council's budget. The savings will be passed on to the residents. Two, only when the SDP and our residents collectively manage the town can we be proud to call it our home.
- 3.3 To fulfill our vision and honour our mission statement, the SDPTC will establish five departments: Finance, Estate Management, Residents' Relations, Information Technology, and Procurement Departments. Each Department will be staffed by a qualified professional employed by the TC. To ensure continuity and a smooth handover, the Transition Team will retain existing staff; we will recruit new employees only if the staff members express a desire to leave. The Transition Team will engage legal and financial consultants to guide the takeover process.
- 3.4 SDP MPs will supervise the professional staff by appointing Oversight Committees (OCs) to oversee the work of the Departments. The OCs will comprise independent professional consultants with the necessary skills and experience in the areas which they are assigned and will meet monthly. The OCs and Departments will be coordinated by the TC Secretary.

Such a set-up where elected officials, professional consultants and TC staff work hand-in-glove will ensure high-quality and effective management. It will also allow the new team to hit the ground running upon taking over the TC.



- 3.5 The SDPTC will run a blog that will be updated daily to monitor and explain to the public the handover process and the level of cooperation of the out-going PAP town council. The blog will carry announcements of key appointments of the TC's personnel and management team. The SDPTC will also conduct a public forum at the conclusion of the handover process to keep residents informed of the state of affairs and to address any outstanding issues between the incoming and outgoing administrations. The former PAP town council will be invited to attend the forum and address the residents.

- 3.6 The following is the action plan for effecting a smooth transition:

The first 30 days

- 3.7 To ensure minimal disruption and inconvenience to residents, the SDPTC will retain key officers from the previous office. We will also honour existing contracts to ensure continuity. C&SC will be retained for at least three months.

The Departments will be tasked with conducting the activities:

3.7.1 *Finance*

Upon taking over office, the SDPTC will hire a qualified and highly skilled Certified Public Accountant to head the Finance Department. To effect a smooth transition, the Department will

- require the following information from the previous management
 - i. past years' audited financial statements,
 - ii. past years' management accounts,
 - iii. past years' budgets,
 - iv. details of all assets and liabilities, income & expenditure, etc.
 - v. details of TC's bank current & fixed deposit accounts,
 - vi. government grants by the mix and composition of housing and flat,
 - vii. existing contracts for estate management, and
 - viii. databases
- identify scalable and customisable systems to manage the SDPTC's finances,
- decide and implement the most suitable system for the new TC,
- examine all financial items handed over,



- 
- report on the initial state of the TC's finance, and
 - retain legal and financial advice to ensure compliance with the TCA on all matters of financial concern, including the [Town Council's Financial Rules](#).

3.7.2 *Estate Management*

The Estate Management Department will:

- takeover documents related to estate duties including contracts and job sheets,¹
- enforce existing contracts and ensure full compliance of contractors, and
- continue to engage the Essential Maintenance Service Unit (EMSU) for the estates' essential services.

3.7.3 *Procurement*

The Procurement Department will work with the Estate Department to study contract extensions and/or the procurement of new ones.

3.7.4 *Residents' Relations*

Our Residents' Relations Department will:

- solicit residents' input regarding their estates for planning purposes and
- keep residents informed about the transition process.

3.7.5 *Information Technology (IT)*

The IT Department will identify scalable and customisable systems that can be employed to manage the databases handed over. It will:

- decide on the most suitable system to use for the new TC,
- monitor the IT workflow, and

¹ Job sheets provided by contractors contain a summary of work done.

- modify and customise the software where necessary.

The first 100 days and beyond

- 3.8 In the first 100 days of our administration, the SDPTC will enhance accountability and transparency processes in our management. We believe that it is our responsibility to account to the residents for the decisions we make and the actions we take. We are also committed to a high level of transparency which includes timely and accurate reporting of finances, compliance with regulations under the tender processes for contracts and the supervision of contractors we engage.
- 3.9 To ensure adherence to the work-plan laid out during the transition period, SDPTC will require the following from its administrative and our operational teams:

3.9.1 *Finance*

The Financial Department will:

- provide financial advice and support to the SDPTC and its TC Board,
- provide clear budgetary planning²
- produce accurate financial reports³
- ensure that sufficient funds are available to meet ongoing operational and investment requirements, and
- post quarterly statement of accounts on the TC website.⁴

² The SDPTC will publish its budget, including estimates of its revenue and expenditure for the next financial year together with a list of works which the TC proposes to undertake, in February of each year as required under [Section 37](#) of the TCA. A Townhall Meeting will be organised so that residents can discuss the TC budget.

³ The SDPTC will perform monthly bank reconciliations in the manner prescribed by the Town Councils Financial Rules [Section 32\(2\)](#). It will also furnish financial statements for each financial year beginning on 1st April of each year and ending on 31st March of the succeeding year and in the form directed by the Auditor-General under [Section 36](#).

⁴ The TC will have its accounts ready for inspection and audit annually. It will also, after the end of each financial year, submit to the Minister an annual report on the activities of the TC as required under [Section 38](#) of the TCA. Our Finance Department will also ensure that reports, processes and procedures are in strict compliance with the Singapore Financial Reporting Standard.

3.9.2 Estate Management

The Estate Management Department will comprise the Estate Manager who will oversee Assistant Managers (one per 60,000 units of flats), Precinct Managers (one per 10,000 units of flats) and Precinct Officers (one per 5,000 units of flats). The Department will:

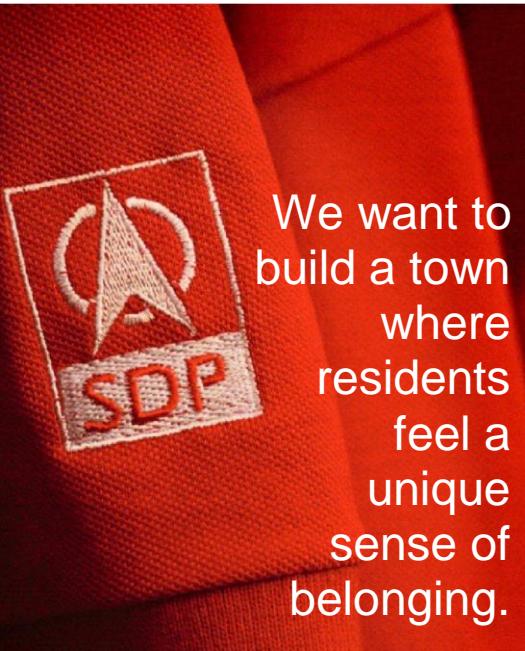
- oversee and enforce existing contracts and ensure their full compliance,
- continue to provide round-the-clock readiness to respond to emergencies as well as timely maintenance for routine matters,
- develop annual work-plans and ensure efficient execution of these plans,
- conduct evaluations and reviews on contractors to ensure compliance, and
- engage in environmental planning and urban estate management.

3.9.3 Procurement

The Procurement Department will:

- ensure full compliance of procurement procedures laid out in the Town Councils Financial Rules,
- work with the Finance Department to ensure proper and timely payments of services and fees, and to adhere to expenditure guidelines,
- prepare documents for tenders and evaluate bids,
- coordinate with the Estate Management Department to evaluate and review contracts,
- adopt industry best practices to achieve good procurement results, and
- forecast price trends and their impact on future projects.





3.9.4 Residents' Relations

Our Resident Relations' Department will:

- facilitate programs and activities that empower residents (see below),
- conduct Townhall Meetings to keep residents informed about these activities and encourage their involvement,
- gather residents' input on how the estate and its management can be improved, and
- attend to residents' concerns and problems.

3.9.5 Information Technology

The IT Department will continue to manage the SDPTC's computing and online needs in support of the administration of the estate.⁵

3.10 By the first 100 days of the SDPTC, residents can expect the accomplishment of the following:

- A comprehensive report of the transition and handover processes,
- A fully established TC and integrated management teams,
- A clear budgetary plan,
- The first financial interim report,
- The work-plan for the first 12 months of TC operations,
- A programme of activities aimed at empowering residents,
- Smooth and functional IT systems,
- First evaluations and reviews of existing contracts and contractors, and
- A set of effective maintenance strategies.

3.11 Beyond the 100 days, the SDP pledges to maintain levels it has set for itself. It is not the intent of this paper to spell out all of the council's operational details, but to highlight some of its plans and commitments in the take-over process.

⁵ The TC will acquire accounting software that will meet MND's data requirements.

4. A Successful Town

- 4.1 As stated above the SDP's mission is not only to manage the housing estate well, we also want to cultivate a successful town. But what is a successful town? It is one where the pavements and lift-landings are not only kept clean but also where residents develop a unique sense of belonging. It is a place where members of the community and the town managers put our minds together to make the estate a real home – a home where neighbour greets neighbour, the better off lend a hand to help lift up those in need, and friends look out for one another.
- 4.2 How will the SDP achieve this? A successful town and the happiness of its residents depends on how much residents have a say, and are involved in, the management of their estates. When residents themselves initiate programs and activities, they are more likely to participate in them. By taking ownership of their community, they take pride in their home. To achieve these goals, the SDPTCs will organise:
 - 4.2.1 *Social projects.* The SDPTC will initiate programs and activities at different levels: from individual blocks through to the constituency level. Residents will be encouraged to run these programs. These activities would include, but not limited to:
 - Youth programmes: Science fairs, sports tournaments, drama/art festivals, etc.
 - Reading and book fairs
 - Help-a-neighbor and other charity events
 - Landscaping and other horticultural projects
 - Neighbourhood security watch
 - Tuition centres for students from the low-income families
 - Education and training workshops
 - Barbecues and cook-outs
 - Flea-markets, yard-sales



- 4.2.2 *Townhall Meetings*. Another way that the SDPTC will involve residents is to conduct quarterly Townhall Meetings. This will be open to all residents who will be able to share ideas, discuss issues, and ask questions about the TC.
- 4.2.3 *Election of town councillors*. According to the TCA, MPs may appoint town council board members. However, in accordance with the SDP's platform of democratising governance in Singapore, the SDPTC will reserve a portion of the TC Board for representatives who will be elected through a constituency level elections. The pilot project will be conducted only after the transition period.⁶
- 4.2.4 *Support for needy residents*. After the initial three months, the SDPTC will review the C&SC. Our stated objective is to keep C&SC for residents at a minimal rate. Even then, we anticipate that there will be residents from the lower-income households who will find it difficult to pay the charges. The Residents' Relations Department will work with such households to find a mutually satisfactory arrangement to resolve the problem.
- 4.2.5 *Helping our children to develop*. A major item in the SDPTC's agenda is the establishment of a programme that will foster the holistic development of the community's children and youths. As mentioned above, this will be done through projects such as annual science fairs, reading and book fairs, sports tournaments, arts and drama festivals, etc. Such events will not only bring out the creative talent in children but will also bring families together to create a close-knit community.

⁶ Each town council board may comprise up to 30 members as stipulated under the TCA, [Section 8\(1\)](#). The TC will establish standing orders governing TC meeting proceedings.

4.2.6 *Financial assistance from the SDP.* The SDP's constitution stipulates that its MPs are obligated to contribute up to 50 percent of their allowance to the party, depending on whether they perform their MP duties on a full- or part-time basis. The SDP will allocate a portion of the funds for social assistance and other programmes in the constituency. The party will also continue awarding needy students the Mohd Isa Education Bursary.



5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The SDP will field a slate of candidates who will not only be able to perform their duties as parliamentary representatives but also function as effective administrators of the TC. An equally important role of an SDP MP is to become a friend of the communities we serve.
- 5.2 Our goal is to surpass current levels of performance of PAP-run town councils and set new standards for transparency and accountability in estate governance. We also look forward to pioneering a new model of town council management where residents are involved in the planning and running of their community.
- 5.3 We make our goals and plans clear in this manifesto because we want Singaporeans to track the promises and commitments that we make. It is only through such a process that we can elevate politics and governance in Singapore, and take our nation to a future full of hope and confidence.

CLIMATE CHANGE IN SINGAPORE

TAKING URGENT MEASURES TOWARDS A SMART AND GREEN FUTURE



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the climate change crisis confronting our planet deepens, Singapore will not be spared its consequences. With rising global temperatures, polar ice-caps will melt and sea-levels will rise. This will have a significant impact on our tiny island.

Such a phenomenon will also wreak havoc with the weather in the region such as prolonged dry seasons and excessive rainfall. It will adversely affect agriculture in the region on which much of our food supply depends. This will have a profound effect on food prices in Singapore.

The cause of climate change is driven largely by the release of greenhouse gases and other pollutants into the atmosphere primarily through the burning of fossil fuels to produce power that enables us to go about our daily lives.

The burning of such fuels in Singapore through our oil refineries has made us a major emitter of greenhouse gases. The PAP's lack of decisive and expeditious action to arrest the problem means that Singapore is woefully underperforming when it comes to meeting emissions-cutting targets required to slow down and reverse global warming.

The Climate Action Tracker, a climate-research organisation that monitors the progress that countries make in fighting climate change, ranks Singapore under the "highly insufficient" category.

Clearly, the present arrangement is untenable and something needs to be done and done urgently if we want to leave the planet and our country habitable for future generations. The SDP has drawn up a set of proposals in this policy paper to do exactly that.

Among these are to incentivise and mandate motorists to switch to electric vehicles. To achieve this, the SDP will move to ramp up the installation of chargers needed for such vehicles across the island. The target is to have 25 percent of cars on our roads be electric ones by 2030, 50 percent by 2040 and fully electrified by 2050.

We also need to expand our use of renewable energy, especially solar power. With technology developing rapidly in harnessing clean energy, prices of electricity from such sources have tumbled making them viable alternatives to oil and gas. SDP will

CLIMATE CHANGE IN SINGAPORE

TAKING URGENT MEASURES TOWARDS A SMART AND GREEN FUTURE

accelerate the installation of solar panels in public spaces, significantly increase R&D funding on solar projects, buy renewable energy from other countries, and collaborate with neighbouring countries to develop clean energy.

We will also regulate the escalation of our population size. Our city is already one of the most densely populated spots in the world. With the cramming of more and more people onto an already crowded island through an overly lax immigration policy, forests and nature reserves are being cleared and disturbed to make way for more construction for housing and transportation. The loss of the island's "lungs" as well as our biodiversity is incalculable.

Under the SDP plan, the Transboundary Haze Pollution Act will be firmly enforced by prosecuting business entities operating in Singapore that are linked with companies engaged in forest-burning in Indonesia.

We will also significantly upgrade the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) we signed under the Paris Agreement to lower and eventually remove harmful emissions.

Finally, one of our priorities is to also prohibit corporations through legislation from manufacturing products that depend on single-use packaging as well as to inculcate among our people the desirable lifestyle of recycling.

While the PAP talks a good game about taking action on climate change, evidence points to a lack of political will and commitment on its part to ensure a future for Singapore that is smart, sustainable and green. It continues to treat the fast deteriorating situation with kid gloves by dragging its feet over implementing urgent and meaningful measures to slow down and even reverse climate change.

This alternative policy is but the SDP's contribution in the on-going struggle to cultivate a Singapore that future generations can live in, free of the ravages of a planet destroyed by our greed and thoughtlessness.

The SDP calls on all Singaporeans, regardless of political persuasion and background, to join in the supreme effort of turning around decades of degrading the very place that we depend on for our continued existence and happiness.

CLIMATE CHANGE IN SINGAPORE

TAKING URGENT MEASURES TOWARDS A SMART AND GREEN FUTURE

I. INTRODUCTION

The subject of climate change does not rank highly on the minds of many Singaporeans. Yet, it is one of the most pressing issues that confront our future and, much more significantly, the future of our children and grandchildren.

The melting of our polar caps and the concomitant rising of sea-levels must worry Singaporeans. It is estimated that the flooding of coastal cities from rising sea-levels could affect 600 million people across the globe. NASA estimates that low-lying cities like Singapore will be submerged underwater by the end of the century if current global warming trends continue.¹

In fact, climatologists warn that if drastic measures are not taken soon, we could see global warming becoming an uncontrollable phenomenon as early as the middle of this century. That is, there is a trigger point after which there is little that we can do that will halt the deteriorating process.

A recent study said that 2019 set the highest ocean temperatures ever recorded. The world's oceans, scientists warn, are heating at the same rate as if five atomic bombs – equivalent to the ones dropped on Hiroshima in WWII – were dropped into the water every second.² Rising water temperature does not only threaten marine life, it wreaks havoc on weather patterns across the planet.

The horrendous bushfires that raged through Australia in recent weeks, for example, is thought to be made worse by global warming.³ Extreme heat and dryness brought on by record temperatures – the country experienced its hottest year on record in 2019 – has devastated swathes of flora and fauna with reportedly one billion animals killed.

Global warming is also affecting Singapore in serious ways. According to the Meteorological Service Singapore, this island is heating up twice as fast as the rest of the world. For every passing decade, Singapore is getting hotter by 0.25°C. Compared to the 1950s, temperatures are nearly 1°C higher today.⁴

If carbon emissions continue unabated, Singapore's daily temperature could reach 37°C in a



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few decades. This will have a grave impact on our physical health. With heat and humidity rising, Singaporeans run the risk of suffering from heatstroke.

Heat is not the only problem affecting Singapore. We are also seeing unusually intense rainfall occurring over the island, causing flash floods and damaging businesses.

Climate change is also affecting Singapore in indirect ways. Changes in weather patterns affect food production and farming in our neighbouring countries. When ocean temperatures rise and affect fish supply or if rising temperatures lower crop yields, food supply falls. As a result, prices of basic foodstuff like rice, fish and vegetable will increase.

Singapore imports about 90 percent of its food needs from over 160 countries. Most of our rice comes from Thailand and Vietnam. Vegetables and fish are imported from Malaysia and other ASEAN countries. We are particularly vulnerable if these supply shocks occur as global warming severely impacts on weather patterns across the region. The International Monetary Fund reports that rising sea levels together with prolonged dry spells will ruin the fertile Mekong Delta, long considered Vietnam's "food bowl", and hurt agriculture. Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand are also affected by heavy storms and excessive rain as well as rising temperatures that have a severe impact on agriculture and human health.⁵ In this regard, Singapore is extremely vulnerable to climate change.

There is no doubt that we must act to stop global warming. The question is, are we doing enough?

1. LESS BRAGGADOCIO, MORE (EFFECTIVE) ACTION

In view of such impending disasters, what is the PAP doing? Will its policies alleviate or exacerbate the problem? How will the actions of this government affect the future of our nation?

As he left for Paris to attend the climate change summit in 2015, Foreign Affairs Minister Vivian Balakrishnan said: "What we have in Singapore is a well-designed future-ready city built on sound economic principles. And we can actually show the world how you can save money, make a living and save the world at the same time."⁶

Balakrishnan should refrain from such braggadocio and focus on addressing problematic policies that contribute to global warming and environmental

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degradation like its immigration policy. Singapore's population, unlike others of coastal cities, is especially vulnerable. We have no hinterland to which our citizens can escape and find refuge should our coastline start to recede from rising sea waters.

Yet, the PAP is looking to increase our population size. Has the government examined this problem in its entirety? Judging by the MRT breakdowns, lack of planning of housing for foreign workers, and the housing price bubble that has occurred, Singaporeans have cause to worry. To cater for the added population, we have had to reclaim more land, dig more tunnels and pour more concrete – all of which have altered the terrain of this island and may have worsened the floods that we have witnessed in recent years, not to mention heating up the island even more.

The question is not whether the PAP has taken steps to deal with climate change but whether the measures have been meaningful. Many of the initiatives implemented thus far have, unfortunately, been cosmetic and driven by fads that do little to move the needle in the fight against greenhouse gas emissions.



For example, in May 2019, nine SBS Transit buses were outfitted with plants on their roofs, a project called 'Garden on the Move'.⁷ The idea was that a green roof would lower the temperature in the interior of the buses thus reducing fuel consumption for air-conditioning. The pilot project would be run for three months and its effectiveness monitored.

This idea is neither new nor workable. New York City tried it in 2012. Critics warned that with the added weight of soil and plants on the buses, fuel consumption would grow. The soil would also dry up quickly given the air current generated by the moving bus. The fast evaporation is exacerbated by the thin layer of soil which further retards the healthy growth of the plants. The extra weight on top may also affect the bus' stability or heavy rains may cause mud to overflow. Emergency-access hatches on the roof would also be covered by the soil and plants.⁸ The idea never really took off.

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In Singapore, after the initial excitement, there has been little news about the ‘Garden on the Move’ project.

Another example is the government’s requirement to have all new HDB developments meet a minimum green-plot ratio of 4:5.⁹ The canopy size of plants, the density of trees, plant-covering on the sides of HDB blocks, etc would be measured.

Cultivating plants on and among HDB blocks may sound like a good idea, but the roots of the plants can penetrate the concrete and cause leaks and structural damage. Watering the plants and maintaining them would also be an issue.

The bigger issue is that green-plot ratios do not address the problem of deforestation in Singapore. For instance, the Tengah forest – the size of Bishan – was cleared to make way for a new HDB estate.¹⁰ What little bits of green put on the roofs of HDB blocks would not replace a lush forest and its ecosystem.

Environmentalists pointed out that Tengah forest was one of the last few habitats for globally endangered species such as the straw-headed bulbul and long-tailed parakeets. Other endangered wildlife spotted in the forest were the critically-endangered Sunda pangolins and the hawk-eagle.¹¹ No amount of roof gardens would bring back this biodiversity.

HDB said that it would conduct a study to assess the impact of the development. It published a report titled Tengah Environmental Baseline Study where it claimed that the vegetation there were mostly of “low conservation significance”. Nature experts, however, questioned its findings and called on HDB to make public the full report on Tengah.¹²

Another controversial development involved the construction of the Cross Island MRT Line which would tunnel under the Central Catchment Nature Reserve. The government announced that the project will proceed despite protests from environmental groups and experts who say the construction would adversely affect the area’s wildlife and nature.¹³ Forests and reserves are the “lungs” of the country and the continued destruction of these areas will harm the island and its inhabitants.

With the magnitude of the problem confronting our country, the PAP’s measures to combat climate change are minuscule and often gimmicky. This observation is borne out by analyses of international organisations which show that Singapore lags behind in its effectiveness in reaching targets set out in the Paris climate accord. This matter is discussed in greater detail below.

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2. DEPENDENCE ON BIG OIL

Another fast-evolving situation which requires our urgent attention is our position as an oil-refining and petrochemical production centre. While it may have been hugely beneficial for us to build our country into the oil hub that we are today – the industry is responsible for one-third of our manufacturing output and 5 percent of GDP – we must also be aware that the burning of fossil fuels is the number one contributor of greenhouse gases.

According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Singapore has the largest carbon footprint per head in the Asia-Pacific. WWF President Yolanda Kakabadse said: “Singapore...is a society that maybe is one of the best examples of what we should not do.”¹⁴

Given the circumstance, should we start thinking of alternative modes of deriving our national income? The reality is that we may not have a choice. Already, industries involved in the production of renewable energy such as Solar City in the US and Goldwind in China are making significant technological strides so much so that the price of electricity derived from wind and solar power is now competitive with, if not cheaper than, that produced by coal and gas. In fact, wind-power technology has allowed countries like Denmark to produce enough electricity to meet its domestic demand. “It shows that a world powered 100 per cent by renewable energy is no fantasy,” said Oliver Joy, of the European Wind Energy Association.¹⁵ The pace of technological development of more efficient and cheaper production of renewable energy will only quicken from here on out.

When the demand for oil is eventually overtaken by the desire for renewables, what do we do? Are we looking at alternatives or are we burying our heads in the sand and simply increasing our capacity to refine and store more oil? Where is Singapore headed in a post-oil future? Our oil exports as a percentage of GDP have been expanding over the decades – its projected percentage-point increase from 1993 to 2018 was 16.5; only Libya is higher. To further boost our status as an oil hub, we dug the Jurong Rock Caverns in 2007 to store and process oil. The caverns are as tall as a nine-storey building and have a capacity of 580 Olympic-sized pools.¹⁶

The case for Singapore to divest itself from an oil-centric economy is persuasive and valid. Unfortunately, with ministerial pronouncements like we are a “future-ready city” despite our dependence on the oil industry, one wonders if the PAP government even sees the problem.

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3. A HAZY FUTURE

Another source of pollution is the haze emanating from the burning of forests in Indonesia and, to a lesser degree, Malaysia. Many of these forest fires are started by companies owned by tycoons involved in the palm-oil industry. Enormous tracts of rainforest in Sumatra are burnt to clear land for the cultivation of the crop. The deforestation kills endangered species and produces the pollution which contributes significantly to the greenhouse effect. Many corporations operating in Singapore have been found to be linked to companies responsible for the burning.



More importantly, the haze envelops Singapore and endangers the health of our people. It is important that individuals and corporations responsible for the fires as well as those conducting business with them are taken to task to ensure that Singapore is not unwittingly aiding and abetting the haze problem.

4. THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Climate change and conservation is not a big issue among Singaporeans but it should be. We must take climate change more seriously and look into introducing legislation that will require the country to adopt best environmental practices including reducing pollution and carbon emissions.

Singaporeans should be more effectively informed on the very real threat of climate change on our lives. The environment our children live in will depend on the action that we take to protect it today. Only then can we protect our future and the survival of our nation.

It is appropriate and necessary to underline the relationship between climate change and how we run our economy. There is a growing realisation that capitalist society, one that emphasises GDP growth at all cost, including the cost of environmental degradation, is a threat to the well-being and the future of the people. Unbridled capitalism, where the means of production and the profits

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they generate are concentrated more and more in the hands of a few, is gaining more scrutiny. Where conglomerates take from Earth and return to it waste to create wealth that they horde, leaving the deleterious effects of climate change to be borne by the masses, has become an urgent issue. It is no wonder that in a global survey, a majority of people around the world believe that “capitalism as it exists today does more harm than good in the world”.¹⁷ More than 34,000 respondents in 28 countries were surveyed and found that 56 percent indicated that they believed capitalism brought more harmful effects than benefits; in Singapore, the number was 54 percent.

To this end, political parties play a crucial role. Not only can parties help to publicise the dire consequences of the rapid warming of the planet, we can and must provide alternative policies that will steer Singapore towards an eco-friendlier environment and provide that added voice in the international arena in the fight against global warming.

To be sure, the SDP has been paying close attention to the issue of climate change. Our members, in particular, the Young Democrats, have attended regional conferences and workshops through the years to learn more about the subject and develop plans to combat the problem (see here¹⁸, here¹⁹, here²⁰ and here²¹).

More broadly, the SDP presents an alternative model of governance wherein freedom of speech, transparency and free media are the central tenets of our political system. We also advocate an economic paradigm less steeped in neoliberalism and more inclined towards a fairer distribution of wealth. Such an approach, as mentioned, is crucial in the guarding of our environment against the onslaught of unthinking capitalism.

We present our party's proposals in the next section.

II. THE ALTERNATIVE

To deal decisively and meaningfully with the growing crisis of climate change, the SDP proposes the following set of measures:

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1. USE ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Singapore must fully embrace vehicles powered by electricity rather than petrol. This is because electric vehicles (EVs) are already proving to be cleaner than vehicles running on petrol. Aside from greenhouse gas emissions, EVs also produce less emissions of pollutants, heat and noise.

Burning 1 litre of petrol produces approximately 2.3 kg of carbon dioxide (CO₂). An average vehicle, which consumes about 2,000 litres of petrol a year, emits about 4,600 kg of CO₂ into the atmosphere.²²

There is, of course, no CO₂ emissions when you drive an EV. CO₂ emissions from electricity produced to power EVs must, however, be taken into consideration. This is why the production of electricity from renewable sources such as solar and wind energy is crucial in the equation (see the section below).

Discussions of EVs in Singapore cannot escape mentioning Tesla, the leading producer of such vehicles. In 2016, a Singaporean complained that he was slapped with a carbon surcharge of \$15,000 when he imported a Tesla sedan. This prompted Tesla CEO Elon Musk to write to PM Lee Hsien Loong to ask why the carbon surcharge was imposed to which Lee replied that he would look into the matter.²³ It turned out that the authorities had factored in CO₂ emissions produced from generating electricity to power the car and that the surcharge was levied after tests on the emissions and fuel efficiency of the car were done.²⁴

The incident led to Musk accusing Singapore of being "unwelcome" to the company and the government was "not supportive" of EVs.²⁵ The government responded that it has prioritised greater use of its trains and buses. "What Elon Musk wants to produce is a lifestyle. We are not interested in a lifestyle. We are interested in proper solutions that will address climate problems," Minister for Environment and Water Resources Masagos Zulkifli said.²⁶

Masagos' response ignores the fact that even with enhanced public transportation, there will always be people who want to own and drive their own cars. Upgrading our system to one which phases out petrol-driven cars to EVs would be desirable given the urgent problems that confront the country.

As Associate Professor Zafar Momin of the Nanyang Business School said:



Given Singapore's land size, great infrastructure and commitment to sustainability, we would not only have been the perfect test bed for

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electric vehicles (EVs) but also an ideal market for their wider application and usage. While we have initiatives and incentives for EVs, we may already have missed the big opportunity to be a leader in EVs as a nation. The Tesla importation case is perhaps indicative of why we may have missed the opportunity.²⁷

With Singapore's drive to be a Smart Nation (see discussion below), there will be a shift towards self-driving cars. Such vehicles can be more easily, cheaply and safely re-charged than re-fueled.

But even as the PAP signals its intention to steer Singapore towards public transportation, it continues its relentless drive to increase the country's population to 6.9 million by 2030. It has even raised the idea of a 10-million population. This, of course, will put even more strain on the bus and MRT system which is already under pressure from heavy use, creating an even greater incentive for people to want to own and drive cars.²⁸

Cities around the world continue to develop EV policies to reduce emissions. greenhouse gases. Amsterdam, for example, announced a zero-emissions transport system by 2025 and Oslo aims to reach zero-emissions by 2030.²⁹ Britain will ban sales of new cars using fossil fuels from 2035 including hybrid vehicles.³⁰ Los Angeles announced a target of 25 percent EVs by 2035 and New York City wants to see a 20 percent EV sales share by 2025. Major cities in the world including Beijing have announced their ambitions to become EV capitals or leaders. In comparison, as of later 2019, there are 1,036 electric cars or just 0.16 percent of the more than 600,000 cars on the road in Singapore.³¹

There is no reason why the switch to EVs in Singapore cannot be accelerated. To push Singapore to adopt the wider use of EVs, the SDP advocates the following measures:

- A. As a start, taxi and bus companies should be the first in line to switch totally to EVs. This is because these vehicles run the most mileage per vehicle and emit the highest amounts of carbon pollution per vehicle. The “critical gap” that prevents vehicle owners, including taxi companies, from converting to EVs is the relative paucity of charging points.³² To overcome this problem, the SDP will move to ramp up the installation of chargers across the island (see next section). Schedules for charging taxis and buses could be drawn up to minimise waiting times for the drivers. This would also help to keep the number of charging stations to a minimum.
- B. Private car owners would also be incentivised to drive EVs by significantly reducing the road tax for such vehicles. The current road tax ranges from

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\$400-\$3,000 per annum depending on the capacity of the car. The tax could be effectively halved for the bigger sized EVs to a 75 percent reduction for smaller ones. This will be a strong incentive for motorists to make the switch. Under the SDP's policy, Singapore will target a 25 percent electric system by the year 2030, 50 percent by 2040 and fully electrified by 2050. This can be achieved by the installation of EV charging points at all HDB and public carparks. A single charging post can be used to charge several cars at any one period. As pointed out above, it is the lack of an adequate charging infrastructure that is the main deterrent for drivers converting to EVs.

- C. Instead of spending money on the new on-board units (OBU) tracked by satellite-based ERP system for vehicles (the installation of the new system will cost more than \$500 million), the government could put the money to better use to build more charging posts for EVs at car parks. With technology improving and the development of new, super-fast chargers, charging times for EVs would be reduced and, in time to come, approach the time it takes to re-fuelling cars at gas stations. Also, with the rapid development of technology in the area of self-driving vehicles, the business of shared EVs on demand will increase quickly. The public can be incentivised to use this system rather than own their own cars. With fewer cars on the road, the employment of an expensive satellite-based OBU system can be delayed or done away altogether.



2. SWITCH TO RENEWABLE ENERGY

Singapore is dubbed "the undisputed oil hub in Asia." We refine 1.5 million barrels of oil per day in 2014, making the country one of the top 10 exporters of refined oil products in Asia.³³ In June 2019, American oil and gas giant ExxonMobil announced the completion of its expanded refinery in Jurong,³⁴ making it a multi-billion-dollar manufacturing and marketing presence on the island with

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more than 4,000 employees.³⁵ At the same time, Royal Dutch Shell announced that it was increasing its storage capacity at its Pulau Bukom refinery by nearly 1.3 million barrels enabling the site to process up to 500,000 barrels per day of oil.³⁶ In 1999, Chevron moved its operating headquarters from the United States to Singapore. Since then, Caltex in Singapore, Chevron's petroleum brand name, became the regional hub to develop marketing strategies for Asia. The company has been given awards by government bodies such as the People's Association and the Economic Development Board.³⁷

The heavy presence of the oil and gas industry in Singapore may be one reason why the PAP is reluctant to move faster to adopt the use of EVs. As noted in the preceding section, analysts cite the fact that the CO₂ emissions from conventional methods of producing electricity may be counterproductive to the widespread adoption of EVs.

Singapore is also home to many data centres. A data centre is a location that houses large computing and networking equipment. Such concentrations of servers and other IT equipment are needed for collecting, storing, processing, or distributing large amounts of data. These locations generate an enormous amount of heat and need cooling down. Cooling systems require much electricity. In 2014, data centres in Singapore already made up seven percent of Singapore's electricity consumption. With the growth of modern, super-data centres, this percentage would certainly be higher now.³⁸

The heavy demand for electricity to power EVs and the increasing presence of data centres is added reason why Singapore should move quickly to renewables.

Solar energy. Because of space constraints or lack of natural resources, the employment of wind turbines, hydroelectric power generators, or geothermal energy sources may not be feasible.

Given the sunny climes in Singapore, however, solar power seems to be a natural and rational choice when it comes to renewable energy. But land scarcity in Singapore constrains our ability to produce effective quantities of solar energy.

The government seems reluctant to switch to a wider use of renewables. A team of researchers noted that "Singapore intends to install solar PV, but has so far been reluctant to install higher shares."³⁹ CEO of Sunseap, a solar energy retail company, Frank Phuan said that the government has indicated that it will

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not subsidise renewable energy, and the price of electricity will have to be market-driven.⁴⁰

Singapore has plenty of roof space to accommodate PV panels. With the recently built 200km of sheltered walkways,⁴¹ we missed the opportunity to install such panels on the roofs of these structures. Although solar panels have been installed on some of the roofs of HDB blocks,⁴² the exercise needs to be quickened and extended to all buildings where feasible.

The excuse often given is that it is not cost-effective to install these panels as the technology is not matured yet. But the cost of PV panels has gone down since the mid-2000s and their efficiency has increased significantly.⁴³ In fact, renewable energy prices in the United States continued to decrease fast (see Figure 1). Research showed prices of “renewables beating fossil fuels by ever-larger margins – even without subsidies – with that trend forecast to continue for decades to come.”⁴⁴ Over the last decade, energy from PVs has fallen 89 percent on average.

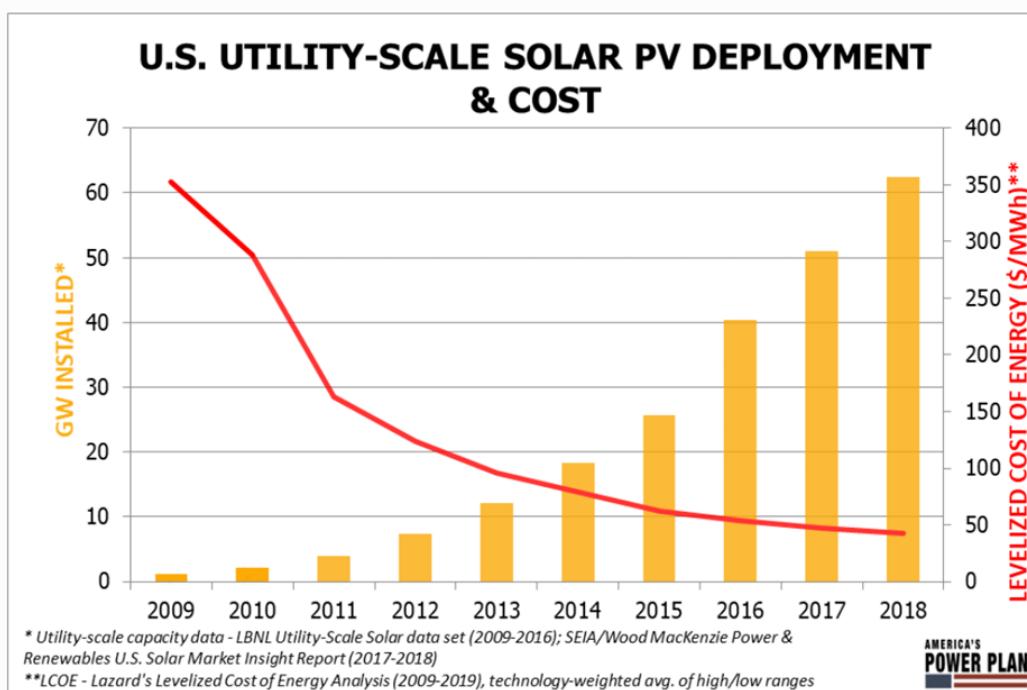


Figure 1: US solar cost decline and capacity additions 2010-2017

Footpaths and bicycle paths can also be constructed with material that absorbs solar energy and emits light at night, removing, or at least minimising, the need for streetlights. Poland, for example, has successfully installed solar-powered bicycle tracks in the town of Lidzbark Warmiński where phosphor-based nuggets absorb light energy and provide luminescence at night.⁴⁵ The technology is able to provide sufficient light for more than 10 hours. Such paths are also available in

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the Netherlands. If these countries can adopt such technology, there is little excuse for Singapore, a much sunnier place, not to.

Also, the PAP government imposed a carbon tax in 2019 as part of its commitment to the Paris agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.⁴⁶ The revenue from the tax should be used to install PV panels.

Singapore should also explore buying electricity generated by renewable sources from other countries to supplement any

shortfall in our production of solar-powered electricity. As it is, we purchase liquefied natural gas (LNG) from other countries. We rely on LNG for 95 percent of our electricity needs.⁴⁷ Traditionally, Malaysia and Indonesia were the two countries from which we imported natural gas. But in 2013, we completed the construction of an LNG terminal that allowed us not only to import gas from countries like Australia and the United States but also become the product's Asian trading centre. "Its LNG ambitions are massive involving markets further afield," a report said. "Singapore's strategic location and reputation as a global trading hub for other commodities place it at the forefront of becoming Asia's LNG trading hub."⁴⁸



Although cleaner than oil, LNG also pollutes the environment. It emits methane – a greenhouse gas that is, according to experts, about 30 times more harmful than CO₂ emissions. Ted Nace, founder and director of the Global Energy Monitor, warned that "LNG is not a good answer climate-wise." He added that it might be "pretty foolish financially" to invest in LNG given the rapidly advancing technology and the concomitant of plunging in prices of renewable energy.⁴⁹

It seems clear, both financially and from the standpoint of reducing global warming, for Singapore to switch sources from which we buy and produce our electricity. Instead of purchasing natural gas, we should buy our power from renewable sources.

Singapore should aggressively invest in industries, even subsidise start-ups, to produce and distribute renewable energy. Funding R&D projects involved in improving the performance of solar PV systems should occur in a major way with the goal of developing Singapore into a leader in the industry just like Japan

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leads in the field of AI and robotics, Germany in-car technology, or Scandinavia in wind power.

Given the dire consequences of climate change that the world faces, such an approach may not be a strategy of choice but rather of necessity.

Wind energy. Conventional wisdom tells us that because of our lack of space and natural resources, energy from wind is not commercially viable. Such thinking precludes us from exploring options of leasing space from our neighbouring countries to develop and operate wind turbines. We can even sell the energy back to the host country at agreed discounts when the generators become viable. This is not a far-fetched idea as we already have a similar arrangement with Malaysia over our water supply. We also lease space from other countries to train our National Service troops. It is eminently doable to lease land and water space in foreign territory to develop our wind energy needs. We even buy enormous amounts of sand from our neighbours. If we can pull this off, leasing space seems very possible.

Hydroelectric energy. The same can be said for the harnessing of hydroelectric power. While Singapore's narrow tidal range and calm seas, as well as the lack of fast-flowing rivers, place limits on generating hydropower, there is nothing to stop us from negotiating with our neighbours the leasing of sea space. As with wind turbines, we should work out a plan with foreign governments to develop such technology that would ultimately benefit not just Singapore but the host countries. Such a form of hydropower may not be widely used yet, but it has tremendous potential for future electricity generation because tides are more predictable than the wind and the sun. We are well-placed to develop research in the area and play a leading role in the foreseeable future.

Political and corporate interests aligned against renewables will argue that jobs will be lost if Singapore turns its back on fossil fuels like oil and LNG. However, the jobs made redundant from such sunset industries will be more than compensated for by new jobs created in the renewables sector. Forbes magazine, for example, reported that "Renewable energy jobs are booming across America, creating stable and high-wage employment for blue-collar workers in some of the country's most fossil fuel-heavy states, just as the coal industry is poised for another downturn."⁵⁰ The Union of Concerned Scientists, a group founded by scientists and students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, reported that "more jobs are created for each unit of electricity generated from renewable sources than from fossil fuels."⁵¹

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In sum, SDP will accelerate the installation of solar panels in public spaces, increase R&D funding on solar projects, seek sources to buy renewable energy, and collaborate with neighbouring countries to develop clean energy.

3. CURB POPULATION ESCALATION

The PAP is bent on bringing in ever-increasing numbers of foreigners. In the government's White Paper on Population published in 2013, the stated target was to expand our population to 6.9 million by 2030. There is even talk of 10 million.

To accommodate such a large number of inhabitants on the island, we have had to reclaim land at an alarming rate. The total land area in Singapore has grown more than 25 percent from 578 km² in 1819 to 719 km² today.⁵²

To provide the substrate for the reclamation, we import sand from neighbouring countries like Malaysia, Indonesia and Cambodia. The mining of sand in these countries has caused major conservation issues for the region and destroyed local ecosystems. As a result, some of these countries have banned the mining and selling of sand.

The problem with such a plan is that more concrete will have to be poured onto the island. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, when combined with the heat released by vehicle engines, paved areas can increase the temperature in cities by as much as 22°F.⁵³

In their paper titled Urban Heat Island in Singapore, researchers Wong Nyuk Hien and Marcel Ignatius wrote: "UHI (Urban Heat Island) is the condition where an increase in building density results in cities recording higher temperatures in comparison to their non-urbanized surroundings." They found that factors such as diminishing of green areas, low wind velocity due to high building density and changes in street surfaces due to coating materials all contribute to UHI. The problem is exacerbated by absorption of solar radiation on dark surfaces and buildings which causes increased use of air conditioning which leads to further heating and CO₂ release.⁵⁴

As mentioned, Singapore is already heating up twice as fast as the rest of the world. More built-up areas mean more heat generated which would put this island under greater environmental pressure.

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Under the SDP plan, forests in Singapore would be left undisturbed and HDB estates would, instead, replace existing golf courses. Given the scarcity of land in Singapore, golf courses reserved for the recreation of the wealthy few make little sense.

Instead of inflating our population numbers by bringing in more and more foreigners, we should turn our attention to ensuring sustainable population growth and cultivating a genuine “smart” city with a people who are creative and innovative, one that competes in the world on ideas rather than sweat. The SDP welcomes foreign workers into our economy. We must ensure that Singaporeans do not embrace ugly nationalism and xenophobia. However, we must also enact an immigration and population policy that complements, not displaces, the Singaporean workforce. Importing foreign labour in a reckless and unsustainable manner in the present manner benefits neither foreigners nor locals, but only businesses who stand to exploit low wage levels.

A smart city, one inhabited by a small but intelligent population free to question and innovate, can drive a productive economy. This includes finding ways to develop a greener economy, one that is in sync with efforts to slow down and reverse global warming.

A big and overcrowded city piles on stress on a people which affects productivity. Coupled with an authoritarian government that quashes dissent – a quality that fuels independent and innovative thinking – Singapore’s future will continue to depend on bringing in large numbers of immigrants instead of relying on the brains of our people. The emphasis should be on quality, not quantity. Political freedom, transparency and democracy are the key to creativity and innovation.

Examples of small nations which are innovative and productive abound. Ireland, with a population of 5 million, produced 7 Nobel laureates; Norway with 5.5 million people has 13 Nobel prize winners; Denmark 5.8 million 14 Nobel winners and Austria 8.7 million people with 21 laureates. Even Luxembourg, with a population size one-tenth that of Singapore’s, boasts two Nobel prize winners.

These countries are also very innovative, producing world-beaters in the commercial sector. Lego, Pandora jewellery, Carlsberg are from Denmark. Sweden, which has a population not much bigger than ours produces companies like Ikea, Volvo, Spotify, H&M, Electrolux and so on. None of these countries depends on foreigners. Their own peoples drive their own economies, not foreigners.

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PAP's notion of a smart city is very different. It recently announced plans to build Singapore into a Smart Nation. The stated objective of the project is "laying the infrastructure and driving pervasive adoption of technology in the economy and society here."⁵⁵ But a smart city is one that is founded upon a smart citizenry and active civic engagement – not just one with the latest gadgets.

Initiatives for a sustainable population growth driven by Singaporean reproduction rather than the influx of foreigners is enumerated in our policy, *Building A People: Sound Policies For A Secure Future*.

4. TAKE STRONG MEASURES AGAINST FOREST-FIRES

Thick clouds of smoke particles envelop Singapore and the surrounding region frequently. The haze is caused by forest fires caused by illegal slash-and-burn practices by farmers and corporations, primarily taking place in Sumatra and Kalimantan. The burning clears their land of vegetation and peat for development. Peat is a highly combustible mixture of dead vegetation and other organic matter. It contains high carbon content which when burned produces heavy carbon emissions. This adds to global warming and is a health hazard for the populations affected.

While steps have been taken by the region's governments to address the problem, such as the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution signed in 2002, the burning of the forests and the attendant haze persist. This is because, as observers point out, of the "limited effectiveness of the agreement".⁵⁶ They add that as long as ASEAN governments fail to tackle issues such as corruption and conflicts of interest, the haze problem will not go away. Despite the occasional protestation from the PAP government over the continuing problem,⁵⁷ little has been achieved.



But while our ability to affect policies in a foreign country is limited, there are concrete measures we can take to minimise the problem.

First, Singapore should directly target the commercial entities responsible for the fires. Banks and financial institutions owned by, or operating in, Singapore should

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be banned from investing in or financing corporations that have been found to be involved, directly or otherwise, in the burning of forests in Indonesia and Malaysia.

One thing that many of these conglomerates have in common is palm oil. Palm oil is widely used in anything from foods to cosmetic products. The problem is that the cultivation of the crop is the largest driver of deforestation through forest fires in Indonesia. In addition, the waste at palm oil refineries releases large amounts of methane. As can be seen in Figure 2 below, businesses in and from Singapore are invested in palm oil in a major way.⁵⁸

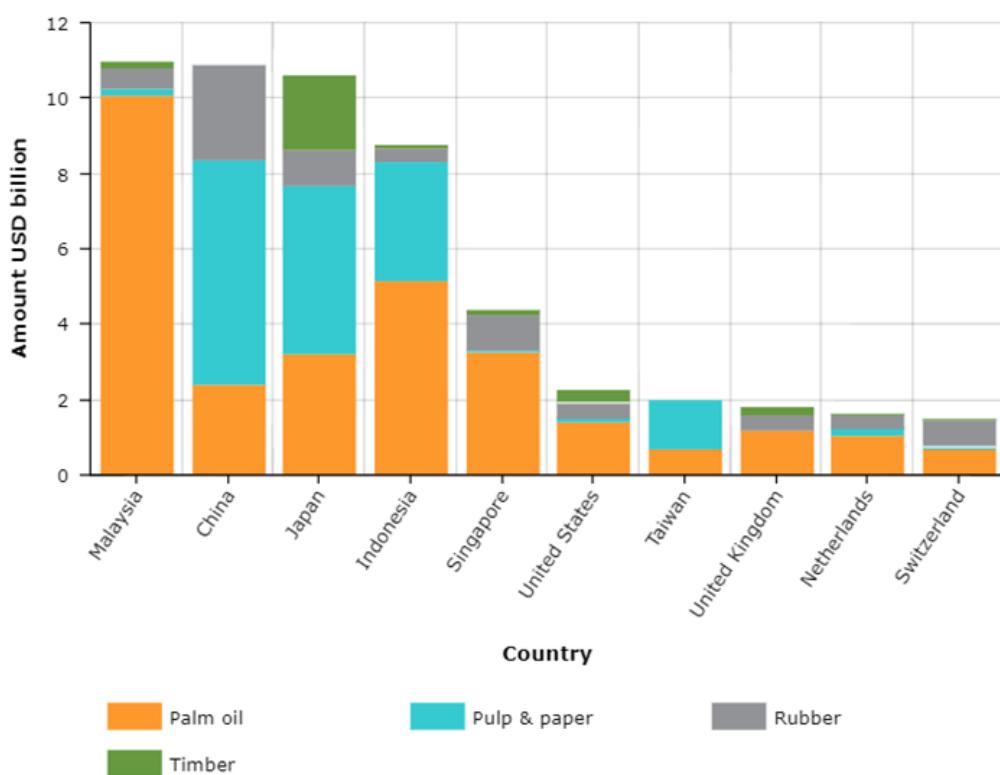


Figure 2: Loans and underwriting by country of origin 2014-2019 August

Banks from China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, Japan, the United States, European Union and, of course, Singapore finance companies that are linked to the fires in the tens of billions of dollars. Singapore itself is responsible for nearly \$2 billion.⁵⁹

If Singapore is serious on tackling the haze issue, the government needs to put teeth into dealing with corporations involved with industries that cause the forest fires, starting with the banks.

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In 2015, the Association of Banks in Singapore released a set of industry guidelines to “enhance the implementation of responsible financing as part of the Singapore banking sector’s strategic priorities to support sustainable development.”⁶⁰ It adopted the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) criteria where banks’ lending and involvement in businesses are based on three guidelines: One, disclosure of senior management’s commitment to responsible financing; two, governance on responsible financing; and, three, capacity building on responsible financing. This initiative is problematic because the guidelines are just that – guidelines; they do not carry penalties if they are not adhered to.

We must also hold companies which are linked to the forest fires to greater accountability. Despite the enactment of the Transboundary Haze Pollution Act (THPA) in 2014 which criminalizes conduct that causes or contributes to haze pollution in Singapore, questions have been raised about the government’s willingness to prosecute companies that flout the law.⁶¹ In September 2019, it was reported that three Indonesian firms with offices in Singapore have been linked to forest fires responsible for the haze. The report also said that no fines had been meted out since the law was passed in 2014.⁶² Environment Minister Masagos told Parliament in October 2019 that six companies were issued legal notices under the THPA in 2015 to take steps to halt the fires that caused haze. Two of the companies said that they were no longer associated with the affected lands. As for the other four companies, their cases are on-going. None of the companies has been prosecuted.⁶³

On this score, the SDP will aggressively enforce the THPA and to bring business entities that are involved with forest-burning companies to heel.

Third, many of the companies like Sinar Mas, Salim, Royal Golden Eagle, Sampoerna and Genting which are implicated in the haze-fires are listed on the Singapore Stock Exchange (SGX).⁶⁴ These companies, owned by tycoon families with “enormous assets” in Singapore,⁶⁵ raise equity or debt from the Singapore market.

SGX can and must be more pro-active and stringent in dealing with these companies. For instance, the Exchange introduced the Sustainability Reporting in 2016 to require companies listed to report on ESG factors.⁶⁶ In a 2018 review of the 495 listed companies which submitted their sustainability reports, only 6.5%, or 32 companies, acknowledged climate change as a material factor.⁶⁷

Singapore cannot afford to pussyfoot around the commitment to climate sustainability, especially with our island-city so vulnerable to climate change. It is

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time to take a strong stance by imposing strict directives that carry severe penalties on corporations operating in Singapore if they continue to finance climate harmful activities. While the profits from the production of cash crops go to private hands, the public suffers from the hazardous effects of their production. This must change.

Fourth, GIC and Temasek Holdings are major investors in companies owned by foreign businesses. They are, however, funded by Singaporean taxpayers and as such they must be transparent and accountable to the public.

A good model for such a practice is Norway's Government Pension Fund Global (GPFG). The Norwegian wealth fund was established to manage the country's petroleum dollars after oil was discovered off its coast in 1969. It handles a total of US\$570 billion, which makes it the biggest sovereign wealth fund in the world. It is described universally as the model wealth fund in terms of the transparent and efficient manner of its operation, posting solid gains in its investments over the years with a 26 percent surge in returns in 2009 and another 10 percent in 2010.⁶⁸

Not only is the GPFG transparent in its operations, it also invests in ethically acceptable businesses. The rules forbid it to invest in "tobacco producers, companies involved in human rights abuses, environmental damage or production of weapons that through their 85 normal use may violate fundamental humanitarian principles (nuclear arms, cluster munitions, land mines etc.)."⁶⁹

The Norwegians elect a government in freely and fairly held elections where ministers are held accountable for all that they do. The Norwegian government then appoints managers who run the GPFG in a manner that is transparent and in the people's interest. And unlike its Singaporean counterpart, the GPFG keeps to strict reporting guidelines stipulated by Norway's finance ministry.

Under the SDP's climate change proposal, the GIC will be directed to adopt good corporate governance and maximum transparency and accountability by adhering to the following:

- A. The GIC shall publish annual reports on the management of the funds and these reports shall be submitted to Parliament for scrutiny.
- B. The annual reports shall consist of all investment activity as well as extracts of the GIC's financial accounts

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- C. The management team of the GIC shall give an account of the Corporation's funds, management costs, investment strategies, a projection of value creation and risk management of the strategies.
- D. The annual report shall also state the GIC's work in relation to good corporate governance and environmental and social issues.
- E. The management team of the GIC shall be appointed by the President subject to a confirmation process of Parliament.

Such management and operating principles will ensure that Singapore's investments under the government adhere to efforts to work towards fighting climate change.

5. TAKE INTERNATIONAL LEAD

The struggle against global warming cannot be confined to Singapore. The international community recognises this problem. Unfortunately, the political will to take urgent action to reverse the fast-deteriorating effects of climate change is not strong. According to the 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, the world can only release another 420 gigatons of CO₂ in order to have a fighting chance to keep the rise in global temperatures to below 1.5°C. At the current pace, that amount will be emitted within roughly eight and a half years.⁷⁰ If the targets are not met, the effects will be catastrophic including decimating the planet's coral reefs, creating more droughts and extreme heat days and exposing humanity to climate-related risks.⁷¹

As a small nation greatly affected by the major polluters, Singapore must take a more active role globally. We must be the leading voice to urge the international political and business communities to take urgent steps to ensure that CO₂ emission targets are met. We may be a small country but we can be a big voice on the global stage in calling for bigger economies to take more stringent setups to curb pollution. The Singapore government has a duty to its people to make this effort the central plank of our foreign policy.

But not only is Singapore not taking the lead in pushing for action on climate change, the PAP government is slacking in its commitment to the Paris climate agreement. According to the Climate Action Tracker, a project run by climate-research organisations monitoring the progress of 32 countries which signed the

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Paris accord, Singapore is listed under the category of countries ¹whose actions are “highly insufficient”⁷² (see Figure 3). These 32 countries account for 80 percent of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions.



Figure 3: Efforts of the world's larger greenhouse gas producers to reduce emissions in accord with the Paris climate agreement. (Climate Action Tracker)

The Climate Action Tracker website writes that

“Despite its high economic capacity, Singapore has a very weak climate target, which we rate as “Highly insufficient”, and is likely to over-achieve it without implementing any additional policies. Singapore needs to substantially strengthen its target.

While renewable energy capacity has expanded, gas remains the dominant energy source in the power sector with about 96% of generation and no clear policy signal to avoid locking in this carbon-intensive form of energy...

In April 2019, the government-controlled Development Bank of Singapore (DBS) announced it would stop funding new coal-fired power stations globally, yet it continues to be involved in several proposed coal power plants in Southeast Asia (Market Forces, 2019).⁷³

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Through the measures enumerated in this policy paper, the SDP will significantly upgrade the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) we signed under the Paris Agreement. See Singapore's NDC here.⁷⁴

Instead of getting caught in the middle of the tug-of-war between the superpowers, Singapore's foreign policy should focus on the immediate and pressing need of the international community to meet the goals set out in the Paris Agreement. To do this, we must be a role model to ensure that we set the pace to combat this existential threat.

6. BUILD SMART, COOL BUILDINGS

One of the biggest non-industrial uses of power is air-conditioning. This includes our homes. Not only does it account for a significant portion of a building's energy consumption, it also generates a tremendous amount of heat and greenhouse gases. According to Prof Lee Poh Seng of NUS, the outside air in Singapore's built-up areas can be up to 7°C hotter than in areas with more greenery.⁷⁵

Singapore already has the highest number of air-conditioning units per capita in Southeast Asia. Prof Lee forecasts that the amount of energy used to cool Singapore will grow 73 percent between 2010 and 2030 as the country increases its built-up environment to accommodate a population projected to grow from 5 million to about 7 million.⁷⁶

One way to lower our dependence on air-conditioning is to encourage the development of smart systems as well as more efficient air-cooling technologies. Employing better and more efficient cooling systems could cut energy consumption in Singapore by as much as 30 percent.

Educational programmes should also be conducted to encourage raising the indoor air-conditioning temperatures. Increasing the temperature by 1°C would save up to 4 percent of air-conditioning energy.⁷⁷ We can start the effort by mandating the reduction of air-conditioning in government buildings and offices and increasing their internal temperatures. This should be carried out under the Public Sector Taking the Lead on Environmental Sustainability programme. It is not uncommon to see our civil servants and government officials clad in warm suits and jackets, sitting in overly cold air-conditioned temperatures.

Buildings should be designed with the natural tropical climate in mind. They can be constructed in such a manner that not too much artificial cooling is needed.

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Michael Leong of SAA Group Architects said, "We can design building and structures to be naturally well-ventilated, without requiring extra machines like air-conditioners or ceiling fans to cool down indoor areas."⁷⁸ With cross-ventilation and high ceilings, the interior of buildings can be 2°C cooler than the temperature outside. Other techniques such as the orienting of buildings with respect to sunlight, adjusting the proximity of buildings to each other, designing interiors using verandas and eaves to encourage air flows, using materials and cladding appropriate for a sunny tropical urban city, and so on should be considered. Skyscrapers encased in glass and metal (which absorb and retain heat) used in less warm countries are not the most appropriate for Singapore.

Building scientists Wong and Ignatius, whose work we cited above, noted that the "usage of materials with lower reflectivity (or albedo) and impermeable surfaces result in more heat being absorbed from the sun's radiation, consequently raising the temperature in urban areas and exaggerating the UHI problem."

Clearly, the way buildings are constructed and the materials used to construct them affect the warming of our island. Such being the case,⁷⁹ the SDP will adopt criteria to assess future development projects under the Green Concept Building Plan.⁸⁰ These will include:

- Minimal disturbance to landscapes and site condition
- Use of non-toxic and recycled/recyclable material
- Efficient use of water and water recycling
- Use of energy-efficient and eco-friendly types of equipment
- Use of renewable energy
- Quality of indoor air quality for human safety and comfort
- Effective controls and building management systems

7. REDUCE WASTE

Additionally, there needs to be a greater push to increase individual and public action towards adopting more sustainable lifestyles. An important aspect of the fight against climate change is to create initiatives which encourage sustainable living among the general public. Reducing waste and recycling help to

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decrease the generation of greenhouse gases by helping to save energy in the processing and manufacturing of materials for industrial and consumer use.

For example, Rome's "Ricicli +Viaggi" (Recycle + Travel) scheme, allows people to recycle plastic bottles in exchange for credit that can be used to purchase train tickets. The initiative, which was launched in July 2019 saw some 350,000 bottles recycled in six weeks.⁸¹

In Taiwan, recycling has been a huge success, thanks to a ground-up effort by the Taiwanese people. The collection process of household garbage is a community affair. Music played from trucks come round to residences and alert residents that it's time to pick up their trash bags. One truck, painted bright yellow collects general trash while a white one following behind collects recyclable materials like raw food or cardboard in different bins. The waste is sent for recycling.⁸²



The result is that Taiwan is one of the world's most admired countries when it comes to recycling and its capital Taipei is clean. The transformation took a short couple of decades from a time when the island was so cluttered and filthy that it earned the title of "Garbage Island."

Kamikatsu, a Japanese town, has also gained a worldwide reputation for its effort in recycling. Its residents diligently sort and recycle their waste of a wide variety including peeling off labels and removing bottle caps. There is also a composting system for organic waste.⁸³

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In contrast, recycling among Singapore's households is almost non-existent. Garbage chutes in HDB flats collect trash of all kinds into a common bin. Also, recycling bins are not readily available. Where they are present, they are usually not recycle-smart. Although separate labels are indicated to collect glass, paper, plastic and metal, there are no separate receptacles in the bin; the different waste materials are emptied into one common container.

There are several measures that we can take to improve our efforts at recycling or reducing the use of plastic. For example, we can encourage consumers to bring their own carriers and containers when buying takeaway food. Hawkers and food outlets could be incentivised to encourage such behaviour by giving customers meaningful discounts for using their own containers and carriers. In earlier days, Singaporeans would buy take-away food using tiffin carriers or *tingkats*.

On this front, the SDP will implement a policy where rentals of hawker stalls would be lowered if they meet the requisite cut-off levels of plastic-carrier/wrap use.

There must be greater effort to make recycling and the reduction of waste a norm in Singapore. This can be achieved through a two-pronged approach. First, the SDP will emphasise the inculcation the values of sustainable living starting in our schools. The curriculum should include classes in recycling and the need for greater socio-environmental consciousness. Only then can we raise generations of Singaporeans steeped in intelligent and sustainable practices rather than a people mindlessly focused on getting ahead materially at their own expense.

Second, corporations should also be prohibited through legislation from manufacturing products that depend on single-use packaging. Consumers can purchase these products using recycled containers. The aim is to keep resources in a perpetual or at least extended, cycle rather than discarded after one use.



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8. AMENDING THE CARBON TAX RATE

The government introduced a carbon tax in 2019 where a rate of \$5 per tonne of greenhouse gas emissions will be levied on industrial facilities that emit the pollutants equal to or above 2,000 tonnes annually. The rate applies from 2019 to 2023 with plans to increase it to between \$10 and \$15 per tonne by 2030.⁸⁴ Climate experts have estimated the required carbon tax amounts to be anywhere between US\$40 to US\$60 per tonne. A carbon tax should include data centre facilities which are energy-intensive and emit CO₂.⁸⁵

The SDP's concern about raising the carbon tax is its effect on consumers. If all the industrial polluters do is to pass the cost on to the people by raising prices on their services and goods as a result of the tax, then the objective of lowering emissions through taxation is negated. Singaporeans are already saddled with heavy taxes and high prices. Unless an effective mechanism can be found to prevent the end-consumer from ultimately shouldering the carbon tax, the SDP does not recommend increasing the carbon tax rate at this time. It is preferable to first turn our attention and energy to switching to using renewables. Further discussion on this matter is welcome.

III. CONCLUSION

The challenges for Singapore's future in as far as global warming are concerned are complex but not insurmountable. What is needed is a clear-eyed government singularly determined to deliver the country from global warming catastrophe.

Unfortunately, the PAP doesn't seem to have its priorities right. It talks a good game and tinkers around the periphery of a rapidly growing crisis while continuing to drag its feet over implementing urgent and meaningful measures that can slow down and even reverse climate change.

It commits to the Paris Agreement to reduce carbon emissions while continuing to play hosts to the world's biggest oil refineries as well as expanding our role in the world market of natural gas.

It draws up ineffective green-plot ratios for HDB estates while ripping up forests and indulging in dubious infrastructural projects like the Jewel in Changi. The building cost \$1.8 billion to construct and is fully air-conditioned with a giant

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waterfall that consumes large amounts of energy. The structure is just another shopping mall with the usual shops and restaurants found all over the other parts of the island. It is not surprising that business for many of the shops is beginning to fall – barely a year into its opening.⁸⁶

It insists that it prefers the public to depend on public transport while continuing to load this island with foreigners that place an unnecessary burden on the transport and housing systems.

It bemoans the haze while not taking a stronger stance with corporations in Singapore linked to the burning of forests in Indonesia.

It shies away from taking the lead in pushing the international community to step up efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while getting caught up in a no-win military situation among the superpowers.

Looking ahead, the PAP has committed \$400 million to build up the island's drainage system to contain floods. Longer-term plans are to fight rising sea-levels over the next century that will cost \$100 billion.⁸⁷ These may be important steps to take, but if the necessary measures outlined in this paper are not implemented – and implemented with urgency – then all the money that we spend on digging more drains and erecting more dykes will not help the country.

Like it or not, the problem of global warming is real, it is acute, and it is upon us. If we continue at the current pace and in the current direction, our future will be imperilled.

The SDP's alternative plan must be deliberated nationally and with purposeful action. Only then can we hope to bequeath to our children and future generations an island that we can still call home.