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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SINGAPORE

OFFICIAL REPORT

FOURTEENTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Thursday, 2 March 2023

The House met at 10:30 am

VOLUME 95

NO 90

ATTENDANCE

PRESENT:

Mr SPEAKER (Mr Tan Chuan-Jin (Marine Parade)).

Mr Abdul Samad (Nominated Member).

Ms Janet Ang (Nominated Member).

Mr Ang Wei Neng (West Coast).

Mr Baey Yam Keng (Tampines), Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Sustainability and the Environment and Minister for Transport.

Mr Chan Chun Sing (Tanjong Pagar), Minister for Education.

Miss Cheryl Chan Wei Ling (East Coast).

Mr Mark Chay (Nominated Member).

Mr Chee Hong Tat (Bishan-Toa Payoh), Senior Minister of State for Finance and Transport.

Mr Cheng Hsing Yao (Nominated Member).

Miss Cheng Li Hui (Tampines).

Mr Edward Chia Bing Hui (Holland-Bukit Timah).

Mr Chong Kee Hiong (Bishan-Toa Payoh).

Mr Desmond Choo (Tampines).

Mr Eric Chua (Tanjong Pagar), Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Culture, Community and Youth and Minister for Social and Family Development.

Mr Chua Kheng Wee Louis (Sengkang).

Mr Darryl David (Ang Mo Kio).

Mr Christopher de Souza (Holland-Bukit Timah), Deputy Speaker.

Ms Foo Mee Har (West Coast).

Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien (Yuhua), Minister for Sustainability and the Environment.

Ms Gan Siow Huang (Marymount), Minister of State for Education and Manpower.

Mr Gan Thiam Poh (Ang Mo Kio).

Mr Gerald Giam Yean Song (Aljunied).

Mr Derrick Goh (Nee Soon).

Ms He Ting Ru (Sengkang).

Mr Heng Chee How (Jalan Besar), Senior Minister of State for Defence.

Mr Heng Swee Keat (East Coast), Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Economic Policies.

Prof Hoon Hian Teck (Nominated Member).

Mr Shawn Huang Wei Zhong (Jurong).

Ms Indranee Rajah (Tanjong Pagar), Minister, Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for Finance and National Development and Leader of the House.

Mr S Iswaran (West Coast), Minister for Transport and Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations.

Dr Janil Puthucheary (Pasir Ris-Punggol), Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information and Health and Government Whip.

Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan (Hong Kah North), Senior Minister of State for Sustainability and the Environment and Transport.

Prof Koh Lian Pin (Nominated Member).

Dr Koh Poh Koon (Tampines), Senior Minister of State for Manpower and Sustainability and the Environment.

Mr Kwek Hian Chuan Henry (Kebun Baru).

Mr Desmond Lee (West Coast), Minister for National Development, Minister-in-charge of Social Services Integration.

Mr Lee Hsien Loong (Ang Mo Kio), Prime Minister.

Mr Leong Mun Wai (Non-Constituency Member).

Mr Liang Eng Hwa (Bukit Panjang).

Mr Lim Biow Chuan (Mountbatten).

Assoc Prof Jamus Jerome Lim (Sengkang).

Ms Sylvia Lim (Aljunied).

Dr Lim Wee Kiak (Sembawang).

Ms Low Yen Ling (Chua Chu Kang), Minister of State for Culture, Community and Youth and Trade and Industry.

Ms Mariam Jaafar (Sembawang).

Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M (Tampines), Minister for Social and Family Development, Second Minister for Health and Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs.

Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman (East Coast), Minister, Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for Education and Foreign Affairs.

Mr Mohd Fahmi Aliman (Marine Parade).

Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap (Aljunied).

Assoc Prof Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim (Nee Soon), Minister of State for Home Affairs and National Development.

Mr Murali Pillai (Bukit Batok).

Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin (Ang Mo Kio).

Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang (Nee Soon).

Ms Ng Ling Ling (Ang Mo Kio).

Miss Rachel Ong (West Coast).

Mr Ong Ye Kung (Sembawang), Minister for Health.

Ms Joan Pereira (Tanjong Pagar).

Mr Leon Perera (Aljunied).

Ms Denise Phua Lay Peng (Jalan Besar).

Ms Hazel Poa (Non-Constituency Member).

Ms Poh Li San (Sembawang).

Mr Pritam Singh (Aljunied), Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Rahayu Mahzam (Jurong), Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Minister for Law.

Mr Saktiandi Supaat (Bishan-Toa Payoh).

Mr Seah Kian Peng (Marine Parade).

Dr Shahira Abdullah (Nominated Member).

Mr K Shanmugam (Nee Soon), Minister for Home Affairs and Law.

Mr Sharael Taha (Pasir Ris-Punggol).

Ms Sim Ann (Holland-Bukit Timah), Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and National Development and Deputy Government Whip.

Mr Sitoh Yih Pin (Potong Pasir).

Ms Hany Soh (Marsiling-Yew Tee).

Mr Alvin Tan (Tanjong Pagar), Minister of State for Culture, Community and Youth and Trade and Industry.

Ms Carrie Tan (Nee Soon).

Mr Desmond Tan (Pasir Ris-Punggol), Minister of State, Prime Minister's Office.

Mr Tan Kiat How (East Coast), Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information and National Development.

Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong (Hougang).

Dr Tan See Leng (Marine Parade), Minister for Manpower and Second Minister for Trade and Industry.

Ms Jessica Tan Soon Neo (East Coast), Deputy Speaker.

Dr Tan Wu Meng (Jurong).

Dr Tan Yia Swam (Nominated Member).

Mr Patrick Tay Teck Guan (Pioneer).

Mrs Josephine Teo (Jalan Besar), Minister for Communications and Information and Second Minister for Home Affairs.

Mr Raj Joshua Thomas (Nominated Member).

Ms Tin Pei Ling (MacPherson).

Mr Edwin Tong Chun Fai (Marine Parade), Minister for Culture, Community and Youth and Second Minister for Law.

Dr Wan Rizal (Jalan Besar).

Mr Don Wee (Chua Chu Kang).

Mr Lawrence Wong (Marsiling-Yew Tee), Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance.

Mr Xie Yao Quan (Jurong).

Mr Alex Yam (Marsiling-Yew Tee).

Ms Yeo Wan Ling (Pasir Ris-Punggol).

Mr Yip Hon Weng (Yio Chu Kang).
Mr Melvin Yong Yik Chye (Radin Mas).
Mr Zaqy Mohamad (Marsiling-Yew Tee), Senior Minister of State for Defence and Manpower and Deputy Leader of the House.
Mr Zhulkarnain Abdul Rahim (Chua Chu Kang).

ABSENT:

Mr Gan Kim Yong (Chua Chu Kang), Minister for Trade and Industry.
Dr Ng Eng Hen (Bishan-Toa Payoh), Minister for Defence.
Ms Sun Xueling (Punggol West), Minister of State for Home Affairs and Social and Family Development.
Mr Teo Chee Hean (Pasir Ris-Punggol), Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security.
Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam (Jurong), Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for Social Policies.
Mr Vikram Nair (Sembawang).
Dr Vivian Balakrishnan (Holland-Bukit Timah), Minister for Foreign Affairs.

PERMISSION TO MEMBERS TO BE ABSENT

Under the provisions of clause 2(d) of Article 46 of the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore, the following Members have been granted permission by the Speaker to be absent from sittings of Parliament (or any Committee of Parliament to which they have been appointed) for the periods stated:

Name	From	To
	(2023)	(2023)
Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam	26 Feb	05 Mar
Mr Teo Chee Hean	28 Feb	02 Mar
Dr Ng Eng Hen	01 Mar	03 Mar
Dr Vivian Balakrishnan	01 Mar	03 Mar
Mr Gan Kim Yong	02 Mar	05 Mar
Ms Sun Xueling	02 Mar	03 Mar
Mr Vikram Nair	02 Mar	05 Mar

[Mr Speaker in the Chair]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

ANNUAL VALUES AS OF 2022 USED TO DETERMINE ELIGIBILITY FOR SOCIAL SUPPORT SCHEMES IN 2023

1 **Mr Yip Hon Weng** asked the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance with the revision of Annual Values (AV) of most residential properties in 2023 (a) what are the communication plans to seniors that social support schemes will not be affected by this revision, as AVs as of 2022 will be used to determine scheme eligibility in 2023; and (b) what are the plans for scheme eligibility for 2024.

The Senior Minister of State for Finance (Mr Chee Hong Tat) (for the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance): Mr Speaker, MOF had earlier issued a media statement to explain that the criteria for the Government’s social support schemes in 2023 will not be affected by the latest Annual Values (AVs) revision, as the AVs as of 2022 are used to determine scheme eligibility. We are also working with the Silver Generation Office (SGO) to engage seniors and provide them this assurance.

For many of our social support schemes, no application is required and Singaporeans receive the support automatically as long as they are eligible. These include the cash payments and MediSave top-ups under the GST Voucher scheme and the Assurance Package.

The Government regularly reviews our social support schemes, including the AV thresholds, to ensure that Singaporeans in need of support receive it.

Mr Speaker: Mr Yip.

Mr Yip Hon Weng (Yio Chu Kang): I thank the Senior Minister of State for his response. Just two supplementary questions. How will the Government monitor and encourage seniors who are eligible in 2023 to continue to apply for social support that needs application, as some may not know? And two, how much lead time will the Government give to let seniors and their families know the scheme eligibility in 2024?

Mr Chee Hong Tat: Sir, these are ongoing engagements and communications with our seniors. Part of it, we will go through the Silver Generation Office. The face-to-face interactions between our Silver Generation Ambassadors and the seniors would be helpful, to explain to them some of these schemes and what they are eligible for. We also rely on other means of communications, including the mass media.

DISBURSEMENTS FOR NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY FUND

2 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Minister for Trade and Industry (a) what is the pattern of funding from the National Productivity Fund (NPF) by industry in the past five years; (b) whether the NPF uses research to benchmark Singapore's productivity according to sectors with other developed countries and when deciding how much to fund each sector; and (c) whether NPF is also funding initiatives undertaken by trade associations and business chambers in addition to Government agencies.

The Minister of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Low Yen Ling) (for the Minister for Trade and Industry): Mr Speaker, Sir, over the past five years, the National Productivity Fund (NPF) has disbursed over \$1 billion across 47 projects relating to productivity improvements and continuing education and training (CET). About half was spent on productivity improvement projects and the other half was spent on CET programmes.

Some of the larger projects funded by the NPF include sector-specific schemes like the Construction Productivity and Capability Fund, as well as schemes that support enterprise and workforce transformation like the Inclusive Growth Programme and the SkillsFuture Enterprise Credit scheme. Projects supported by NPF complement our wider range of schemes and projects in driving productivity improvements.

In identifying areas for productivity improvement, sector agencies take into account feedback from the industry, best practices from Singapore and globally, as well as relevant benchmarking studies. For example, to identify suitable interventions for greater productivity in the retail and food services sectors, productivity benchmarking studies were commissioned on industry performance and efficiency in areas such as labour and space, in Singapore and overseas.

The design and implementation of projects are done in close collaboration and/or consultation with trade associations (TACs) and the Employment and Employability Institute (e2i). Working with the relevant TACs helps ensure that initiatives are designed to meet the needs of the industry. For example, the Hotel Innovation Committee (HIC), in an effort led by the Singapore Hotel Association (SHA) and supported by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), steered the sector to adopt technology solutions to raise productivity.

The HIC developed initiatives like the Hotel Technology Directory to connect industry players with technology solution providers as they sought to transform their business processes. This has helped spur the adoption of solutions such as the self-check-in technology that is integrated with STB's E-Visitor Authentication system, robotics and RFID tracking.

Mr Speaker: Mr Leon Perera.

Mr Leon Perera (Aljunied): I thank the Minister of State for her reply. Just a few supplementary questions. Firstly, to confirm my understanding, does the NPF restrict its funding to other Government agencies, to support the projects that those agencies are running, or is the NPF also open to funding TACs, business chambers or even individual companies for their productivity enhancement efforts?

The second supplementary question is, is the approach taken by the NPF more proactive or reactive, or is it a blend of both? Meaning to say that, can any organisation pitch a project to the NPF to request funding or is it the case that the NPF is not really open to that sort of modus operandi and they will just determine what sectors or what projects they want to do in any particular year?

And thirdly, I am wondering if the NPF makes easily available online a statement of its objectives, its KPIs, its strategies, maybe a review of what it has done in the past year. Many Statutory Boards and agencies do have their annual reports online where the CEO will talk about the agencies' priorities, what they did in the previous year, what their goals are for the coming year and so on. I found it quite difficult to search for this information – and I stand corrected if I just did not try hard enough – and I only found some information on the NPF for 2010 and 2017. For 2017, I was able to find the annual report; it is a very brief annual report and I found it through the National Archives website, actually. So, I was just wondering if this information is easily available and if not, will it be made easily available, going forward, given the tremendous amount of funding that is going into the NPF?

Mr Speaker: Two on observations. Please keep it concise and a reminder to try to keep it to two supplementary questions. Do not sneak in a third one.

Ms Low Yen Ling: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I want to thank the Member Mr Leon Perera for his three questions. Allow me to take a step back to recap.

Mr Leon Perera and Members would remember that the NPF was set up in 2010 to support programmes relating to productivity enhancement as well as Continuing Education and Training (CET). It came about because of the Economic Strategies Committee (ESC). It was part of the wider push for productivity growth arising from the ESC recommendations.

The NPF has been set up since 2010, so it has been about 13 years. The NPF, especially since the formation of the Future Economy Council, also supports the work of the 23 Industry Transformation Maps (ITMs). The Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) Committee of Supply (COS) on Tuesday has highlighted the work of the ITMs.

The ITMs are not just under the purview of MTI and our nine economic agencies. Some of the other agencies and Ministries are involved. For example, for the build environment, the Building Construction Authority (BCA) is very involved in spearheading the built environment ITM.

The NPF supports the work of the Future Economy Council that drives the growth and the transformation of Singapore's economy for the future. You would remember that for the ITMs, there are a few pillars. Productivity is one important pillar. Innovation, internationalisation, creating good jobs for Singaporeans today and tomorrow.

So, the establishment and the top-up for the NPF highlights the Singapore Government's strong commitment towards productivity enhancement and CET.

I want to assure the Member that the productivity projects that are funded by the NPF complements the wide range of schemes and projects, not just in MTI but, like I said, across the Ministries and agencies in improving productivity of all sectors of the economy.

I gave the number for the disbursement over the last five years. At this juncture, let me share one number, for a sense of our overall progress in productivity improvements. Our labour productivity growth rate was 2.6% per annum in the last five years, prior to COVID-19. This is consistent with the target growth rate of 2% to 3% set in 2010 when the NPF was set up.

The Member also asked about TACs. The work of the ITM is such that the sector agency cannot create policies in isolation. We have to work with the TACs because they play a very important role, advocating for the sector, bridging the communication with the sector and connecting the sector together, being a voice for the sector. The TACs are very involved.

In my reply to the Parliamentary Question (PQ), you would have heard me using the example of the hotels. STB works closely with SHA to bring that about. That is really how we get buy-in to level up the productivity across the sector, sector by sector and in fact, sub-sector by sub-sector. Whether it is the hotel, retail, food services or construction sectors, and so on.

The Member also asked whether companies can apply for NPF funding. The companies that are interested can certainly approach the sector agencies or even the TACs that might be involved. I want to share with him that the funds from the NPF are used to support meritorious productivity and CET schemes. Each of the project will have different criteria to meet, whether it is the vertical sectoral-specific ones or the horizontal ones.

To the Member's last question to make available more information, this is certainly done across all ITMs, sharing about how we are working together with the TACs, companies in the sector and trade unions. The various trade unions are very involved in working with the TACs and the sector agencies to curate these jobs and also to implement the productivity drive.

Let me share this, if Mr Speaker could indulge me. I talked about hotels. Let me cite the example of Tranche 2 of the hotel productivity plan —

Mr Speaker: I will indulge to a point.

Ms Low Yen Ling: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The plan was completed in March 2022, just last year, with a \$1.36 million of grant disbursed for a duration of 2016 to 2022. Amongst the eight initiatives under the hotel productivity plan, one of them is to proliferate shared services at the group level.

STB has exceeded the KPI in this initiative. I will not bore you with the details but I will highlight how it has done so. It embarked on more than 40 projects at group level to encourage our hotels to develop centralised systems in areas like IT, HR, property management, customer management, and also to adopt shared services such as group level branding and marketing. And in so doing, to raise the productivity such that we can create better well-paying jobs for Singaporeans.

Mr Speaker: Mr Perera, a quick one, please.

Mr Leon Perera: I will keep it to two and I thank you for your indulgence, Mr Speaker, Sir. First, to confirm my understanding, the NPF, if I read the Minister of State correctly, only funds other Government agencies and programmes. It does not give funding directly to TACs or to companies.

The second supplementary question is, would the Ministry commit to making available clear statements online of what the NPF activities are, what its goals are, what its priorities are, based on the research that it is doing and to make this available to the members of the public?

Ms Low Yen Ling: Mr Speaker, I will also keep it short.

Mr Speaker: Yes, please.

Ms Low Yen Ling: I want to thank the Member for his two supplementary questions. The NPF is available for the Ministries and agencies to tap into to spearhead productivity enhancement projects and CET that will benefit the TACs and the sector. In a way, the TACs and the companies are tapping on the funding as well.

For the second question, as our companies and workers benefit from a wide range of schemes, in addition to the NPF, the various schemes are also subject to scrutiny. I want to assure him that within the NPF, we regularly monitor the progress of the project that is funded by NPF to ensure they meet project level targets. For example, the hotel productivity plan I shared. And that is just one initiative. We will monitor how they have met the targets and the KPIs, item by item, such as number of firms or individuals who benefited from the projects.

I also want to assure him that MTI economists also conduct regular studies to examine the individual impact of key schemes under NPF.

DEFAULT APPROVALS FOR UNCONTESTED DEPUTYSHIP APPLICATIONS FROM SPOUSE OR CHILDREN OF INDIVIDUALS ASSESSED TO BE LACKING IN MENTAL CAPACITY

3 **Mr Yip Hon Weng** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development (a) whether the Ministry will consider under the simplified track to grant default approvals for uncontested deputyship applications from the spouse or children of individuals who are assessed as lacking mental capacity; and (b) If not, what are the reasons for not implementing this approach.

The Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Social and Family Development (Mr Eric Chua) (for the Minister for Social and Family Development): Mr Speaker, the Court today can already approve a Deputyship application without a hearing, if it is uncontested.

Mr Speaker: Very good. Mr Yip Hon Weng.

Mr Yip Hon Weng (Yio Chu Kang): I thank the Senior Parliamentary Secretary for his very quick answer. I am heartened to know that this option is already available today. How can the Government increase awareness of this option as many may not know and how long will this process take?

Mr Eric Chua: Mr Speaker, I thank the Member for his supplementary question. Like him, I am concerned about the awareness as well as update, of not just the awareness of the Lasting Power of Attorney (LPAs) but also relevant instruments. So, rest assured that we will continue to work with Government agencies as well as community groups to make sure that awareness and take-up of these instruments are enhanced in future.

FOREIGN VERSUS LOCAL COMPANIES THAT QUALIFY UNDER CONDITION 1 OF MANPOWER FOR STRATEGIC ECONOMIC PRIORITIES SCHEME

4 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Minister for Trade and Industry of the 1,000 companies that qualify under Condition 1 of the Manpower for Strategic Economic Priorities scheme, what is the breakdown of the number between foreign companies and local enterprises.

The Minister for Manpower (Dr Tan See Leng): All Manpower for Strategic Economic Priorities (M-SEP) beneficiaries are locally incorporated or registered business entities. They would need to be as such in order to hire Work Permit or S Pass holders to benefit from the M-SEP scheme.

Mr Speaker: Let us keep the ball rolling. Mr Leon Perera, please.

Mr Leon Perera (Aljunied): I thank the Minister for his concise answer. My question was really, of the 1,000 or so who are qualified, how many are locally owned businesses as opposed to foreign MNCs?

I have another supplementary question, which is relating to the press release that was put up by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM). The press release said that "at the end of the two-year period, firms would have to demonstrate that they maintained their local workforce share during this period". So, the M-SEP scheme is actually allowing firms to hire more work pass and S Pass holders during the two-year period.

I just wanted to clarify, what that sentence is referring to: at the end of the two-year period, firms would also have to maintain their local workforce share. Because, if you are allowed to hire more of these work pass and S Pass holders, by definition, would your local workforce share not go down at the end of that two-year period? Unless you are not exercising as a company, the ability to hire more of those, which would also defeat the point of the scheme. I just want to clarify that.

Dr Tan See Leng: Mr Speaker, I beg your indulgence because this needs a bit of time to go through.

To the Member's first supplementary question, the actual proportion depends on the firms which successfully apply for the initiatives listed, which is under Condition 1. Under Condition 1, in terms of fulfilment of the M-SEP scheme, there are 16 programmes that are listed. For me to go through the exact details of the M-SEP scheme itself, perhaps the Member could separately file a Parliamentary Question. I am happy to walk the Member through.

So, that is the qualifying criteria.

Of the firms today that are currently eligible for M-SEP, about 40% of them have local shareholding of at least 30%. Having local shareholding is not a prerequisite for M-SEP. What is more important in the entire M-SEP scheme is that they contribute to our growth and they create opportunities for Singaporeans. Hence, these firms must be locally incorporated or registered.

In this particular way, M-SEP is very selective in targeting firms or investments which will grow our economy and our competitiveness. And to be part of these programmes, the firms would have been working closely with our economic agencies like Economic Development Board (EDB) or Enterprise Singapore (ESG).

To the Member's second point in terms of the end of the two-year period, it should not be taken in isolation. If you look at the overall flow in terms of the scheme from the fulfilment of Condition 1, then the two-year mark in terms of a higher concentration of foreign workforce or that potential should not be any impediment whatsoever. Because the ultimate fulfilment of the conditions is really about growing our economy, our competitiveness and at the same time, making sure that our locals continue to be put up front in terms of training and in terms of upskilling.

Mr Speaker: Mr Perera.

Mr Leon Perera: I thank the Minister for his reply. Just a very quick one on the second supplementary question. In terms of this reference “at the end of the two-year period where you have to maintain your local workforce share”, if I understand the Minister correctly, I suppose that is referring to just maintain the absolute number of locals that the firm is hiring, rather than the share of locals as a percentage. Is that the correct understanding?

Dr Tan See Leng: I thank the Member for his persistence in trying to extract some measure so that he can come back in two years' time and put a check. The entire focus as I have spent over an hour yesterday in my Committee of Supply (COS) speech doing, is to focus on levelling up our competitiveness, maintaining our lead against the whole business world.

Therefore, it is important that in the scheme that we put up – and today given where we are, we have actually very tightly scoped these companies that qualify under the M-SEP scheme.

So, you should look at it from that context.

In the broader macroeconomics of how we look at our workforce, and the overall change, the one-third to two-third ratio will still maintain. If you are going to look at one particular aspect of the entire plethora of schemes that we have available and say that this particular scheme is going to result in over-concentration, that is not going to happen. I hope that gives you enough reassurance.

This is again very tightly scoped. These are companies that EDB and ESG work very closely with and the number of work passes that is going to be awarded through M-SEP would not move the needle significantly. It is really meant to see how we can provide these companies to have a leg-up to fulfil our strategic economic priorities.

10.52 am

Mr Speaker: Order. End of Question Time. The Clerk will now proceed to read the Order of the Day.

[Pursuant to Standing Order No 22(3), provided that Members had not asked for questions standing in their names to be postponed to a later Sitting day or withdrawn, written answers to questions not reached by the end of Question Time are reproduced in the Appendix.]

ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 1 APRIL 2023 TO 31 MARCH 2024

(Committee of Supply – Paper Cmd 20 of 2023)

Order read for consideration in Committee of Supply [5th Allotted Day]

[Mr Speaker in the Chair]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY – HEAD L (MINISTRY OF SUSTAINABILITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT)

(An inclusive and sustainable home)

Head L (cont) –

Resumption of Debate on Question [1 March 2023].

"That the total sum to be allocated for Head L of the Estimates be reduced by \$100." – [Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang].

Question again proposed.

The Chairman: Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Grace Fu.

10.53 am

The Minister for Sustainability and the Environment (Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien): Mr Chairman, before I address the cuts filed by Members, I would like to thank many Members who spoke on sustainability during the Budget debate. In particular, Prof Koh Lian Pin's call for climate change and sustainability to always be among the bread-and-butter issues we focus on. And Ms Carrie Tan's motto to Share More, Use Less, Waste Not, resonated with me. Senior Minister Teo Chee Hean also spoke about our raised climate ambition and the urgent need for climate action. He explained that a whole-of-nation effort was needed to transition to a greener future.

This nationwide effort is underpinned by the Singapore Green Plan 2030, which we launched two years ago. The Green Plan charts bold and concrete policies and actions for Singapore to achieve our net-zero emissions goal. It serves as a critical compass on our path to sustainability. My colleagues from other Ministries have been or will be providing updates on their green plan initiatives over the Committee of Supply (COS) debate.

We must press on with this intergenerational effort to steward a green, liveable and climate-resilient home for Singaporeans and our future generations. Today, my colleagues from the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment (MSE) and I will share how we are laying the foundations for a green nation that is Climate-Resilient and Climate-Friendly.

First, I will elaborate on how we are leading, enabling and facilitating Singapore's transition to a climate-friendly nation.

The public sector will lead the way for Singapore's decarbonisation journey and pave the way for green efforts to take root. Under the GreenGov.SG initiative, the public sector has committed to achieving net-zero emissions around 2045, five years ahead of our national target. Prof Koh Lian Pin and Mr Don Wee asked for a progress update.

To spearhead the effort, we have appointed Singapore's first Government Chief Sustainability Officer (GCSO). Each Ministry has also appointed a Chief Sustainability Officer to oversee sustainability matters across their Ministry family. They will work closely with the GCSO to develop and coordinate strategies to meet this ambition.

Our public sector agencies are pushing ahead with decarbonising their systems and processes. For instance, the National Environment Agency (NEA) is working with Keppel Seghers on a joint feasibility study to capture carbon dioxide emitted from Waste-to-Energy plants.

Ms Poh Li San asked about PUB's decarbonisation plans and solutions. PUB has also committed to achieve net-zero emissions around 2045, in line with our GreenGov.SG ambition. Their decarbonisation strategy is underpinned by 3Rs – Reduce, Replace and Remove.

First, PUB will reduce carbon emissions by improving the efficiency of energy-intensive processes such as desalination and NEWater. It targets to reduce the energy consumption for desalination from 3.5 to less than 2 kilowatt-hour per cubic meter by 2025. PUB's upcoming Tuas Water Reclamation Plant (WRP) will be fully energy self-sufficient by harnessing synergies with NEA's Integrated Waste Management Facility.

Next, PUB will also replace carbon-based energy sources with renewable energy, including solar. We are already home to one of the world's largest floating solar farms at Tengeh Reservoir. We are deploying the next floating solar farms at Pandan Reservoir and plan to call the tender for this later this year.

PUB is also exploring innovative technologies to remove carbon. In partnership with the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), PUB is test-bedding the use of novel electrolysis technology to capture carbon dioxide in seawater as part of the desalination process. This will produce hydrogen and pre-treated seawater so that it can be desalinated at lower energy.

Mr Don Wee and Miss Cheryl Chan will be pleased to hear that from this financial year onwards, the Government will publish an annual GreenGov.SG report, the report will show our efforts, progress and plans. We will start with reporting Scope 1 and 2 emissions, electricity and water consumption with reference to international standards and frameworks.

From FY2024, all Statutory Boards will also make their annual environmental sustainability disclosures. Several statutory boards have started making sustainability disclosures. They have been systematically incorporating sustainability in their decision-making and risk management frameworks to achieve concrete sustainability outcomes.

As Mr Don Wee, Mr Louis Ng and Prof Koh pointed out, the public sector can drive the nation's transition to a green economy by leveraging on its procurement budget. Let me elaborate on our plans for green procurement in the public sector.

The public sector has adopted green procurement since 2007. Thus far, we have introduced sustainability requirements for selected goods and services. For example, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) equipment, electrical appliances and printing paper must first meet environmental standards before they are assessed on price and quality attributes.

Building on this foundation, we intend to raise the bar. Starting from 2024, besides pre-qualifying the products on environmental standards, we will also consider the sustainability practices of the company we buy from. As announced by Senior Minister of State for Finance, Mr Chee Hong Tat, we will start with large construction and ICT tenders. These make up more than 60% of the value of Government procurement contracts. Such projects include public infrastructure, industrial buildings and office ICT equipment contracts.

11.00 am

Using ICT as an example, in addition to the requirement of matching the best-in-class in energy efficiency, we may evaluate the efforts of the tenderers in reducing packaging and carbon footprint of their operations, when we evaluate the tender bids.

As this is a new concept, we will start with setting aside up to 5% of the evaluation points for environmental sustainability. We will review the amount and engage industry closely as we expand the adoption of sustainability criteria to more public sector procurement sectors.

Mr Don Wee asked if such efforts to green the public sector will entail additional costs. Environmental sustainability is not costless and we will have to pay a bit more for greener goods and services. But as the world decarbonises, the demand for green products and services will grow.

And green procurement in the public sector will encourage suppliers to adopt sustainability practices and develop green products and services. Thereby, enhancing the growth of the green economy in Singapore and the competitiveness of our companies globally. The Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) had outlined initiatives that support businesses in adopting sustainability practices, such as measuring carbon emissions sustainability reporting and seizing opportunities in the green economy.

I hope that these initiatives under GreenGov.SG will spur many in the private sector to follow suit, in publishing their own sustainability reports and incorporating sustainability considerations in their procurement policies. Together as a nation, we can transform our economy.

This leads me to talk about enabling the transformation through partnering businesses and the community. Building a green nation requires the participation of all – businesses, communities and persons. The Government cannot do it alone and all of us must work closely alongside each other, as partners, to deliver on the Green Plan.

We will be raising our carbon tax progressively over the next few years to further incentivise carbon and energy efficiency throughout the economy and society. The Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) had addressed queries on allowances under the transition framework that Miss Cheryl Chan asked about.

As raised by Prof Koh, we will allow companies to use high-quality international carbon credits or ICCs, to offset up to 5% of their taxable emissions. We will publish a whitelist of acceptable ICCs later this year, which will include eligible host countries, carbon crediting programmes and methodologies.

Businesses should do more with less. Creating more products and services with less resources and less waste will raise their competitiveness in the long run, particularly against higher carbon and energy prices.

Businesses must invest in energy efficient equipment or manufacturing processes. Some upfront costs may be incurred. However, over the long run, lower energy and resource use will lead to lower costs over the equipment's lifecycle. Mr Gan Thiam Poh asked about the support provided for businesses, including SMEs, in making this upfront investment.

We recognise that upfront capital investment can be challenging for our businesses, particularly SMEs. To support an inclusive transition, we will help SMEs make the switch. Enterprise Singapore introduced the Energy Efficiency Grant (EEG) for food services, food manufacturing and retail sectors last year. NEA also enhanced the Energy Efficiency Fund (E2F) for manufacturing companies to invest in energy efficient equipment.

One SME that benefited from the enhanced E2F is ACP Metal Finishing Private Limited (ACP), which specialises in metal surface treatments and finishes. ACP tapped on the enhanced E2F to replace over a thousand fluorescent lightings in its facilities with more energy efficient LED lightings. The E2F funded 70% of the \$60,000 project cost. With these retrofits, the company improved the energy efficiency of its operations. They enjoyed annual energy savings of about \$30,000 which represents a payback period of less than a year with support from the E2F.

I am happy to announce that we will further enhance the Energy Efficiency Fund to provide manufacturing companies with certainty of the grant amount, upfront, when they invest in energy efficient equipment. We will also further simplify the grant application process by streamlining the measurement and verification requirements. I encourage eligible companies, particularly our SMEs to tap the enhanced scheme to defray the cost of switching to more energy efficient equipment. This will enhance their competitiveness, as they participate in the greening of our economy.

Mr Gan and Dr Lim Wee Kiak also called for support for households to be more energy efficient. With rising number of households, more working from home and usage of appliances, increasing energy efficiency in our homes is more important than ever.

Our energy labels, with the number of ticks, have enabled consumers to make informed decisions when purchasing appliances. I am heartened that more consumers are choosing appliances with higher energy efficiency. Suppliers have noticed this and are responding by expanding their offering of energy efficient appliances.

We will enhance these efforts. We will add energy labels to portable air-conditioners and more types of lamps next year. The standards of air-conditioners, refrigerators, lamps and televisions will also be raised over the next two years to lock in efficiency gains and remove less efficient appliances from the market. These will help to further reduce energy consumption in our households and help consumers reduce their utility bills by choosing more energy efficient appliances. Mr Chairman, in Mandarin, please.

(In Mandarin): [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] We recognise that purchasing energy efficient appliances may involve some additional costs upfront, in order to benefit from lower utility bills in the long run. Some families may have difficulty making the payment. We introduced the Climate Friendly Households (CFH) Programme in 2020 to help households in 1- to 3-room HDB flats offset the higher cost of energy- and water-efficient household appliances.

For example, last year, a family bought a 3-tick refrigerator that cost about \$800. A comparable 2-tick model would cost about \$200 less. With the \$150 climate voucher, they could offset most of the higher cost of the 3-tick model, on top of further savings in their monthly electricity bill.

We have been working with community partners to increase awareness of the Programme, through outreach activities to residents, posters at community clubs, and digital display panels at HDB blocks. We have also worked with retailers to display CFH Programme collaterals on eligible appliances for easy identification and reminder. I urge eligible households to tap on the climate vouchers to switch to more efficient appliances and fittings.

We will be extending and expanding the eligibility criteria of the Climate Friendly Households Programme. This will enable more households to be eligible for the scheme, to tap on the vouchers and to benefit from bigger savings in their utility bills. More details on the programme's extension, as well as the list of eligible appliances, will be released later this year, likely to be effective in the following financial year.

(In English): Aside from increasing efficiency, circularity is another avenue of being climate-friendly. Senior Minister of State Amy Khor will elaborate further on our efforts towards a zero waste nation, in particular, to reduce packaging waste and boost our recycling rate. She will also share about continued efforts to partner hawkers in ensuring Singapore's treasured hawker culture is safeguarded for years to come.

Grants and policies are but tools and enablers. To unlock the next bound of the green transition, we must change our collective mindsets and behaviours. Individually, our actions may feel insignificant, but collectively, we can build a new social compact necessary for a green Singapore.

The Government has been facilitating the green transition through our engagements and partnerships with the community under our Forward Singapore Steward Pillar. Prof Koh asked for an update. He will be heartened to hear that many Singaporeans share our ambitions and hopes for a greener Singapore and have great ideas to help us get there.

To date, over 1,400 Singaporeans ranging from the youth to the elderly have attended close to 20 engagement sessions under the Forward Singapore Steward Pillar. The engagements focused on the challenges and trade-offs in fiscal and environmental sustainability topics, such as our net-zero ambition, resource circularity, coastal and flood resilience and food security.

In a dialogue with seniors at Toa Payoh, I was particularly inspired by their ideas and enthusiasm towards recycling and reducing their carbon footprint. I remember Mr Wang, who sold his car and switched to cycling after the completion of a MRT station in his neighbourhood. He is also a handyman, repairing discarded electrical appliances regularly for his neighbours to reuse. We can certainly take a leaf out of the book of these residents in embodying the spirit of stewardship.

In a bid to turn more of these ideas into action, we have launched the Green Nation Pledge. We are calling on individuals and organisations to pledge as a contributor, advocate or champion. More than 350 educational institutions and organisations representing 200,000 employees and students and more than 10,000 individuals have made Green Nation Pledges thus far.

My Ministry will continue to facilitate ground-up sustainability initiatives and partner the community in building a green nation. Senior Parliamentary Secretary Baey will share more on our efforts in his speech and also about our efforts on public health resilience.

Mr Chairman, the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report found that the Southeast Asia region is one of the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Rising sea levels pose an existential threat to us. We are especially at risk as a low-lying island state. We also expect significant increases in temperature and extreme weather patterns by the end of the century. The impacts of climate change are far-reaching and have downstream implications on food security when harvests are affected and on water security when sources of water dry up during heatwaves.

My Ministry is laying the foundation for Singapore to be a climate-ready nation. I will elaborate on how we will bolster our water security and Senior Minister of State Koh Poh Koon will share how we are shoring up our coastal defences, inland flood protection and food resilience.

Singapore has four national taps – water from local catchments, imported water, NEWater and desalinated water. NEWater and desalinated water are weather-resilient sources. In addressing the threats of climate change, we will invest further in these weather-resilient taps.

Ms Poh has asked for an update on our water infrastructure. We will increase the capacity and efficiency of desalination capabilities. Last year, we opened our fifth desalination plant – the Jurong Island Desalination Plant (JIDP). It is co-located with the Tembusu Multi-Utilities Complex (TMUC). This enables the plant to be about 5% more energy efficient compared to earlier desalination plants.

We will strengthen our systems for managing used water and recycling it into NEWater. Used water is a precious resource that can be recycled endlessly to fortify our water resilience.

We capture our used water through our Deep Tunnel Sewerage System (DTSS) – a network of deep tunnels that form a superhighway for our used water. The used water travels through the DTSS by gravity to Water Reclamation Plants (WRPs) and NEWater factories. They are then collected, treated and reclaimed to produce NEWater.

When completed, the DTSS will reduce by 50% the amount of land that would otherwise have been needed for used water infrastructure. This is significant in land-scarce Singapore and will make room for more spaces for Singaporeans to live, work and play.

11.15 am

We are making good progress on DTSS Phase 2 and expect tunnelling works to be completed by the second half of this year. This will connect the existing Changi WRP on the eastern side and the upcoming Tuas WRP in the west. The Tuas WRP will be completed by 2026, alongside the new Tuas NEWater Factory.

We will be redeveloping the Kranji Water Reclamation Plant and NEWater Factory in the north as the new piece of our three-node DTSS. Preliminary design will commence this year. Together, these developments will strengthen Singapore's water reclamation system, increase the treatment capacity of used water and bolster our NEWater production.

Efforts to secure our water supply must be accompanied by efforts to manage our water demand. Mr Gan asked about our efforts in improving water efficiency in the non-domestic sector. The non-domestic sector currently accounts for more than half of our total water demand and can play a big part in water conservation.

We have required large water users to establish water management systems and submit annual plans for water efficiency to PUB, under the Mandatory Water Efficiency Management Practices. Through this exercise, large water users are made aware of water intensive parts of their operations and identify opportunities to increase efficiency.

To further improve water efficiency in the non-domestic sector, PUB will introduce mandatory recycling requirements on new and expansion projects in industries that have high water consumption. These are namely the wafer fabrication, electronics and biomedical industries. They are water intensive and have high potential for water recycling. PUB will also enhance the incentive schemes to encourage companies to go beyond the mandatory recycling rate. This will come into effect on 1 January 2024. More details will be released later.

Households can play a part through sustainable living practices and being mindful of our consumption. It is easy to take for granted that clean water is available in every household today. It is unfathomable that 60 years ago, water rationing was imposed in Singapore. The water supply had to be cut off for 12 hours, three times a week, for about eight months. We must, therefore, continue to promote water conservation among our population.

A resilient water supply is critical in safeguarding our water needs from external shocks arising from climate and environmental impacts. The Singapore Water Story is one that must carry through to future generations. And that is the goal of a green nation: to steward a green, liveable and climate-resilient home. A home that is sustainable and will last for generations. The Government will lay the foundations for a green Singapore that is climate-friendly and climate-ready, but we will only make headway if this is a shared vision and if we all take collective steps along this journey.

I invite businesses to partner us in being catalytic agents to the transition, by moving ahead of the curve to bring about the next bound of sustainability. I invite the community to partner us in building a social compact that will make us the greenest generation so far. I invite everyone to partner us in building a green nation together. [*Applause.*]

Mr Chairman: Senior Minister of State Dr Amy Khor.

The Senior Minister of State for Sustainability and the Environment (Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan): Chairman, let me now elaborate on our vision for a zero-waste nation and my pet topic – no, not smoking, but hawkers and hawker centres.

Since the launch of the Zero Waste Masterplan in 2019, my Ministry and NEA have taken concrete steps to move from a throwaway culture towards a more sustainable paradigm. We are making good progress, addressing our priorities waste streams of electronic waste, or e-waste, packaging waste and food waste.

Mr Louis Ng asked for an update on the e-waste Extended Producer Responsibility, or EPR, scheme that was implemented in July 2021. Since then, we have more than doubled the number of nationwide e-waste collection points, from 300 to over 700 today. These collection points are situated at accessible locations, like community centres and shopping malls.

To date, ALBA, the appointed Producer Responsibility Scheme operator, has collected more than 9,000 tonnes of e-waste. It is a start, but is only a fraction of our collection targets. Since 1 July 2021, for Information Communication Technology (ICT) equipment, batteries and lamps, the collection rate is under 4%. We have done better for large household appliances, with a collection rate of 18%. There is still much room for improvement.

Together with ALBA, we will roll out extensive publicity and outreach efforts throughout the year, across various marketing and online platforms, focusing on events such as International E-waste Day in October. ALBA has also worked with all 17 Town Councils to organise quarterly collection drives at housing estates to collect bulky e-waste.

On 6 February 2023, I moved the Resource Sustainability (Amendment) Bill for first reading. There will be a full debate on the Bill during the Second Reading.

Today, I will share more details on two key initiatives under the Bill: a disposable carrier bag charge and a beverage container return scheme. They are decisive steps to reduce packaging waste and increase recycling, including single-use plastics.

First, on the disposable carrier bag charge. By making the cost of disposable bags visible to consumers, the charge will nudge consumers to be mindful of and reduce their usage of disposable bags.

Based on NEA's 2021 survey of around 1,000 residents, close to 90% agreed that they had a part to play in reducing the usage of disposable carrier bags. More than 70% also agreed that a mandatory charge will help to reduce the usage of these bags.

From Monday, 3 July 2023, supermarket operators with a company-level annual turnover of more than \$100 million will be required to charge at least five cents per disposable carrier bag at their Singapore Food Agency (SFA)-licensed supermarket outlets. Following consultations with supermarket operators, we understand that the majority will be charging five cents per bag, and this would moderate potential cost impact on consumers. We can avoid the charge by bringing our own reusable bags.

The mandatory charge will cover around 400, or about two-thirds, of all supermarket outlets. These include large supermarket chains, such as FairPrice, Cold Storage, Giant and Sheng Siong. These supermarkets will be easily identifiable through collaterals displayed at their premises. The mandatory charge would not apply at other retail outlets, such as convenience stores, as suggested by Mr Ng. Nevertheless, I note that many retailers already charge for bags voluntarily, including large convenience store chains, such as 7-Eleven and Cheers. We will monitor the effectiveness of the charge and assess the need to expand the mandatory coverage in the future.

The charge will apply to all disposable carrier bags, not just plastic bags, as all bags require resources and generate carbon emissions during their production and disposal. Other similar schemes in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the UK, have led to a reduction of plastic bags used by 60% to 90%.

We have heard concerns about supermarket operators profiting from the charge. I am happy to share that all covered supermarket operators have indicated that they intend to apply the charge proceeds towards environmental and social causes. For transparency and accountability, supermarket operators will be required to publish information on the number of bags issued, amount of proceeds collected and how the proceeds are used.

Mr Gan Thiam Poh asked how we can balance the charge and the need for bags for waste disposal. The charge will not remove the public's access to disposable bags. Bags will still be available at supermarkets and other retail outlets. By reducing waste and recycling right, we will require fewer bags for waste disposal. Additionally, we can repurpose product packaging to bag waste, including toilet roll bags or packaging from online purchases.

Second, a beverage container return scheme, which Mr Gan mentioned. The scheme is part of an EPR approach to manage packaging waste. Beverage producers will be responsible for collecting and recycling the products they put to market.

Consumers will pay a small deposit when buying a pre-packaged beverage and receive a full refund when the empty beverage container is returned for recycling at a conveniently located return point. The scheme will cultivate recycling habits and aggregate clean and high-quality recyclables, which can be made into new products.

The scheme framework has been developed following extensive stakeholder consultations since 2020. Around 80% of 1,000 households surveyed in 2021 generally supported implementing the scheme.

The scheme will cover plastic bottles and metal cans of volumes ranging from 150 to 3,000 millilitres, for all types of pre-packaged beverages. Plastic bottles and metal cans comprise about 70% of beverage containers put to market. They are easy to collect, compactible and have high material value.

Similar schemes have been implemented in over 50 jurisdictions, such as Norway and Sweden. Many have seen return rates increase to over 80%. For Singapore's beverage container return scheme, NEA will set an 80% return rate target on the scheme operator at steady state. With this, we expect about 800 million plastic bottles and metal cans to be returned for recycling annually.

Even as we strengthen legislation to drive behaviour change, we must continue with outreach and education. Prof Koh Lian Pin spoke on The Waste Café. As noted in my Parliamentary Question reply yesterday, we will take into consideration the views of those who felt that this experiment could have been done differently, to improve our future campaigns.

I also thank Prof Koh for his queries on our initiatives to encourage household recycling. On transparent recycling bins, we will be releasing our findings soon. On recycling chutes, HDB introduced dual chutes for refuse and recyclables for all new public housing developments from 2014. Since 2018, NEA has also required them at all new non-landed, private residential developments higher than four storeys.

Mr Gan and Ms Hany Soh spoke on the contamination rate of recyclables, which is about 40%. In tandem with education campaigns, the E-waste EPR scheme, the upcoming beverage container return scheme and initiatives by other organisations to sort recyclables, such as paper and textiles, will reduce contamination in our blue bins.

Members will be heartened to learn that all households can collect a Bloobox from vending machines deployed island-wide later this month, to set up a recycling corner. Designed by a team of students from the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), the Bloobox is foldable, reusable and light. It has labels to help households identify what can and cannot be recycled, with reminders that plastic bottles, metal cans and glass containers for recycling should be empty, and free of food and liquids. Members may pick up a Bloobox from the Parliament Library to start your own recycling corner.

I will now speak about our hawker centres and hawker culture. Our hawker centres are an important institution, providing us with affordable and tasty hawker food.

Miss Cheryl Chan and Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin asked about planning considerations for new hawker centres and markets, and the progress of the new hawker centres. Mr Pritam Singh also asked about plans for hawker centres in the Marina Bay Financial area.

The Government had previously announced plans to build 20 new hawker centres, prioritising new estates and existing estates in the heartlands that are relatively under-served, in terms of affordable dining options. These sites are selected after carefully considering factors, including residential catchment, availability of comparable dining options and complementary facilities in the vicinity. This ensures the centres serves the demand of the residents, while avoiding over competition amongst comparable F&B establishments.

Even as we build new centres, we need to ensure that there are hawkers and that they can make a decent livelihood.

11.30 am

CBD hawker centres face additional challenges due to their heavy reliance on the working lunch crowd and the lack of residential catchment. Today, there are already existing food options in the CBD for workers. These include four hawker centres such as Market Street Hawker Centre that just reopened last year, as well as about 50 coffeeshops, food courts and canteens.

Last year, four new hawker centres opened in Senja, Bukit Canberra, Fernvale and Punggol. Besides Market Street Hawker Centre, another redeveloped centre that commenced operations was Margaret Drive Hawker Centre. Repairs and Redecoration (R&R works) were also completed at 15 centres. Many Singaporeans have explored these centres as part of hawker centre hopping circuits, which is becoming a national pastime. Chairman, in Mandarin, please.

(In Mandarin): [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] This year, we can look forward to the opening of two new hawker centres in Buangkok and Woodleigh Village. Both hawker centres will have around 40 stalls and 700 seats.

Both hawker centres will be connected to neighbourhood amenities and transport nodes, making it convenient for residents. The seating areas are spacious, family friendly, and inclusive. Ceilings are high to ensure better ventilation and airflow.

Additionally, the refreshed Jurong West Hawker Centre is slated to reopen in the third quarter of 2023 after the completion of reconfiguration works.

Besides these new centres, to enable our patrons to enjoy their meals in a pleasant and well-ventilated environment, we will also upgrade 25 existing hawker centres, including Holland Village Market and Food Centre and North Bridge Road Market and Food Centre.

(In English): We are also futureproofing hawker centres through the Hawker Centres Transformation Programme (HTP). As Ms Nadia would be aware, we are piloting the HTP at Cheng San Market and Food Centre and Geylang Serai Market. NEA will be engaging stallholders before targeting to start works from 2024.

Let me address Ms Joan Pereira and Miss Cheryl Chan's questions about inflationary pressures and the impact on rental and cooked food prices.

We have provided hawkers with a conducive business environment including ensuring reasonable rentals at our hawker centres. For NEA's monthly tender exercises, we adopt a transparent and fair system with no minimum bid. Individuals can bid for a stall at a monthly rental as low as \$1 per month, while others may submit higher bids to secure stalls at popular locations. After the first three years, rent is adjusted towards assessed market rent. In fact, only about 4% of cooked food stalls in hawker centres today are paying rent at above the assessed market rent. The remaining over 5,600 stallholders are paying rent no higher than the assessed market rate.

Median rental across our non-subsidised cooked food stalls has remained constant at about \$1,250 per month since 2018. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have also supported hawkers by providing 10 months of rental waiver and six months of subsidies for table cleaning and centralised dish-washing. In fact, stall rentals at hawker centres are generally lower than most other comparable food establishments in their vicinity. Nonetheless, rental only accounts for about 9% of our hawkers' operating costs.

Hawkers price their food based on multiple factors including operating costs, location, business level and patron demographics. They delicately balance these factors to attract patrons while trying to make a decent living. Today, patrons can continue to find affordable options in our hawker centres – as Mr Singh also acknowledges – including the Socially-conscious Enterprise Hawker Centres (SEHCs), where operators have committed to provide at least one budget meal option per stall.

To help Singaporeans cope with inflationary pressure, the Government is, among other measures, providing CDC and GST vouchers under the Assurance Package, and with more assistance provided to the lower income. CDC vouchers can be used at our hawker centres. The Government will continue to monitor the situation and consider if further support is needed.

We are taking additional steps to futureproof our hawker centres. Under the Productive Hawker Centres (PHC) Programme, the Hawkers' Productivity Grant (HPG) provides co-funding to purchase kitchen automation and queue management equipment. Ms Rahayu Mahzam would be happy to know close to \$3 million has been provided to more than 900 hawkers under the HPG. Additionally, eight existing centres have tapped on PHC funding to implement centre-level Centralised Dish Washing (CDW) and Automated Tray Return System (ATRS).

Today, more than 70% of cooked food stallholders in our hawker centres are already using e-payment. Support groups have been set up at 37 hawker centres to help hawkers embrace digital opportunities.

Mr Gan asked what can be done to support hawkers to digitalise. We will be expanding the HPG to include stall-level digital solutions such as e-ordering solutions which are becoming more widespread. We will maintain the co-funding quantum at 80% but will increase the total claimable amount from \$5,000 to \$7,000 per stallholder. The funding period will also be extended to March 2026.

Additionally, we will broaden the ATRS component of the PHC programme to cover Cleaning Process Automation (CPA) solutions. This helps to address challenges such as ageing cleaners and rising manpower costs. Examples include autonomous systems that clean tables and transfer used trays and crockery from tray return points to centralised dishwashing areas. This will reduce cleaners' workload

especially during peak hours. We will co-fund up to 80% of deployment costs incurred by the cleaning operator for CPA solutions.

Coupled with the mandatory tray and crockery return, these would help to improve the cleanliness situation and bird nuisance issues raised by Ms Nadia. With everyone doing their part to return their used trays and crockery, we noticed that the situation has generally improved and bird nuisance feedback at hawker centres has been declining annually from 2019 to 2022.

As we celebrate our veteran hawkers, I am also heartened by the new hawkers who have joined the trade. Miss Chan would be happy to hear that many of them have benefited from NEA's Incubation Stall Programme (ISP) and Hawkers' Development Programme (HDP). Together with other similar programmes by our SEHC operators, over 50 aspiring hawkers have joined the hawker trade through these programmes.

As part of our tradition, you would have tried some hawker fare from our ISP and HDP hawkers at yesterday's tea break. This included delicious halal braised duck kway teow from an ISP stall by Jonathan Tan and Habri Hammad Bin Mohammad at Amoy Street Food Centre. Johnathan adapted his grandfather's Hokkien braised duck recipe into a halal recipe so the Muslim community can enjoy his food, while continuing his grandfather's legacy.

We are constantly reviewing our programmes. Through feedback, we realised that additional emphasis on culinary readiness alongside close mentorship from hawker mentors will raise participants' chances of success. Therefore, the HDP's classroom programme will spend more time honing culinary skills. At the apprenticeship stage, hawker mentors will also help to assess the participants' culinary readiness. Participants can have the option to extend their apprenticeship by four more weeks, on top of the current eight weeks.

Finally, we have also received feedback that some local snacks are increasingly less commonly found. Those selling such snacks usually find it difficult to sustain an entire cooked food stall. We will work with SEHCs operators to pilot the use of kiosks, which would incur lower rental and operating cost to support the sale of snacks such as muah chee and putu piring. We hope this will help to preserve these snacks as part of our hawker culture. We will monitor the viability of such kiosks before deciding if we should scale up this pilot.

Chairman, I am heartened that many Members have called on Singaporeans to embrace sustainability, reduce consumption and green business practices. I remember the slogan "Courtesy begins with you and me". Likewise, "Sustainability begins with you and me". The Government cannot build a green nation alone. I urge everyone to incorporate sustainable practices into your daily routines, starting with the three Rs and support our hawkers to sustain our hawker culture.

The Chairman: Senior Minister of State Dr Koh Poh Koon.

The Senior Minister of State for Sustainability and the Environment (Dr Koh Poh Koon): Mr Chairman, as a low-lying tropical island state that imports most of our food, food security, sea level rise and inland flooding are critical concerns. We are making strong efforts to strengthen our resilience on these fronts.

Food security is an existential concern for Singapore. We import more than 90% of the food we consume, making it impossible for us to insulate ourselves completely from global food supply and price shocks. Over the past two years, we have experienced first-hand the effects of supply chain disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, geopolitical disruptions and developments elsewhere as well as policy decisions taken by foreign governments.

But this does not mean that we are completely at the mercy of such external factors. We can shore up our resilience if we work together as a nation – with Government, industry and consumers each playing our part.

Mr Gan Thiam Poh asked about lessons learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic pertaining to food resilience. Dr Lim Wee Kiak similarly wanted to know how our importers and consumers can become more resilient towards food supply shocks.

We take a multi-pronged approach. A core strategy is import source diversification for our key food items. We have increased our number of food supply sources from 172 countries and regions in 2019 to 183 countries today. We have accredited Indonesia as a new source of chilled, frozen and processed chicken meat. So we now have 25 accredited countries for chicken imports. We have also approved Brunei as a new source of eggs, and we now have 17 countries accredited to export hen shell eggs to Singapore, up from just 12 in 2019. The Singapore Food Agency (SFA) will continue to accredit more import sources and facilitate the industry's further diversification through sourcing trips and business networking sessions.

Having new sources for food imports will strengthen our resilience but only if the companies put in place robust business continuity plans (BCPs), continue to diversify sources at the company level and maintain warm links with multiple import sources. This would help them to pivot more easily when needed and protect their businesses during supply disruptions. Dr Lim Wee Kiak will be happy to note that the industry is adapting and working with SFA to review their BCPs and diversify their supplies.

While Singapore imports most of our food and is a price-taker, consumers too can exercise flexibility in their food choices when supply disruptions occur and pivot to other alternatives. We saw how Singaporeans readily switched to frozen chicken when Malaysian fresh chicken imports were disrupted last year.

I want to assure Dr Lim Wee Kiak that Government is pressing with our "30 by 30" goal of building Singapore's capability and capacity to sustainably produce 30% of our nutritional needs locally by 2030. Last year, we announced the enhancement of our Agri-Food Cluster Transformation Fund to offer farms a higher co-funding quantum to a wider range of food types such as fruited vegetables and

mushrooms.

I am glad to announce that SFA will launch the first land tender for this wider range of food types in the later half of this year. This will provide consumers with more food choices that are produced locally. SFA will provide more details when the tender is launched.

To build up even more industry capacity, we will need to optimise our limited agriculture spaces. We are making good progress in master planning Lim Chu Kang, where we will transform the region into a high-tech agri-food zone. We intend to reap synergies between land-based farms in the Lim Chu Kang region and sea-based farming in the adjacent West Johor Strait.

Mr Chairman, may I have your permission to display a slide on the LED screens please?

The Chairman: Yes, please. *[A slide was shown to hon Members.]*

11.45 am

Dr Koh Poh Koon: A multi-disciplinary consultancy study will holistically plan the development of LCK and the adjoining West Johor Strait. For example, we are exploring siting our fish hatcheries and other key infrastructural and processing facilities on land, to provide support to both land-based and sea-based fish farms. We will also incorporate upcoming regional studies for coastal protection measures at the LCK coastline, to enable our farms to be climate resilient.

Some of these ideas will be showcased in the LCK Master Plan exhibition, which SFA will launch in the second half of 2023. I hope Members will look out for the exhibition when it is finally launched.

In the East Johor Strait shown on the slide, which is separated by the Causeway from the West Johor Strait, we have a distinct and separate cluster of fish farms, supported by key aquaculture facilities. The separation of the fish farms into two distinct clusters is especially important to enhance fish resiliency in the face of climate change, which may result in harmful algal blooms as has happened in the past before.

Miss Cheryl Chan and Prof Koh Lian Pin asked how aquaculture would contribute to our "30 by 30" goal. Prof Koh Lian Pin also asked how we would ensure that the development of aquaculture in sea spaces is environmentally sustainable. We have identified fish production as one of our priority areas. It is a nutritious source of protein that can be grown efficiently.

This is why we launched the Singapore Aquaculture Plan last year, to transform the sector in three ways. First, to increase and optimise spaces for farming. Secondly, to help the industry adopt technology and better farm practices. And thirdly, to invest in research and innovation.

Miss Cheryl Chan asked how lessons from other countries with established aquaculture industries can be applied to our context.

We plan to conduct a joint study trip this year with industry and academia, to countries with advanced aquaculture production, to understand how they have managed to grow their commercial aquaculture sectors without negatively impacting marine biodiversity.

SFA will also dedicate significant resources and work closely with industry and academics to enhance our understanding of the effects of aquaculture on our local marine environment. For example, SFA is collaborating with NUS and the Barramundi Group to study the impact of aquaculture on the marine environment and marine life surrounding St John's Island. The study will conduct reef surveys and measure water and sediment quality prospectively over a period of time, to better understand in real-time, how aquaculture practices and farming activities could potentially affect these environmental parameters. We will adopt relevant practices from our overseas learning trip and detailed insights gained from our own local studies to suit our Singapore context.

To further support Singapore's ambitions in leading aquaculture research and innovation, we will enhance our R&D facilities to attract more companies and researchers to base themselves here.

In November 2022, we launched AquaPolis to transform the aquaculture research landscape. The brain trust of AquaPolis will comprise scientists from various research institutions, including the National University of Singapore (NUS), Temasek Life Sciences Laboratory and many others.

They will work on addressing real world aquaculture challenges to enhance the productivity of farms and quality of fish farmed in Singapore. For example, by developing superior fingerlings with traits, such as faster growth rates and higher Omega-3 content and reducing fish mortality from common fish diseases.

SFA's Marine Aquaculture Centre, located on St John's Island, will serve as the anchor research campus of AquaPolis. We will undertake two new initiatives.

First, we will enhance its facilities with upgrades, such as the installation of recirculating aquaculture systems for research in intensive farming within closed environments, to cater to evolving R&D needs. Second, we will also embark on a study to review how our future research facilities can be better integrated with aquaculture infrastructure, such as jetties and hatcheries.

In the steady state, our Singapore Aquaculture Plan will comprise three distinct centres, as you can see on the slide: the West Johor Strait, the East Johor Strait and AquaPolis in the Southern Waters. This will provide critical diversification of our aquaculture production across three different sites and ensures our aquaculture sector expands in a climate-resilient manner. The enhanced research capabilities and

facilities will also be better integrated with aquaculture infrastructure.

Miss Cheryl Chan asked about plans to build the manpower pipeline for our farming industry.

For students, Republic Polytechnic has broadened the scope of their Diploma in Biotechnology to include a specialisation in Food and Agro-technologies. For mid-career professionals, SFA partnered with Workforce Singapore and Republic Polytechnic in 2022 to launch a Career Conversion Programme to equip them with the knowledge and skills as Agri-tech Specialists or Agri-tech Operators.

I am glad to announce that for Nitec and Higher Nitec graduates as well as in-service employees, a new Work-Study Diploma in Agriculture and Aquaculture Technology will be launched by ITE next month. This will provide them with engineering skills to operate new agriculture and aquaculture systems, knowledge about food crops cultivation and fish farm management.

We will, therefore, have training programmes for different segments of the workforce to meet the agri-food industry's manpower needs.

As we encourage our local farms to produce more, there must be sufficient demand for our local produce. I thank Ms Hany Soh for her suggestion for Government to demonstrate support for local produce in food procurement. I agree that this is an area we should study further.

In February, a new Alliance for Action (AfA) on "Demand Offtake and Consumer Education" was formed, as part of the Forward Singapore conversation. The AfA includes key members of our local food ecosystem, such as representatives from farms, off-takers, such as supermarkets and trade associations representing the hotels, the retailers, as well as the catering associations, supported by various agencies, like Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and Enterprise Singapore. Together, they will explore solutions to help the hotel, restaurants and catering sector, as well as our local consumers, embrace local produce.

I look forward to hearing their ground up recommendations that will further develop our local agricultural industry. Sir, in Mandarin, please.

(In Mandarin): [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Food is an existential concern for Singapore as we import more than 90% of our food supply. Over the past two years, we have experienced first-hand the effects of disruption to our food supply chain. Many consumers have readily embraced alternatives, for example, by buying thawed frozen chickens from Australia and Thailand, or by switching to other protein types, such as fish and eggs.

To further strengthen our food resilience, we are pressing ahead with our "30 by 30" goal of building our agri-food industry's capability to produce 30% of our nutritional needs locally and sustainably by 2030.

To ensure the continuous growth of local agriculture, the next key step is to grow demand for local produce. In February, a new Alliance for Action (AfA) on "Demand Offtake and Consumer Education" was formed, as part of the ForwardSG conversation, including representatives from farming, food processing, hospitality and F&B sectors.

AfA will look into demand and supply aggregation of local produce and build greater mindshare for local produce through consumer education. Recommendations from AfA will strengthen our food supply resilience. The development of our agriculture industry depends on the support from Singaporeans for our local produce.

(In English): Ms Nadia Samdin asked how SFA will innovate to bolster its food safety capabilities.

SFA is developing Whole Genome Sequencing analytics to better identify the causes of foodborne diseases, and to help prevent outbreaks. We will strengthen SFA's use of data analytics to identify food establishments with higher risks of food safety lapses, enabling our officers to conduct more targeted inspections and educate poorer performing food establishments to tighten their food safety practices.

We will also invest in deep technology to ensure that our food safety regime keeps pace with industry innovation.

Dr Lim Week Kiat asked about progress in novel foods. Since SFA approved the sale of cultured meat in 2020, a global first, we have seen a steady increase in applications for the sale of novel foods. Most recently, SFA gave regulatory approval to GOOD Meat for the use of serum-free media in the production of cultivated meat.

We will set aside \$23 million, under the Singapore Food Story R&D Programme 2.0, the national R&D programme for food, to build new food safety capabilities to cater to developments in the novel foods space. SFA will support research projects to develop new methodologies which aim to provide more timely assessments, including toxicity and allergenicity assessments for novel and alternative proteins.

I thank Ms Nadia Samdin for her suggestions to enhance our food safety framework to encourage industry to maintain good food safety standards, including our home-based businesses and food sold through online platforms. Home-based food businesses are not licensed by SFA as they pose relatively low food safety risks due to their small scale. They are still subjected though to prevailing food safety regulations and should comply with SFA's regulations and guidelines on proper food handling practices.

In January, a new Singapore Standard was launched to guide food e-commerce players on their roles and responsibilities related to food safety. The guidelines were co-developed with a wide range of stakeholders, from food e-commerce platforms to food delivery platforms as well as supermarket retailers.

Food safety is a joint responsibility. I am heartened to see strong industry support in committing towards best practices in providing food safety information to consumers and improving traceability and recall along the food e-commerce chain.

Next, I will touch on coastal and flood protection, which Dr Lim Wee Kiak, Mr Edward Chia, Ms Nadia Samdin as well as Ms Poh Li San asked about.

Singapore is a low-lying island. Thirty percent of our land area is less than five metres above the mean sea level. With climate change, the Centre for Climate Research Singapore estimates that the mean sea level around Singapore could increase by up to one metre by 2100. This will affect many stretches of our coastline. Combined with the effects of more sudden and extreme rainfall as well as storm surges, we can expect greater risks to the community, our infrastructure, and our livelihood.

PUB, our national coastal protection agency, has been making steady progress and will periodically refine our coastal protection plans.

To Mr Edward Chia's question, since May 2021, we have progressively launched several studies to understand the characteristics of Singapore's coastlines and develop targeted coastal protection measures. PUB will commence the next site-specific study for the Sungei Kadut and the Lim Chu Kang area in the second half of this year.

I agree with Dr Lim Wee Kiak and Ms Nadia Samdin that these present opportunities to shape climate resilience efforts with the public. In conjunction with the Forward Singapore exercise, PUB started the Our Coastal Conversation series, and conducted two dialogue sessions for the City-East Coast area in October 2022.

Participants from diverse backgrounds, corporates, community groups, NGOs and even schools, participated in the dialogue and raised interesting perspectives on the trade-offs that we would need to make to tackle the effects of climate change. For example, some participants raised issues like, how would we retain the scenic views and the convenient access to the beaches that we enjoy while, at the same, looking at how we protect our coastlines, including the coastal nature parks.

I would like to reassure Ms Nadia Samdin that we will continue to work closely with our stakeholders on topics, such as coastal protection and other topics like marine litter. Last year, we published Singapore's first National Action Strategy on Marine Litter in consultation with our people, public and private sectors.

In addition to trade-offs, coastal protection is a long-term endeavour and requires new technologies and innovations, as Ms Poh Li San and Prof Koh Lian Pin had pointed out.

I am pleased to announce that we will launch a new dedicated Coastal Protection and Flood Management Research Programme (CFRP), funded by the National Research Foundation, to strengthen long-term coastal protection and inland flood management capabilities in Singapore.

The CFRP will provide \$125 million to foster research and collaboration across academia and the industry. This will establish a vibrant R&D ecosystem to support the development of innovative coastal protection and flood management solutions.

I agree with Prof Koh Lian Pin that we should work with industry and consider solutions that they can offer.

The CFRP's applied research and living lab components will support the test-bedding of inter-disciplinary urban flood solutions and equip our industries with the capability to develop and eventually export the next generation of coastal and flood protection solutions.

The CFRP will be anchored by a Centre of Excellence, hosted by National University of Singapore (NUS). More details will be provided later this year.

12.00 pm

Beyond sea level rises, climate change will also bring about increased and more intense rainfall, as we experienced in the last two days.

Ms Nadia Samdin, Ms Poh Li San and Mr Edward Chia asked about drainage and coastal protection infrastructure plans. Mr Edward Chia also asked about how these will be financed.

Since 2011, the Government has invested around \$2 billion on drainage improvement works. We have set aside another \$1.4 billion to carry out further improvements to the drainage system from 2021 to 2025. Drainage improvement works in 25 locations are currently ongoing, including the expansion of the Bukit Timah Canal.

PUB is exploring solutions that address the combined effects of sea level rise and intense rainfall and will continue to collaborate with agencies to co-create multi-functional drainage solutions.

One funding source is the Coastal and Flood Protection Fund, set up in 2020 with an initial injection of \$5 billion. But the cost to expand our drainage to cater for every extreme rainfall event is prohibitive. We must therefore strengthen our community resilience and collective response to how we deal with floods.

I encourage everyone to stay updated on PUB's flood alerts. Please sign on to their Telegram alert system if you have not done so, and for property owners and developers to ensure that the flood protection measures in your own developments remain effective.

Mr Chairman, as a small city-state with no natural resources, we must adapt and evolve to the constant changes around us.

We will continue to strengthen our resilience against existential threats by reimagining our coastlines as we explore new coastal protection measures, improving our drainage infrastructure to withstand more intense rainfall, and building a more food resilient Singapore. Whether it is mitigating the effects of climate change or strengthening our food resilience, each and every one of us has a role to play. My Ministry will work in partnership with all Singaporeans to build a more resilient Singapore.

The Chairman: Senior Parliamentary Secretary Baey Yam Keng.

The Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Sustainability and the Environment (Mr Baey Yam Keng): Chairman, dengue continues to pose a serious threat to Singapore. In fact, this situation is also due to our success in tackling dengue over the decades. In the sixties and seventies, dengue was prevalent and was a major cause of childhood death.

While we have significantly reduced the local population's exposure to the disease, it has also resulted in low population dengue immunity today. That is why we must continue to step up efforts in the fight against dengue.

NEA adopts a holistic dengue control strategy. This includes one, surveillance of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito population and circulating dengue virus; two, working with premises managers and residents to eliminate mosquito breeding; and three, publicity campaigns and outreach. This includes the use of purple alert banners we introduced last year to inform residents of areas with high mosquito population. NEA also partners key stakeholders such as Town Councils in mosquito control efforts. In addition, the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Health Sciences Authority (HSA) monitor the development of and evaluate dengue vaccines and therapeutics. The evaluation of the TAK-003 vaccine, which Ms Sylvia asked about, is currently ongoing.

Last year, more than 32,000 dengue cases were reported locally, the second highest in Singapore's recorded history. While dengue cases have decreased from the peak in the middle of last year, weekly cases remain high, with the potential for another surge in cases. NEA has been leveraging technology to strengthen our existing dengue control regime.

One example is Project Wolbachia, where non-biting male Wolbachia-Aedes mosquitoes, are released at selected dengue high-risk areas to suppress the local mosquito population. To Ms Hany Soh, Mr Gan Thiam Poh and Ms Poh Li San's queries on the progress of this pilot project, I am pleased to report that results thus far have been encouraging. Initial studies have shown that continued releases of male Wolbachia-Aedes mosquitoes can successfully suppress the urban *Aedes aegypti* mosquito population in release sites. In the initial field studies in Tampines, Yishun, Choa Chu Kang and Bukit Batok, where there have been more than one year of releases, we have observed up to 98% drop in the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito population and up to 88% reduction of dengue cases.

During the 2022 outbreak, the technology has prevented large clusters in these areas, where dengue transmission used to be high historically.

In the second half of last year, NEA expanded Project Wolbachia pilot to eight additional sites. This is part of a multi-site field study to further evaluate the impact of Wolbachia technology on dengue cases and clusters. Alongside HDB blocks, NEA has also been carrying out releases at landed residential estates to determine the most effective and impactful approach for wider-scale deployment. Based on early data, declining *Aedes aegypti* mosquito populations have also been observed in these areas.

With the expansion last year, the Project Wolbachia pilot now covers more than 300,000 households, which is about 30% of all HDB blocks and 9% of all landed homes across Singapore. NEA will continue to collaborate with commercial partners to enhance automation and scale up both in-house and outsourced Wolbachia-Aedes mosquito production and release capacity to support the ongoing study.

We will continue to collect data for rigorous evaluation of the Wolbachia technology and to refine deployment and strategies to allow cost-effective expansion in the next few years.

Regardless, the Wolbachia technology is not a silver bullet. Profuse breeding of Aedes mosquitoes could reverse the success effected by the Wolbachia technology. NEA will continue to work with partner agencies and stakeholders to detect and remove potential mosquito breeding habitats and will take firm enforcement action where necessary.

Our community must continue to play an active part in upkeeping our environment to prevent mosquito breeding and to curb transmission of the dengue virus. This is why NEA has been working closely with community partners.

For example, NEA collaborated with the West Coast and Pioneer grassroots organisations to tackle several large dengue clusters in the area last year. Roadshows were organised to educate residents on measures to prevent mosquito breeding and to protect themselves from dengue. Grassroots volunteers also conducted house visits and distributed educational flyers and insect repellent. The concerted efforts helped to slow down the transmission of dengue infections from almost 40 cases a week at the peak, to the eventual successful closure of the clusters.

I would like to thank all residents and grassroots volunteers for their continued support for Project Wolbachia and playing their part in our fight against dengue.

Chairman, Minister Fu shared how the Government is leading our nation's green transition. To succeed in our goal, we will need communities and individuals to step up and step forward. We are committed to partnering the community to foster a more liveable and sustainable society. This is the only way for us to meet our climate goals.

To cultivate a culture of sustainability within the community, my Ministry, together with the Ministry of National Development (MND) and Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY), launched the Green Action for Communities (GAC) movement last year. The nationwide movement brings together community leaders and residents to plan, organise and co-implement sustainability initiatives in their communities to support the Singapore Green Plan.

Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin asked about the support and resources provided for GAC groups. We have held capacity workshops for GAC groups in all five districts and are rolling out localised deep dives where community leaders discuss in smaller groups to formulate plans that best meet the unique needs and conditions of their communities. Residents and volunteers who are passionate about sustainability come together and are empowered to develop their own action plans to rally their communities and champion sustainability initiatives in their neighbourhoods. We have also published a GAC guidebook for GAC groups to look for ideas, funding and partners for sustainability initiatives.

The workshops have been very fruitful with great ideas that meet the community's needs. For example, repairing, proper recycling of e-waste, composting of food waste, having a car-free day and more community involvement in tree-planting activities. I am happy that residents are passionate about rallying communities and spreading the sustainability message in their neighbourhoods.

We will embark on the next phase this year to galvanise community participation in the action plans and showcase some of the key programmes. Residents will be able to contribute their ideas and participate in the programmes.

I thank all community partners for their commitment and passion in driving this movement. I hope we will see many more Community Eco-Days and other green initiatives like what Ms Nadia Samdin and her team have done.

Through MSE's annual Climate Action Week (CAW), we have been working with our partners to encourage communities to take collective climate action towards a sustainable future for Singapore. We are happy to see increasing participation from the People, Private and Public sectors.

Last year's CAW saw over 140 activities organised by 80 partners; the highest numbers since its launch in 2019. The activities, which aimed to increase awareness of and spur action against climate change included community events, workshops, talks, learning journeys, school and youth activities, clean-ups, promotions, and green challenges.

This year, we are excited to rebrand CAW as Go Green SG. This will better reflect the wide range of sustainability initiatives and programmes it encompasses. I urge our People, Private and Public sector partners to join this community movement and organise sustainability-related activities beyond just a week, to rally even more Singaporeans towards a sustainable lifestyle. There will be a wide range of activities for everyone when Go Green SG is launched in early July this year.

As Minister of State Mr Alvin Tan announced, Singapore has been certified as a sustainable urban destination by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council. To strengthen our position as a sustainable urban destination, I am pleased to announce that Go Green SG we will be collaborating closely with the Singapore Tourism Board to showcase to the world the various sustainable experiences that Singapore has to offer. Singaporeans can join international visitors in more lifestyle programming to learn more about sustainability through fun and meaningful immersive experiences.

Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin asked about the SG Eco Fund and engaging youths to encourage more ground-up sustainability initiatives. SG Eco Fund was launched in November 2020 to support ground-up solutions for a greener and more sustainable Singapore. For the most recent grant call, I am pleased to announce that \$2.4 million will be awarded to 77 worthy projects that span various sectors and topics.

Among them, we have a group of students that are using food scraps to breed crickets as an ingredient for making pet food and a project to teach women from vulnerable backgrounds to upcycle unwanted clothing donations into useful items.

Golden Cap Farm, a local startup, will run a pilot programme to collect used coffee grounds from cafes and re-use it as a substrate for growing mushrooms. They will also organise mushroom farm tours and composting workshops.

Social enterprise, Two Glasses, is raising awareness about the impact of fast fashion and overconsumption through its short films and community discussions. They are also developing a counter for people to track new clothing purchased and the number of times they wear each piece of clothing. These aim to encourage a shift in behaviour of overconsumption.

Just from this sampling of projects, we see ideas for food waste used to produce food for either humans or pets and those that evolve around the clothes we wear, stop excessive buying and up-cycle unwanted clothes.

To-date, 182 individuals and organisations have been awarded \$9 million under SG Eco Fund. The range of topics covered by them will help to move us towards our climate and Green Plan goals. More importantly, we see that grant recipients come from all walks of life.

As Prof Koh Lian Pin pointed out, there are various funding schemes besides the SG Eco Fund that enable communities to take action. Each scheme is designed to encourage action with varying thematic or stakeholder considerations and is assessed accordingly.

12.15 pm

As what Prof Koh said so well: "Everyone from every sector has important contributions to make." We need everyone to work together towards a sustainable Singapore. With the various funding support schemes available, we hope that whether you are young or old, an individual or an organisation, you can all play a part to build our green nation.

We all have a shared responsibility in achieving our climate goals. We must come together as a nation to work towards this important and urgent matter. I urge all Singaporeans to join forces on climate action. We must act together now for a greener and more sustainable Singapore.

The Chairman: Clarifications. Ms Poh Li San.

Ms Poh Li San: Thank you, Chairman. I thank Minister Grace Fu and the whole team in MSE for leading the whole nation in this green transition. It is not easy.

I have one question for Minister Grace Fu. She mentioned that Pandan Reservoir will also be expanded to include the floating solar farms. I would like to know, from the Tengeh Reservoir experience, how is biodiversity in the water in the reservoir affected with solar panels.

I have another question for Senior Minister of State Koh. I am heartened to learn about the set-up of the Coastal Protection and Flood Management Research Programme (CFRP) to have an applied research and living lab in NUS. May I know how do we intend to bring in talents to do the research, and also, will we be looking at courses for students at NUS to support this effort?

And the last question is for Senior Parliamentary Secretary Baey. In the fight against dengue, I understand that to expand Project Wolbachia, we have to increase mosquito productions from two million to five million every week. That is a lot of mosquitoes. How do we sustain this effort over the long run? What is MSE's strategy?

Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien: Chairman, I would like to thank Ms Poh for her clarifications.

On Pandan Reservoir, I would like to assure Members that before we embark on the project, we will do the appropriate environmental study, just as we have done for Tengeh, and also for Bedok. It is important for us to take a holistic evaluation on the impact on the environment, and Members, as well as members of the public, can rest assured that PUB will do the right thing of studying before we embark on it.

We had taken care of it when we did Tengeh, situating the solar panels where we are limiting the size, where we think that it is appropriate for the animals and the birds in the area. We will similarly do the same for Pandan Reservoir.

Dr Koh Poh Koon: Sir, I thank Ms Poh Li San for asking for some more details about the CFRP and the Centre of Excellence that we sited in NUS. While NUS may serve as a host for this new set-up, it will be an institution that will involve other institutions of higher learning (IHLs), other research institutions from NTU and the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR) institutions as well.

Plus, there will be an executive committee that comprises some of the experts in this related fields that provide insights and opinions on how best to scale up and grow this particular organisation.

So, with the involvement of more industry partners as well as other IHLs, there will be opportunities then for students in these institutions to involve in some of the R&D work. That is how we build up the talent pipeline. Connections with other international bodies of excellence would then also create another network where we can bring expertise from overseas to scale up and boost the expertise on R&D.

Mr Baey Yam Keng: Sir, I am heartened to hear Ms Poh Li San's interest in Project Wolbachia and how it will be scaled up.

Right now, we are covering about 30% of HDB blocks but just 9% of landed homes; and we already need five million mosquitoes every week. So, imagine if we cover the whole of Singapore, we will easily need about 15 to 20 million mosquitoes a week. So, we need to see how we are able to do this in a cost-effective way, with the large-scale production and release of these mosquitoes in these public areas.

But at the same time, before that, we must also determine scientifically how effective this technology that is being rolled out and whether it is effective at a large scale, across the whole of Singapore. We need to look at the dynamics of the Wolbachia mosquitoes with the wild-type mosquitoes out there, how they survive, how they continue to find the female mosquitoes to mate. And also, how they are released and distributed across the dense urban setting we have in Singapore, both high-rise HDB blocks, including 50 storeys that we have and that we are building, as well as landed property estates.

We need to justify that we are able to use our resources prudently in a cost-effective way so that we can achieve the desired outcome.

I would like ask for Members' patience as NEA, with the Environmental Health Institute, work on studying the different roll-outs that we have so far, establishing the scientific basis of the effectiveness and also getting the resources to scale up production accordingly.

The Chairman: Prof Koh.

Prof Koh Lian Pin: I thank the Minister, the two Senior Ministers of State and Senior Parliamentary Secretary for their responses.

I just have one clarification question. As Singapore pursues our ambition to be a climate services hub, we are seeding our ecosystem of sustainability solutions providers by welcoming and working with international partners. I think it makes a lot of sense to attract the best people and best organisations here quickly, to support us.

At the same time, I would like to hear the Minister's thoughts on what more can we do. How can we ensure that there is sufficient investment and coordination across our public, private and people sectors to nurture world-class sustainability champions, leaders and institutions of our own, to service both Singapore and the global community?

Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien: Chairman, I thank Prof Koh Lian Pin for a very thoughtful question. I totally agree with him about the need to create excellence in Singapore but at the same time have a strong local anchor so that Singaporeans will find exciting career and also will be able to create value as we move towards sustainability.

I think the example that Senior Minister of State Koh Poh Koon has mentioned earlier about the climate protection and flood management centre that we have just announced is a very clear illustration of how we intend to do that. It is a centre that is located in NUS, with strong anchors – not just in NUS but in various IHLs that have capabilities in related issues. It also intends to pull in disciplines from other centres that are related to coastal protection and flood management. For example, if we consider nature-based solutions, then expertise in this area will have to be incorporated.

At the same time, we talked about a living lab where interesting solutions that have worked elsewhere, we need to refine, we need to test and we need to pilot it, to ensure that they are effective in the Singapore context. This is where overseas expertise and local companies can jointly work on such projects, and therefore, anchoring, transferring and absorbing some of these foreign expertise into the local talent pool.

Senior Minister of State Koh Poh Koon has also talked about how we intend to engage students in PhD projects and also in the Masters project to ensure that we have sufficient people in the pipeline to enable us to undertake this project that is going to be massive, that is going to be huge, that is going to be significant and at the same time, it is going to take many decades.

It is going to be a multi-billion-dollar and multi-decade undertaking, just as we have done for the water security story, the coastal protection part of it is going to be a new area where we expect international collaboration, foreign ideas and innovations that we should be open to accept, while at the same time, finding our own local applications that is relevant and cost-effective to us.

I would also like to just refer Members to what has been announced under the MTI COS debate, that a Green Skills Committee will be set up to look at creating greater capabilities and developing more expertise in the areas of sustainability and green economy.

This is a very exciting area. It cuts across many sectors. It is both vertical, like coastal protection; and horizontal, cutting across sustainability, verification and management reporting of carbon emissions. So, there are many opportunities and lots of work ahead of us, and we want to see how we can bring greater coordination between the public, private and people sectors.

Miss Cheryl Chan Wei Ling: Thank you, Chairman. I have two clarifications.

The first one is for Senior Minister of State Amy Khor. I am glad that Senior Minister of State Khor has told us that the rentals do not make up the bulk of the cost and prices of cooked food for the stalls in hawker centres. I think she mentioned that it is only about 9%. But the challenge will be for the many people who are out there, they will now think, are the hawkers now profiteering as a result of it?

I believe most hawkers are not and they are just trying to earn a decent living. Can Senior Minister of State Khor share a little bit more. Apart from what we already know, how we can ensure that price increase of cooked food in future does not outpace the inflation rate that is in the market? For all the cooked-food stalls that are under the direct rental with NEA, will NEA consider asking them to at least provide a budget meal in some form or the other, even though they are not the Socially-conscious Enterprise Hawker Centres?

The second clarification is for Senior Minister of State Khor. I am very heartened that she shared all the plans for the aquaculture. They are very good because they consider all the different aspects within the ecosystem. But as we all know, R&D efforts also take time to translate into commercialisation. Given now that the runway to 2030 is not very long, how confident are we that all these will be able to meet the targets that we set for 2030?

Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan: Let me thank the Member for a very useful clarification on the rentals at hawker centres. As I have said, based on our last survey in October 2022, rentals form about 9% of the hawkers' total operating cost. The main operating cost is the cost of food ingredients. It is about 57% and then the next is manpower cost. Rental comes third.

Having said that, we are mindful that we must create a good environment for the hawkers, making sure that the rents are fair but not speculative. This is the reason why we have done away with reserved rent, so that people can bid for as low as \$1. In fact, we do have we do have rentals at \$2 a month. Individuals bid according to what they think they can pay and the competition, and so on.

We have also done away with subletting and assignment so that you remove this real estate play from hawker stall rentals. For our new Socially-conscious Enterprise Hawker Centres (SEHCs), we have a staggered rental scheme. So, for the first two years, the stallholders do not pay the full rental. It is 80%, 90%; and then, in the third year 100%.

During the pandemic, and even during repairs and redecoration works, if disruptions are over a prolonged period, we give rental waivers and so on. And we also give rebates for S&CC and so on, when centres are closed for upgrading.

This is how we try and keep the rentals reasonable and not speculative, to help the hawkers. I hope that that helps to clarify that when I say rental is 9%, it does not mean the hawkers are profiteering because there are other costs involved, which are even higher.

With regard to asking whether for existing hawker stalls which are tendered out, do we then want to ask them to provide budget meals? Actually, our survey showed even now, prices of hawker food in our hawker centres are generally lower than those in the other comparable food establishments within the vicinity, like coffee shops and so on.

12.30 pm

And indeed, whilst you asked this, there are some people who perceive that SEHC hawker food is higher priced. But, basically, when you look at it, they are comparable. I think that competition would help, because hawkers will price according to what they think the market can take – the patron demographics, as well as their cost structure, the location and so on.

So, I think hawkers do that. Our surveys have shown that they are reasonable. Mr Singh also asked whether we can build one in Marina Bay because he thinks that the hawker centres' hawker food is much more reasonable.

Mr Chairman: Mr Louis Ng. Minister Koh Poh Koon.

Dr Koh Poh Koon: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I thank Miss Chan for asking this important question that I am sure must be on the minds of many Singaporeans, after we have gone through the disruptions of some of our supplies during COVID-19.

First, I must say that our "30 by 30" goal, is a stretch target. Today, we import 90% of the food we consume, so we do have a lot of headroom that we need to make up for.

Unfortunately, the two years of COVID-19 disruption has also caused many of our farm projects to be delayed, especially those who are in the midst of trying to start their construction in the midst of COVID-19. Delays in raw materials, delay in supplies, curtailment of work by foreign workers unable to work because of COVID-19 – all these have caused at least about one to two years of delay in the implementation plan. But when you talk to the farming community, they are committed to try and increase the production, and increase our food resilience.

As I said in my speech, what is important also is to make sure that as they produce more, Singaporeans are prepared to consume more of local produce. There must be a demand for the produce.

Many of our farmers actually can produce more, but they have hesitancy doing so, not knowing whether the market can absorb the produce. Which is why I think it is important for all of us to buy our collective insurance – we need to support more local produce, so that you give a signal and encouragement to our farmers to do more production.

In reaching our "30 by 30" target – which is a stretch goal, as I said – but it is also a journey. I think we are trying our very best, resourcing our farmers with funding, helping them with technology adoption. We have seen some early success of this, where some of our fish farms, for example, are taking on more productive methods using recirculating aquaculture systems: floating on the sea, rather than just using the seawater as it is, but filtering and actually creating a more conducive environment within the tanks for the fish to be grown in a more dense manner, yet kept in a very safe and very humane way to allow the tonnage to be much more intense.

By using a recirculating aquaculture system, for example, the productivity and the yield can be up to 10 or 15 times more than an sea open cage. And I think if more of our farms adopt such productive technologies, we will be closer to hitting our "30 by 30" target. Today, we have three egg farms and a fourth one on the way. We are able to probably close the gap and meet 30% of our egg requirements in Singapore. But for vegetables and fish, we do need more Singaporeans to support consumption, so that we can ramp up.

And the Alliances for Action (AfA) that we have just announced will, hopefully, be able to shape our consumers and our B2B relationship with our farms to increase off-take and increase consumption, so that together, we build ourselves towards that resilience we desire.

Mr Speaker: Mr Louis Ng.

Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang: Thank you, Sir. I thank Minister for the good news about the green procurement, the disposable carrier bag charge. Could I ask whether we have a timeline in terms of when we will expand the green procurement practices and the disposable bag charge? And whether the Ministry will consider publishing a roadmap for these expansions, similar to what we have done for our carbon tax?

Second, I am sure Senior Minister of State Amy Khor did not do this on purpose, but she did not respond to my cuts on second-hand smoke. Could I ask her whether we can do a public consultation or set up a citizens workgroup to tackle this issue of second-hand smoke?

Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien: Mr Chairman, we expected Mr Louis Ng to ask "what's next?", even as and when we announce the first step. I would just like to assure Members that we would definitely want to go as fast as possible.

Focusing on our target of 2030 and realising that green procurement has its impact of expanding the introduction of new, more environmentally friendly products and services; and also, hopefully, as a pathfinder, introduce more technologies and introducing scale, so that we can help to bring down the costs of such products and services. So, we are very mindful about the impact that we can play.

But at the same time, I think several Members in the House, Mr Chairman, have also asked that we do it in a way that is inclusive, so that all our companies, our SMEs are also brought along this journey.

Balancing the pace is a bit like the Goldilocks problem – not too hot, not too cold, just right.

We should not go too slowly, but neither should we go too quickly, but we should do it just right. We will take the lessons learned from the first tranche that we will be implementing. Members can be assured that we will want to go as quickly as we can.

Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan: Let me take the first question on disposable carrier bag charge.

I have just announced that we are going to start charging on 3 July 2023, Monday. So, we have not even started. But having said that, the issue is not about charging for disposable carrier bags. The idea of doing this is to nudge a change in behaviour, to get people to think more before they take that bag, to reduce their use; and if possible, even not to use it.

You are talking about small little bags, why do you need to use it? Put in the pocket, put in the bag, your handbag and so on, and you do not actually need. So, the idea is to nudge a change in behaviour.

If indeed, once we start this, there is a significant change in behaviour, then there is no need to expand it because people will change their behaviour automatically, they will not take the bags if they do not need to. And also, other organisations may follow suit in charging for bags just to help nudge behaviour. So, I think we need to monitor and do not jump the gun.

I also want to thank the Member for asking a clarification on second-hand smoke. Thank you, indeed, because frankly, I ran out of time. And it was not my pet subject, so I had to choose. *[Laughter.]* Yes, but thank you, now I can continue with the rest of my speech.

Mr Chairman: Sounds like "kelong". *[Laughter.]*

Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan: Mr Louis Ng was suggesting setting up a citizens workgroup to study this issue of second-hand smoke in homes. The key challenge in this matter is in enforcing against second-hand smoke in homes, if we want to do it.

And the challenges are, as we have already said, but I will repeat it again: technological constraints and privacy concerns, to collect clear and Court-admissible evidence of smoking in homes, whether it is at the balconies or windows, and by identifiable individuals. And this makes enforcement difficult.

So, I think we cannot resolve this issue simply by just setting up a citizens workgroup, in order to get the group to discuss about the issue of second-hand smoke. What is important is we need to be able to find or identify that technological means to enforce it.

Therefore, we currently have no plans to set up such a workgroup. But as I have said before, and it is worth repeating again – we are monitoring technologies in this area to see whether we can utilise anything to strengthen enforcement possibilities.

And as I have also noted, just two days ago, that we have also been working on upstream efforts, multi-Ministry. So, the Ministry of Finance (MOF) increased tax on tobacco, we hope that that will help to further reduce smoking prevalence, smoking initiation, and encourage smoking cessation. And many other legislative and policy measures that we put in. If we reduce smoking prevalence, the second-hand tobacco smoke issue will also be addressed.

Mr Chairman: Ms Hany Soh.

Ms Hany Soh: Thank you, Chairman. I have three supplementary questions, two is for Senior Minister of State Amy Khor. I am heartened to hear about the plans to be rolled out on the International E-Waste Day, which is in October. But apart from that, could NEA also look into how the three Ps can come together, to increase awareness in other aspects.

For example, the World Environment Day in June, and coming up very soon, the Global Recycling Day on 18 March, so that we can encourage more active recycling and for the community to collectively take the lead to further reduce the contamination rate of our recyclables.

The second question is on the charging for plastic bags. During Marsiling-Yew Tee GRC's Green Action Communities deep dive, one of the suggestions is actually to explore how the community can collaborate with supermarkets to incentivise and encourage Bring Your Own Bag (BYOB) initiatives. So, how can the Ministry facilitate to link up the community and these supermarkets, so as to organise more of such green sustainable initiatives.

Thirdly, for Senior Parliamentary Secretary Baey, in relations to the Project Wolbachia, I understand that it has been rolled out and it is intended to ramp up to more HDB blocks and also landed homes. Can I also clarify that whether we are also exploring, if we have sufficient numbers, to release it to the private condominiums as well, as during the peak periods. For example, in Wood Grove, I have seven condominiums, there is actually a cluster for these condominiums.

Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan: I thank the Member for her suggestions. Indeed, we can work with the grassroots, the local advisors, as well as to via the Green Action for Communities programme, which Senior Parliamentary Secretary Baey was talking about, in order to look at outreach and education efforts, as well as increasing awareness about recycle and nudging people to adopt such green habits. So, we can do so. We have got our NEA officers on the ground too, and we can work to this as well as through the Green Action for Communities programme.

With regards to supermarket operators, we are already engaging the supermarket operators. I have just announced that all the supermarket operators have already agreed that they are going to use the proceeds from the bag charge for environmental and social causes. And one of them could be giving out reusable bags to the community, to encourage them to use that.

Mr Baey Yam Keng: I thank Ms Hany Soh for the question. Indeed, I think for us to cover all residential premises, private condominiums will be part of it. And we will need to work with the Management Corporation Strata Titles (MCSTs) because we need access to the premises. Currently, we are looking at releases twice a week. So, we will need such a collaboration with MCSTs and the condominium residents.

But at the moment, we are looking at how we can put our resources to bring benefits to more people. Therefore, HDB estates will be our primary interest, because with that, we are able to scale-up, hopefully we can scale-up and then protect more people from dengue. Let us take one step at a time; but certainly, the condominium residents would be on our radar screen as well.

Mr Chairman: Mr Louis Ng, you may wish to withdraw your amendment?

Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang: Sir, the work of MSE is a very diverse and very important one. It covers the food we eat, the environment we live in, the water we drink and, of course, the future of humankind, in terms of protecting our planet and fighting climate change. And I did not forget and did not run out of time – the air we breathe, second-hand smoke as well.

I know I ask some difficult questions, especially to Senior Minister of State Amy, but since she says she is immune to it, we can continue. But I want to record my sincere appreciation for the hard work by all the office holders, the team and staff members at MSE, NEA, PUB, SFA. Thank you for all your hard work.

I thank all the Members of Parliament who have spoken up as well, to question our policies, to make our policies better, and I should also record our thanks to Chairman and the team at Parliament, for greening Parliament. For again, ending the use of disposable cups, for turning up the air-con temperature, so we sweat it out as we debate here – all in the spirit of cutting our emissions.

And I hope, Chairman, will note that I am the first Government Parliamentary Committee (GPC) to thank you in the wrap-up speech. But you should take note of me as Louis Ng, not Louis Chua. [*Laughter.*] With that, Sir, I beg leave to withdraw my amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

The sum of \$2,432,080,200 for Head L ordered to stand part of the Main Estimates.

The sum of \$1,056,918,300 for Head L ordered to stand part of the Development Estimates.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY – HEAD T (MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)

(An inclusive and sustainable home)

The Chairman: Head T, Ministry of National Development. Miss Cheryl Chan.

12.45 pm

Home Ownership at Different Life Stages

Miss Cheryl Chan Wei Ling (East Coast): Chairman, I beg to move, "That the total sum to be allocated for Head T of the Estimates to be reduced by \$100".

The recent public housing Motion and conclusion of the Budget debate saw a very vigorous discussion in the House with the Budget providing assurances and pledging more support to ensuring affordability and accessibility to public housing. Several Parliamentary colleagues sought more details on the support to be rendered and offering suggestions for consideration to address the intricate issue of housing affordability and accessibility on the long run.

12.45 pm

With Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong outlining that more help would be given to first-timer families with children by giving them an additional ballot for their Build-To-Order (BTO) flat applications, can the Housing and Development Board (HDB) provide more details how they intend to help first-timers who plan to start their families soon after settling down and first-timers with children to achieve a better chance at securing a BTO flat? This is a matter not just about encouraging birth rates. Instead, it is about giving clarity to young families so they can better plan their lives around their careers, where to live after marriage and how to find the appropriate caregiving support for their children and parents as family sizes shrinks.

Sir, when we think of home ownership, I cannot help but feel the need to consider this topic at different life stages. Many of us today have the benefit of living with our parents when we are fresh out of school and not worry about it until we are of certain age or begin our lives with our better half.

Yet, times have clearly changed. Our society now faces new demands, changing trends and aspirations whereby young adults want their own independence or shared spaces soon after graduating. Young families requiring more space to cope with work from home and their children want to have their own rooms while growing up. More seniors are seeing empty nests after their children have their own homes and the seniors increasingly find it difficult to upkeep their existing homes as they age but are unsure if they can indeed enjoy the new home that they right-size to.

So, what do we do with these changing needs? I wish to raise a few suggestions for MND's consideration in future housing supply and new builds.

First, more 4- or 5- room or larger flats and reduce 3-room flats in new precincts for a specified period of housing supply.

As more young families aspire to upgrade or move to larger units over time, would it not be more suitable for them to obtain a larger unit from the start and live in it for a longer period? This way, the market demand will not increase on a cyclical basis and the minimum occupation period (MOP) can be increased to curb near term price increase which is inevitable in every sale.

Families will have more stability in anchoring their lives around a neighbourhood, as over time, there will be less distinction between mature and non-mature estates with better transportation networks and more infrastructures available in new towns. Further, the resale market for 3-room flats can be sustained for those who require and be kept more affordable without competing with the new BTOs' supply. Such supply builds will be done for a specified period and reviewed regularly to monitor its impact over a decade.

Second, allow singles to share or rent flats that is directly from HDB for flats that will undergo Voluntary Early Redevelopment Scheme (VERS).

While there are no details around VERS now, we know that many flats built in the 1970s to early 1980s would fall in this category in the coming decade or so. The need to shift current cohort of VERS flat owners to new flats meant more land and more new builds are required regardless of the size. Singles and families who rent from the open market will also further add to this demand even without any significant increase in our total country's population.

Despite the trend of more singles or people marrying at a later age, singles will not form the majority of our society and people who do eventually settle down when the timing and factors are right. Thus, the large bulk of this demand is transient and may actually better cater to the needs of those who require them for several years till they enter the next stage of their lives.

Today, rental flats are only made available to the low-income group while those who wish to rent or have interim housing need to rely on flats that HDB have on hand. If HDB plans to tear down the VERS flats in phases to free the land for different purposes, why not consider making such flats available for rental by singles or on sharing basis without having the age limit pegged to 35 years of age as that remains for singles who wish to own their flats?

Third, new variety of flats for seniors who right-size.

Today, seniors who right-size appear to have a preference for some type of flats. Those from the private housing generally purchase 5-room or Executive Apartment (EA) resale flats and those who moved from the HDB flat would choose a 2-room Flexi or 3-room resale flats. Nonetheless, 2-room Flexi flats still mean new supply must be placed in the market. I wish to ask Minister whether the take-up rate for the Silver Housing Bonus has been encouraging.

For seniors who are looking for flat options to right-size or to live in community assisted care apartments, is it possible for HDB to refurbish and re-configure existing blocks of flats to allow better caregiving needs and active ageing in place instead of having nursing homes? Of course, HDB has to assess the structural stability of infrastructure and economics taken into consideration to decide if alteration of existing units or new builds of such units would make more sense. Can Minister also share what are HDB plans to better support the needs of our seniors?

Question proposed.

The Affordable Homes Scheme

Mr Leong Mun Wai (Non-Constituency Member): Mr Chairman, the Progress Singapore Party (PSP) has recommended the Affordable Homes Scheme (AHS) and the Millennial Apartments Scheme to deliver affordable and accessible public housing to Singaporeans of current and future generations. I am sure Singaporeans will be excited to be able to buy a new flat in Tengah \$140,000 under the AHS and live in it for their entire lives without having to pay land cost, instead of paying \$350,000 under the current BTO scheme.

The lower housing cost under AHS will allow Singaporeans to afford housing without depleting their Central Provident Fund (CPF) savings. They can look forward to a comfortable retirement and no longer need to worry about the ups and downs of the resale market, the lease decay and the ever-changing policies of the Government.

The Government must admit that the current housing system has reached its limits. The Minister has argued that the main problem is temporary short supply. But the biggest problem we face is actually ever-increasing BTO prices. BTO prices would hit \$1 million soon. What will be the BTO price in 20 years' time? Future generations will have to constantly worry about BTO prices.

On the other hand, the AHS will ensure that every Singaporean of each generation will be able to afford an HDB flat because he pays only the construction cost and not the land cost. The land cost is waived because public housing is considered a public good. This is the most equitable way of distributing the benefits of our land to Singaporeans.

The AHS also continues to offer Singaporeans the choice of making a profit from his flat by selling in the resale market. However, to be fair to other Singaporeans, he will need to repay the deferred land cost with accrued interest to the Government upon the sale of his flat. Therefore, whether a Singaporean buys a 4-room BTO flat in Tengah \$350,000 or the same flat for \$148,000 under AHS, he will need to sell it at about \$700,000 in order to make a profit after 25 years.

For the BTO flat, it is for recouping the loan servicing cost. And for the AHS flat, it is for paying the deferred land cost. The deferred land cost feature prevents the AHS owner from profiteering from selling his flat. This also prevents the AHS owners from affecting the resale market.

Overwhelmed by the value proposition of the AHS, the Government has tried to frighten Singaporeans into thinking that the PSP is going to cause a crash in resale flat prices with our policy proposals. But this is just a red herring.

In the short term, it is a policy intent of AHS to cause a slight adjustment in the current surging resale market so as to enable keen buyers to get their flats at a more reasonable price. That will be healthy after recent market exuberance. However, the resale price will recover in the long term because fewer AHS owners are likely to sell as they can live in the flat throughout their life without paying for the land cost.

Furthermore, there will also be support for the resale market from the backlog of first-timer demand. In addition, buyers who are ineligible for new flats, buyers who want to live in a specific location because they want to live near their parents, permanent residents and upgraders form a large pool of demand that will underpin the resale market which is still much cheaper than the private property market. The AHS will not require excessive fiscal resources to implement. Most of the land cost forgone at the beginning is recoverable from the deferred land cost later. Effectively, we will only defer our reserved accumulation.

Singaporeans may ask if all these are too good to be true and where is the caveat. There is actually no caveat. And all these are possible because the Government has acquired the land from the 1970s to the 1980s at zero or nominal cost. We only need our rich "ah gong" to agree to do more for Singaporeans. Singaporeans deserve better, for country, for people.

Resale Affordability for First-timers

Mr Xie Yao Quan (Jurong): Chairman, I welcome, the Government's move to increase the housing grant for first-timers buying a resale flat. However, could the Ministry share its assessment of whether or how this might drive up resale prices even more. And I know the Ministry has put out the statement and Deputy Prime Minister Wong has also touched on this in his round-up speech in the Budget debate. But could the Ministry share a fuller assessment? Could the Ministry also share further details about why the increase in grants is sized at \$30,000 for a 4-room or smaller flat or \$10,000 for a 5-room flat? What is the estimated fiscal impact of this increase in grants?

HDB Commercial Rules and Outdoor Display Areas Management

Mr Pritam Singh (Aljunied): Sir, HDB town centres are hive of activity, particularly on weekends. HDB retail shop fronts near commercial centres close to MRT stations and major infrastructure enjoy high footfall. The same cannot be said for all HDB retail shops, particularly those in smaller or more isolated HDB commercial areas.

Over the last few years, an itinerant industry of shopfront traders have emerged, particularly in smaller commercial areas, moving from place to place and securing outdoor display areas or outdoor display areas (ODAs) space directly from shop owners or lessees for a few hours each day.

The HDB Commercial department rules currently require that commercial shops are required to display the same trade items in their respective ODAs. This is a legacy rule. Today, however, it is not uncommon to see this particular rule generally disregarded with some ODAs rented and sublet out to itinerant traders for a few hours each day.

I would imagine that one of the ostensible purposes for HDB Commercial department to establish the rule against the display of dissimilar ODA goods would be to ensure that there is not an excess of one type of trade in the area where a broad range of goods and services are usually available.

While the number of itinerant traders can be small and constantly varies, they do raise accusations of unfair competition amongst some HDB commercial and retail shop owners and lessees who: one, adhere to the rules and do not sublet their ODA; and two, display the same items in the ODAs as they do in their shops.

For their part, Town Councils extend the use of ODA to shopkeepers and lessees and have powers to revoke ODAs if necessary. When such powers are used in keeping with the spirit of the HDB Commercial rule that ODAs are only to be used for the display of similar trade items that are found in the shops, some itinerant traders and the lessees or owners of the shops that sublet their ODA questioned why such rules are not enforced in other commercial areas where they operate as well.

I would like to inquire if the expectations of HDB commercial towards Town Councils in enforcing the rules and the approaches to the management of the ODA regarding the display of items are consistent in all areas where there are HDB commercial and retail shops, such as town centres. Does the HDB entertain exceptions to the aforesaid rules that can be sought with the approval of the HDB Commercial section to allow itinerant traders to sell their goods at the ODAs? That could be some reasons for this. For example, in view of a possible imbalance of shops in a typical area or because of the limited variety of shops in a commercial area or simply to encourage vibrancy. I would be grateful for some clarity in this regard.

1.00 pm

Building Strong Social Compact

Mr Liang Eng Hwa (Bukit Panjang): Sir, while we do have commercial shopping centres at HDB towns, heartland shops at neighbourhoods do play an essential role to offer convenient services and at affordable prices.

The rents for these shops tend to be lower than those at shopping centres and the shops are often run by residents who live around there or are familiar faces. It adds vibrancy, character and identity to the place.

These market places can also be a conducive environment for new entrepreneurs who may wish to try out a small startup or to test-bed their business ideas. Hence, I am very happy to hear of the Heartland Innovation and Transformation Programme announced at the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI)'s COS this year.

It is important to keep the barrier to entry low in these heartland locations so that entrepreneurship can flourish in these neighbourhood settings and also serve the local community and beyond. So, can I ask what is the Ministry of National Development (MND) or HDB's thinking on encouraging innovative startups as well as social enterprises to set up at heartland commercial precincts?

To do this, we also need to further refresh the shop spaces in the heartlands. Can I ask if MND will look into enhancing the Revitalisation of Shops (ROS) scheme to upgrade the shops and to inject new vibrancy? If yes, can I take this opportunity to also register my interest for Bukit Panjang? We have a vibrant heartland market at Bangkit and it is most ideal for an enhanced ROS. So, for MND's consideration.

F&B and Retail Options in Existing Towns

Mr Chua Kheng Wee Louis (Sengkang): The rising cost of living and uncertain economic outlook have made Singaporeans more cost conscious about their food options, which makes hawker centres, with their eclectic mix of delicious local food at affordable prices, the preferred places for meals for most. However, given the uneven distribution of hawker centres around Singapore, some Singaporeans are, unfortunately, disadvantaged on this front.

Some interesting statistics which I found, based on NEA's list of hawker centres as at December, there are, currently, 118 hawker centres in Singapore, 27 directly managed by NEA, 80 by Town Councils (TCs), 10 by private operators and one is not in operation.

It appears that, on the one hand, Jalan Besar and Tanjong Pagar have a disproportionately higher number of hawker centres per division while, on the other hand, Choa Chu Kang and Sengkang TCs do not have any hawker centres within their boundaries.

There is no real justification for some locations having a lot more hawker centres than others. As they are a key feature of Singapore's unique culture and heritage and are Singaporeans' preferred daily go-to place for affordable food, they should be built in every town centre. Hawker centres, like HDB shops, not only make heartland living vibrant, they also support small local businesses run by and employing residents living nearby.

Hawker centres directly managed by NEA should be central to the planning of new estates and built ahead of demand in new estates. Pioneering hawkers should be charged lower rents prior to demand building up and reassessed based on traffic and tenants' sales progress. This would be fair to the first few batches of residents and hawkers in new towns. Stall leases should be awarded on the basis of retail diversity and the range of prices, among others.

In my HDB (Amendment) Bill speech earlier this year, I called for the Government to not forget neighbourhoods, such as Sengkang, which do not have the benefit of the convenience and rich diversity of having heartland shops in close proximity to our homes. As advised by Senior Minister of State Sim Ann back then, I had since written to HDB on this matter and I look forward to hearing from HDB and working closely with the team on the low retail and food options within the existing precincts of Sengkang.

The Chairman: Mr Xie Yao Quan, your three cuts together, please.

Nurturing Startups in Our Heartlands

Mr Xie Yao Quan (Jurong): Sir, heartland shops with brands that tend to be lower than at private commercial locales could provide a conducive environment for new businesses to start up and test ideas. Could MND do more to attract startups to set up shops in our heartland commercial precincts?

Heartland Shops for Social Good

Also, under the current Social Enterprise Scheme, HDB offers commercial spaces at subsidised rent to raise registered social enterprises. Could MND update on the uptake and does it have plans to further enhance the initiative?

Sir, I imagine that many youths would be interested to work in these startups and social enterprises in our heartlands. And I can imagine, too, a broader youth-driven microeconomy in each of our HDB neighbourhoods, if we can couple these heartland enterprises with co-living facilities in the heartlands and allow youths working in the heartlands to also play and live together. And HDB does not have to do this by itself.

As Senior Minister of State Tan Kiat How had noted, there is, today, a vibrant market with multiple commercial players. So, HDB can partner private operators, but set standards, including in pricing and affordability, and take the lead in developing the market for essentially short-term flexible rental for youths by way of co-living arrangements in heartland locations.

More Housing Options for Singles

Sir, I have another suggestion to better help singles own their homes. To be clear, I think the current eligible age for singles for both BTO and resale flats is appropriate and should remain. Nonetheless, we can do more to help singles 35 and above to own their BTO flats.

Today, singles can buy two-room flexi flats in non-mature estates. I hope the Government will also allow singles to buy 3-room BTOs in non-mature estates. Indeed, if we could be even bolder, why not 2-room and 3-room BTOs for singles in mature estates, too, especially after the supply crunch abates?

This would likely increase the overall demand for 3-room BTOs, but it is part of evolving our balance and, to strike a balance, we could preserve the supply currently set aside for first-timer families.

Improving Current BTO Model

Mr Chua Kheng Wee Louis: Chairman, in my cut last year, I called for the Government to build a larger percentage of HDB stock ahead of demand. During the housing debate earlier this year, my hon friend Leon Perera mooted this idea as well, recognising that if we can build industrial facilities ahead of demand, can we not also build residential homes ahead of demand?

I do appreciate Minister Desmond Lee's assurance that HDB is planning to launch more shorter waiting time flats of around 2,000 to 3,000 flats per year by 2025. However, this is, essentially, at similar levels to the number of such flats launched in the last five years, ranging from 1,096 in 2018 to 2,850 in 2020, representing a mere 7% to 18% of BTO supply in each year.

We all recognise that long waiting times are not just an inconvenience but seriously affect Singaporeans' life plans, such as causing young couples to delay starting a family. Beyond addressing the near-term demand-supply imbalance, I believe it is time for us to have a fundamental rethink of the BTO system.

Someone shared with me a blog post by a certain Prof Ben Leong which I agree with, and I quote, "Having excess flats is actually a feature and not a bug. It just means that if some Singaporeans want to get married and want a new house straightaway, there is a house available!", and he goes on further to say, "To me, BTO is the real culprit behind our uncontrolled fire".

Even if the hybrid approach I proposed entails a small risk of marginal excess supply, this would strengthen the security of supply of HDB flats, making us more resilient to potential supply-side shocks, as we have seen in the wake of COVID-19.

Most importantly, any such risk of marginal excess supply would be worthwhile taking to achieve the social need to reduce average BTO wait times and, in turn, support Singaporeans in charting their lives and starting new families.

Communal and Co-living Housing

Ms Carrie Tan (Nee Soon): Mr Chairman, communes and co-living are housing formats where people come together to live, share their resources and responsibilities for fostering mutual support. We can optimise our land used for housing with these two concepts.

An example is "mommune" – a commune for mums. This model exists in both Japan and Hong Kong where single mothers and their children live together as a large communal family. They pool their domestic and childcare-related resources to reduce the economic burdens of single parenthood. By splitting chores, finances and babysitting duties, single parents have more bandwidth to explore enriching experiences to benefit their children. We should explore this model and apply it to other groups which need extra support to manage their day-to-day lives, such as families with special needs children and members who are persons with disability.

Co-living can be for singles. Co-living apartments can be built for people to have their own private rooms but share common spaces, such as pantry, kitchen, living room and laundry space. This creates physical social interaction opportunities for a generation of people who have grown more used to online interaction. For all we know, it may also improve our marriage rates!

Private companies, such as Hamlet and Cove, already offer co-living options near the city, albeit at a premium price. Why not have it available as public housing, too, for young adults to access lower priced housing on short leases, while living amongst their peer groups with similar lifestyle preferences? At the same time, we can co-locate these singles' precincts with community care apartments for the elderly and communes for various needs families – creating convenient opportunities for them to volunteer near their homes. Ground-up initiatives, in the likes of Kampung Kakis and SG Assist, have shown that Singaporeans love to help out and they love to help out conveniently.

Young entrepreneurs can also be given spaces in these localities to offer new products and services, creating a space for social entrepreneurship and business incubation.

We have the opportunity at the Paya Lebar Airbase development to pilot these models and a new way forward for Singapore's housing. I urge the Government agencies working on this project to explore these suggestions and consult interested Singaporeans with relevant experience in these fields to advance these ideas.

Unpegging Home Loan Rates from CPF Ordinary Account Rates

Mr Chua Kheng Wee Louis: Chairman, in November last year, I asked the Minister for National Development if the funds obtained by HDB to issue housing loans are derived from CPF and whether the Government can consider to unpeg the HDB concessionary interest rate for housing loans from the prevailing CPF Ordinary Account (OA) interest rate and, if not, why not.

As it turns out, the funds obtained by HDB to issue housing loans are from the Development Fund, not CPF. Consequently, it is MOF that provides these funds to HDB and sets them at the prevailing CPF OA rate.

I understand the rationale for the HDB to impose a spread of 0.10% above the OA rate to recover HDB's cost of administering loans. But the bigger issue is, rather than being dogmatic about pegging the HDB concessionary interest rate at 0.10% above the prevailing CPF OA interest rate, can MOF and, in turn, HDB and MND not make the call to segregate the two distinct roles of the OA savings rate and the HDB loan rate?

As I have raised in my cuts to MOM, the CPF Board's assessment of the major local banks' interest rate to be at 0.52% for the period November 2022 to January 2023 appears unrealistically low, given the realities of the deposit environment of the local banks today, and does not reflect economic reality.

Singaporeans are rightly concerned that if the OA rates do somehow rise in future, then there could be higher home loan rates as well, given this peg. However, given that MND has made it abundantly clear that the funds obtained by HDB to issue housing loans are from the Development Fund, not CPF, can we not let the concerns around the home loan peg hold us back from the correct decision of providing for both mortgage stability and certainty and also retirement adequacy for Singaporeans?

Managing Cost of Living through MND Policies

Mr Kwek Hian Chuan Henry (Kebun Baru): Chairman, MND has a variety of policies – proximity housing grants, affordable neighborhood centres, affordable interest rates – that contribute to an affordable cost of living for Singaporeans. Nevertheless, we are experiencing a prolonged increase in cost of living over the last few years. Are there more that MND, in concert with other Ministries, can use to do mitigate rising prices?

For example, HDB has modified the criterion for selecting coffee shop operators in recent years, where affordable pricing is also an important consideration. Can HDB share more about the success of this initiative, and whether more can be done for other HDB shops?

Is there more that HDB can do to ensure that HDB interest rates remain affordable and that more Singaporeans, especially freelancers, platform workers as well as micro-SME owners, can benefit from HDB's low interest rates? And can HDB share whether there are any additional plans to manage cost of living?

Affordability and Loan Delinquency

Ms Hazel Poa (Non-Constituency Member): Mr Chairman, loan delinquency provides another angle to look at affordability. What is the historical delinquency rate of loans taken to buy HDB flats, with breakdown by loans from HDB and private financial institutions, for the last 30 years? Is there any discernible trend?

Specifically, in the past three years, with breakdown by flat type, how many HDB flats were behind in payments, how many were eventually taken back by HDB and, for those flats taken back by HDB, what is the maximum and minimum number of months they have been in arrears and where are the families staying now? Were they settled in rental flats or other shelters? How much of their earlier payments do they get back? Do they get back the full amount paid plus accrued interest?

Affordable, Accessible and Inclusive HDB Flats

Mr Zhulkarnain Abdul Rahim (Chua Chu Kang): Mr Chairman, in my Budget debate speech, I talked about the sentiments of young first-timer applicants and how we can tweak the HDB balloting process to achieve equitable outcomes. We need to provide affordable and accessible housing to all segments of society.

How is HDB going to help first-timers starting their families and first-timers with children to achieve a better chance at securing a BTO flat?

On public housing rental, can MND give an update on the Joint Singles Scheme-Operator Run (JSS-OR) pilot that was rolled out in end 2021 as an alternative option to the Joint Singles Scheme (JSS) for singles in public rental, and whether there are plans to expand the pilot to more sites?

On seniors, how many seniors have successfully taken up the Silver Housing Bonus (SHB) and how is MND going to continue supporting seniors looking to right-size and monetise their flats?

Open Market Rental Affordability

Mr Chua Kheng Wee Louis: Back in January this year, I asked MND whether the Government would consider providing a time-limited rental subsidy for rental flat applicants who qualify for the Parenthood Provisional Housing Scheme (PPHS) and Public Rental Scheme (PRS) respectively, provided that they are unable to find alternative temporary housing arrangements and have been unsuccessful in obtaining a flat from HDB after a pre-defined time period.

In the replies to many of my residents' unsuccessful appeals to HDB, the open market appears to be HDB's catch-all solution to those who have been unsuccessful in meeting their housing needs. Whether it is for those who qualify for, but are unsuccessful in obtaining a PPHS or PRS, those who are lucky enough to qualify for one but face long wait times or those who are not successful or successful in their BTO flat application.

1.15 pm

Yet, for various reasons, largely relating to the current demand and supply situation, open market rentals have continued to soar, and are increasingly out of many Singaporeans' budgets. As it is, the qualifying criteria for the PPHS and PRS schemes are very stringent. So, I do hope the Government can reconsider my suggestion to maintain open market rental affordability.

Mr Gan Thiam Poh (Ang Mo Kio): Chairman. The Public Rental Scheme (PRS) provides a roof over the heads of Singaporeans who have problems affording their own homes. Would MND share an update on the Joint Singles Scheme-Operator Run (JSS-OR) pilot that was launched at the end of 2021 to provide an addition option to the Joint Singles Scheme (JSS) for single persons? How effective has this scheme been so far?

HDB Rental Housing

Ms Sylvia Lim (Aljunied): Chairman. During last month's debates on HDB housing, it was acknowledged by MND that some families were not ready to buy HDB flats as they first needed to build up their finances. There are also other families who used to own flats, but due to disruptions such as divorce or business failure, ended up losing their homes. HDB rental housing is a valued option for such families and individuals. From what I have seen from my Meet-the-People Sessions, the demand for rental housing is very high.

HDB's eligibility criteria for rental flats are understandably strict. Most applicants must have household incomes of not more than \$1,500 per month. Singles must be aged 35 or older before they can apply to co-share with another tenant. If one is approved, the waiting time for allocation of flats is about eight months. The sizes of the flats available under the Public Rental Scheme (PRS) are restricted to one-room flats and two-room flats.

From my observations, these parameters lead to hardship on two fronts.

First, the economics. A household earning above \$1,500 to say, \$2,500 may not be able to afford other housing options. Rentals in the open market are unaffordable. As for purchasing a flat, much depends on one's CPF savings, age and ability to work.

Secondly, living conditions. Rental blocks have many more flat units. Though the flats may be small, this does not translate into smaller household sizes. The small size of flats means that families may be not able to confine their belongings to the unit itself, resulting in possessions being placed along the common corridors, affecting the living environment and becoming potential fire hazards.

I note that HDB's recent initiatives to improve living conditions. It has been announced that there will be improvements in lighting and ventilation of new rental blocks. A separate initiative proposes to mix rental flats with owner-occupied flats. These are welcome moves and I hope the Government will continue to look for ways to both improve the quality of rental housing and reduce the stigma of living in the rental flats.

Related to this, I would like to ask two questions. First, moving forward, would HDB consider reviewing the household income cut-off for rental flats, to say, \$2,500 per month? Secondly, would HDB look into providing larger flats, say 3-room flats, under the Public Rental Scheme?

Rental Housing for Singles and Families

Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin (Ang Mo Kio): Sir, in 2021 HDB rolled out the Joint Single Scheme Operator-run (JSS-OR) pilot. I would like to ask how successful has this pilot been? What are some of the feedback received and lessons from the scheme, as well as who the main applicants to the scheme have been, for example, are they seniors? Does HDB plan to expand the JSS-OR pilot to more sites? If so, what proportions of flats under JSS will be allocated to this and on what timeline?

Additionally, families who are sometimes caught in limbo as they eagerly await their BTO keys have turned to the Parenthood Provisional Housing Scheme (PPHS). Many appreciate the support. I would like to ask what are the typical profiles of families under PPHS and is HDB on track to increase the number of PPHS flats by mid-2023? Could HDB provide an update on whether application rates have further fallen or remain high, and if the proportion of individuals who were offered a flat but eventually rejected them has decreased?

The Chairman: Chong Kee Hiong. Three cuts, please.

Public Rental Flats

Mr Chong Kee Hiong (Bishan-Toa Payoh): The Public Rental Scheme (PRS) assists Singaporeans with no alternative housing options by providing them with heavily subsidised rental flats. There are four schemes under PRS: Family Scheme, ComLink Rental Scheme, Joint Singles Scheme and Joint Singles Scheme Operator-Run (JSS-OR) Pilot. I would like to ask the Ministry for an update on the PRS.

How does HDB apportion the number of flats to each of the four schemes under PRS? Does HDB prioritise applications where there are children involved?

Has HDB received more applications for these flats in recent months? The increasing rental rates in the open market would have made it more challenging for those who are renting. With the general increase in pay, would the household income cap of \$1,500 be reviewed? When was the last revision?

Will HDB also share an update on the Joint Singles Scheme Operator-Run (JSS-OR) Pilot rolled out in end-2021, where HDB helps to match flat mates based on their common factors? It is meant as an alternative to the Joint Singles Scheme. What is the demand and supply for JSS-OR and are there plans to expand this pilot to more sites?

Fire in HDB Flats

There were 934 cases of residential fires last year, of which about a third were of electrical origin. How many were in HDB flats and does MND have a breakdown of flat types, including public rental flats?

If public rental and smaller flats account for more of the fires, would the Ministry consider more targeted public education programmes to increase awareness of fire safety and prevention? Timely reminders and advisories can potentially save lives.

Would HDB also consider including the Home Fire Alarm Device (HFAD) as an essential item under the Home Improvement Programme's (HIP) - Essential Improvements scheme? While there is no correlation to indicate the fire cases were due to age of flats, the installation of HFAD would help in response time if such fires were to occur within the flat.

Could SCDF share information on the causes of fires following the investigations with the relevant agencies such as HDB and Town Council for knowledge management?

Adequate fire insurance coverage is also necessary. Would the Ministry consider subsidising comprehensive fire insurance for lower-income families? If HDB can act as a "bulk" insurance purchaser with co-payments from these households, the negotiated premiums would likely be much more affordable.

Building HDB Flats Faster

At the recent debate over public housing, I appealed to HDB to invest more resources to build flats faster to catch up on the time lost due to the COVID-19. pandemic. It is vital to shorten the waiting times for BTO flats.

HDB should continue to work with the construction sector to utilise new and faster building techniques to reduce time for completion of projects. This will naturally increase the supply of flats in the market to alleviate supply and demand pressures and moderate price increases as the competition for resale flats is lowered.

At the COS debate last year, I spoke on adopting the Prefabricated Prefinished Volumetric Construction (PPVC) method more widely to improve building productivity. With constraints on skilled manpower, increased productivity through better technological solutions is key to building our flats faster. Besides PPVC, what other forms of Design for Manufacturing and Assembly (DfMA), where some construction work is moved off-site into factories to prefabricate building modules, are utilised for the construction of our HDB flats?

The Ministry shared that around 44% of building projects by gross floor area adopted DfMA in 2021 and the target was to reach 70% by 2025. May I ask if this is the same target for HDB flats' construction?

Integrated Digital Delivery (IDD) is another way to boost productivity, whereby all stakeholders involved in a building project collaborate through digital platforms. IDD helps to improve accuracy and communication.

The Productivity Innovation Project (PIP) and the Productivity Solutions Grant (PSG) are two of the schemes under the Construction Productivity and Capability Fund. Under PIP, applicants can benefit from support of up to 70% of the cost of adopting solutions like DfMA and IDD technologies. Companies can also apply for the PSG, which co-funds up to 70% of the cost of adopting off-the-shelf digital solutions. Would MND share what are the take-up rates of these schemes and how they have translated into expediting the building of our HDB flats?

Bike Racks in Multi-storey Car Parks

Assoc Prof Jamus Jerome Lim (Sengkang): In the 2021 COS debate, I suggested the multi-storey car parks (MSCPs) in many non-mature states are under-utilised and asked a part of them be repurposed. HDB declined to redesignate the MSCP space for coffee shops or cloud kitchens, but many MSCPs remain under-utilised. More and more families are purchasing bicycles in pursuit of healthy lifestyles, but face parking constraints. Delivery riders also find little space to park while making drop-offs.

I propose that we redesignate the ground floor of under-utilised MSCPs for bike and delivery parking and shift vehicle parking one floor up.

Town Council Funding

Mr Murali Pillai (Bukit Batok): Sir, last year, I delivered a speech in this House warning about the costs escalation on the part of the Town Council. Since my speech, I have noted several other potential misalignments with HDB and other agencies.

Take for example, pruning of trees. When Town Councils prune trees, the idea is to preserve the natural shade that trees provide. However, with the escalation of bird roosting in HDB estates, NParks have advised Town Councils to carry out more aggressive and regular pruning of trees than would ordinarily be the case. That translates to more costs.

Another example is the installation of automated fire rated roller shutters in carparks of new BTO flats due to a design consequence: the siting of a carpark near a substation. There is one example of it in Bukit Batok. Such roller shutters will have to be maintained every month, like lifts. This, again, increases costs.

My concern is that all these escalating costs, if not defrayed by HDB, will have to be saddled by residents in form of increased Service and Conservancy Charges (S&CC). This in turn will have an effect on cost of living, notwithstanding the S&CC grants. I invite the hon Minister's views on this.

Affordable Meals in Our Heartlands

Mr Xie Yao Quan: Sir, coffee shops in our heartlands changing hands at record prices have attracted considerable public attention. Residents are understandably concerned about ever-rising prices of cooked food and price inflation in ingredients, electricity and gas have further pushed up prices of cook food. How might MND ensure that cooked meals at eating houses in our heartlands remain affordable for

Singaporeans?

Affordability of Meal Options

Mr Gan Thiam Poh: Chair, coffee shops and eating houses are familiar features in our neighbourhoods, providing a selection of warm meals to residents after a long day at work or school. They also provide a respite to the frail elderly, homemakers and caregivers. Considering inflationary pressures, would MND share how it will ensure the affordability of these important meal options at the eateries in our heartlands?

Pricey Hawker Food in Sengkang

Assoc Prof Jamus Jerome Lim: This House has just debated that HDB (Amendment) Bill in January where my Sengkang teammate Louis Chua spoke about the disparity in the number of coffee shops typically found in mature estates versus relatively new ones such as Sengkang. He did so again today.

Today, I wish to speak about not so much the difference in quality but also the difference in price faced by our residents. Data that my volunteer team and I had painstakingly gathered suggest that hawker food in Anchorvale, the division of Sengkang that I represent, is significantly more expensive compared to more mature estates by an average of around 50 cents. One reason for this is that there are simply less coffee shops and hawker centres in newer estates. Hawker centres are a unique feature of our heartlands and in many mature towns, these often become focal points for the neighbourhood, together in the source of affordable sustenance for families. Yet, in the whole of Sengkang, there has only been one hawker centre and it is not even an NEA-run one, at least thus far.

But private control of hawker centres throws up yet another reason for expensive hawker food. The current bidding for HDB commercial spaces including coffee shops and hawker centre spaces follows the standard price quality method (PQM). The price component will maximise the tender price while the quality component which could be weighted to take up as much as half the score includes considerations such as affordability, productivity initiatives and availability of healthy options, as shared earlier.

In principle, the PQM allows non-price factors to come into play. In practice however, it is not difficult to game the system. An entire coffee shop may have just one store that offers a single healthy option. Or store holders may price just one so-called "loss leader" item competitively, thereby qualifying for the higher quality score, but the remainder of the items may remain expensive.

I have heard anecdotes from real estate insiders that quality scores for such spaces are typically very similar which suggest the quality scores could indeed be gamed, effectively defaulting the auction to a price-based one.

1.30 pm

More crucially, feedback from my residents suggests that healthy options are few, as are reasonably priced items, with many items priced dearly. I wonder if MND has received similar feedback, and if the Minister would be willing to share how quality will be ensured, both during auction, and on an ongoing basis.

Open bidding for coffee shop spaces encourages high bids, which is generally passed on to individual store owners through higher rents and subsequently to the end consumer via higher prices. As the \$41-million winning bid for a Tampines coffee shop last year reminds us, such an escalation of bidding is a reality, as is the higher rents that result.

While it is true that the higher bids are not completely forgone by the public purse – after all, they go into general revenue – this amounts to a cross-subsidy, from the residents of newer estates to the general population.

One approach is to adapt rental pricing to demand conditions. In our manifesto, the Workers' Party called for such dynamic rental: when the development is first launched, rental prices can be kept lower, prior to demand being built up. This also compensates hawkers for taking on the additional risk of being a pioneer vendor.

Another strategy, which this Government has already considered and implemented in other dimensions of public policy, is to move away from the highest, or the lowest, as the case may be, to setting the sealed bid to the second price. This is a so-called Vickrey auction, so named after the academic and Nobel prize winning economist who first formally described the mechanism. In a nutshell, the top bidder in the auction still wins, but the price is set at that of the second highest bid. I would not go into the technicalities of this approach, as to why it is desirable, but suffice it to say that auction participants will tend to reveal their true willingness to pay in such a setting, while simultaneously being resistant to a gaming of the system.

Vickrey auctions have been used in a number of real world settings, including, famously, on eBay. It is also used much closer to home, for our existing Certificate of Entitlement (COE) system. Applying the self-same principles for coffee shop bids may help mitigate the race to the top or the bottom, depending on one's point of view, present in first-price auction bidding, and help keep coffee shop prices much lower for our residents.

Unlocking the Resale Market

Ms Mariam Jaafar (Sembawang): Sir, the increase in CPF housing grants for first-timer buyers resale flats has been welcome news for many. But there has been some debate on whether the grants will be capitalised in higher resale prices. MND has said that it has evaluated the risks and will monitor the situation.

Given the potential distortionary impact of subsidies, especially when supply is inelastic, I want to repeat my suggestions in the housing debate. Will MND consider further measures to unlock the resale supply in the resale market, such as requiring HDB owners who buy private property to sell their flats, or to ban them from renting their HDB flats?

Helping Seniors to Monetise Their Flats

For many seniors, a significant portion of their wealth lies in the value of their flats. HDB has come up with a number of schemes for senior to monetise their flats, including the Silver Housing Bonus for those who want to downgrade, the Lease Buyback Scheme, allowing them to rent a room to supplement their retirement income and building new 2-room Flexi flats. As we live longer, more and more seniors may have trouble with retirement adequacy.

Can the Minister provide an update on how many seniors have applied for the Silver Housing Bonus and the Lease Buyback Scheme respectively? How many have been approved, and how does this compare to MND's planning parameters? What more can be done to increase understanding and adoption of the scheme? Would the Minister consider further enhancements to the Lease Buyback Scheme to make it more attractive, such as increasing the cash payouts? How will Government continue to support seniors looking to monetise their flats?

Assisted Living Options for Seniors

Mr Gerald Giam Yean Song (Aljunied): By 2030, almost one in three people in Singapore will need some form of eldercare service. However, Singapore's limited assisted living options mean seniors have few choices beyond living unassisted at home, engaging a foreign domestic helper or moving into a nursing home.

Nursing home residents in Singapore tend to stay for extended periods of five to 15 years. In contrast, the typical nursing home stay in the United States is about two years, in part due to its more diverse aged care options like retirement villages and assisted living. The high demand for nursing homes has led to bed occupancy rates exceeding 90%. More nursing homes should be built. But these are expensive to construct and operate.

HDB's Community Care Apartments (CCAs) could be a cost-effective alternative for seniors who need assisted living but are not in need of round-the-clock care. What has been the take-up rate of CCAs so far? What is the projected demand and how many CCAs does HDB plan to build in the next 10 years?

The Government could boost the availability of CCAs by purchasing and renovating existing HDB flats. This was suggested during a Roundtable organised by the Leadership Institute for Global Health Transformation and reported in The Straits times. I heard hon Member Cheryl Chan suggesting this earlier as well. By converting these fats into CCAs, seniors will be able to more conveniently access care services they need. It will help scale up the provision of CCAs to more seniors and enable more of them to age in place in familiar surroundings.

The Chairman: Mr Henry Kwek, take your two cuts, please.

Community Care Apartment

Mr Kwek Hian Chuan Henry: There have been two CCAs pilots launched thus far. These CCAs form an important part of our evolving senior housing policy.

First, CCA pioneer a different housing layout, and much can be learned from the lived experience versus the original stated preferences of the seniors. Two, because they also include the assisted living services that is packaged together, the CCAs help MND understand the willingness of seniors to pay for these services, as well as the gap in expectations, meaning the projected services versus actual needs. Third, the CCAs help the Government understand the retirement adequacy of seniors to pay for cost-of-living, medical expenses and assisted living (AL) services.

As such, can MND share on the feedback on the CCAs, as well as MND's own assessment of this programme so far? Given that both launches were over-subscribed, are there plans for more CCAs to be built?

Senior Housing and Ageing-in-place

Chairman, as Singapore ages, capacity in our nursing homes and new senior-friendly apartments will be stretched.

Some seniors also prefer new and innovative housing types and layouts, such as group homes, share apartments with friends and extended families. Some seniors also prefer different layouts, such as large common living areas with smaller individual rooms. They also look forward to retrofitting their existing homes through, maybe, improved Enhancement for Active Seniors (EASE) fittings.

There is also an urgent need to create space within existing public and private housing estates to support in-situ assisted living (AL) services to support seniors to age-in-place. This is a core issue that concerns the People's Action Party (PAP) senior group.

As such, can Minister for National Development share on the general approach in working with the whole-of-Government (WOG), especially with Ministry of Health (MOH), to reshape our existing housing estates to make ageing-in-place a reality?

Can MND share on the progress on some of these, such as the Parry Avenue site as well as any plans to update the EASE to factor in the evolving needs of seniors?

Home Improvement Programme (HIP)

Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap (Aljunied): Sir, the HDB blocks in my Kaki Bukit ward were built in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Most of these blocks had undergone the Home Improvement Programme (HIP) except for one precinct, which comprises of blocks 512 to 518 of Bedok North Avenue 2 and block 554 for Bedok North Street 3. I understand that the said blocks were ineligible because this precinct had probably undergone a Main Upgrading Programme (MUP).

Being part of an old HDB estate, these nine blocks have a considerable number of elderly occupants. In my interaction with some of my elderly residents through house visits and community outreach, I received feedback requesting for the replacement of pipe sockets with new clothes drying racks. I note that this is one of the compulsory improvements under the HIP. These elderly residents said that they envied their friends whose flats had been installed with this feature as it makes hanging laundry less challenging.

Sir, can HDB look into replacing pipe sockets with new clothes hanging racks for flats that were not eligible for the HIP, to make it easier for residents to hang the laundry, especially the elderly? I sincerely hope HDB will give this request some thought.

Building Age-friendly Neighbourhoods

Mr Edward Chia Bing Hui (Holland-Bukit Timah): Mr Chairman, Sir, Budget 2023 continued to pave the way towards a more inclusive and liveable Singapore. I am heartened that our young people will be better able to realise their housing aspirations and our seniors will also be better equipped to age-in-place. In pursuit of a more inclusive Singapore, we need to continue to empower those who are vulnerable. Today, as a Member of the PAP senior group, I would like to draw attention to two such groups: our lower-income seniors and older women.

Since its introduction in 2012, the EASE programme has been instrumental in making our public housing flats more elderly-friendly for our senior residents. I welcome the \$295 million top-up to the HIP and EASE programme as announced in Budget 2023. I am also encouraged that 1-, 2- and 3- room flat residents can receive subsidies of up to 95% for EASE programme upgrading works.

It is crucial that seniors in the lower-income strata be able to comfortably age-in-place. Hence, I would like to seek updates on how many lower-income seniors or seniors living 1- and 2- room flats have benefited from the EASE programme. Also, is the Ministry considering an expansion of supportable items, such as features that are in CCAs?

Against the backdrop of a rapidly ageing population, Singapore is also witnessing the feminisation of ageing, where women outlive men. While the life expectancies of both men and women have been increasing, the life expectancy of women continues to be higher than that of men over the years. Older women are also more likely to spend more years in disability than men, with higher reported rates of morbidity and lower mobility. In terms of carrying out everyday activities, older women are twice as likely to report some level of difficulty as compared to men.

Hence, we are likely to see a growing pool of older women with poorer health expectancy and who live alone, making them more vulnerable to feelings of loneliness. Hence, I would like to ask how many older women presently live alone in our housing estates and if there have been any attempts to understand the impact of our built environment on their socio and emotional well-being.

Since the feminisation of aging is set to accelerate in coming years, what provisions have been made to cater to the needs of our older women? Specifically, how can our neighbourhoods better enable our older women to remain socially engaged? One suggestion can be to have more physical activity stations that are catered for women in our void decks. These stations can focus on strength training to curb the degradation of muscle mass that contributes to lower mobility and increased rates of morbidity. Within these spaces, older women can foster deeper connections among themselves through everyday bonding and community activities.

With targeted and meaningful interventions, we can enable more people to embrace ageing and experience renewed meaning and fulfilment in their silver years.

Right-sizing for Seniors

Mr Xie Yao Quan: Sir, I have met many seniors who are looking to right-size not to monetise their existing flats in the first instance, but because they are empty-nesters, their children had married and moved out and they no longer need or are able to upkeep their existing flats as they age. In other words, seniors look to right-size primarily because of life stage. But the opportunity to unlock equity in their existing flats and enhance retirement adequacy makes right-sizing an even more attractive proposition.

Could MND update on the number of seniors who have chosen to right-size and successfully got the Silver Housing Bonus? What are the Ministry's plans to further support seniors looking to right-size?

Lift Access for all HDB Flats

Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong (Hougang): Mr Chairman, I speak once more on the issue of lift upgrading for the six blocks of HDB flats in Hougang SMC where there are still certain units which do not have same floor lift access. As this is a very real issue affecting a number of my residents, especially those with mobility needs requiring assistance to access the stairs outside their units when they need to go out or come home, not to mention inconvenience to ambulances bringing people to the hospital and also additional charges for delivery items. I feel pain when residents told me that their parents or grandparents had to be carried when accessing the stairs next to their unit.

First of all, I would like to see an update on the current number of HDB blocks in Singapore with incomplete lift access for all flats. We were last told that there were about 150 such HDB blocks in Singapore.

At COS 2021, the Minister said that the lift access housing grant of up to \$30,000 was introduced in 2020 to assist residents with urgent mobility or medical needs to move to another flat with direct lift access.

1.45 pm

May I ask the Government for an update on the total number of grants given so far, as well as its percentage over the total number of such HDB units without same floor lift access?

The Minister also said in COS 2021 in response to my previous calls, therefore blocks where the costs are still too high, it would not be prudent to offer the LUP, but the Government will continue to explore new technical methods to bring down LUP cost.

The lift access housing grant is not an option for most residents with whom I have spoken to on this issue so far. As I have mentioned in my Budget debate speech, it is never easy to ask people to shift the different address and it is definitely not an empathetic solution. Many residents still cannot accept HDB's explanation of the issue of cost; something which could have been avoided, if HDB had tender out lift upgrading projects consisting of these blocks with problematic designs, together with the bulk of the HDB blocks with no design issues for LUP access.

I would like to see an update on HDB's effort in seeking new technical methods to bring down LUP cost for the affected blocks. I hope the HDB will work on this issue expeditiously to bring lift upgrading to all blocks in Singapore lacking lift access, including the remaining six blocks in Hougang so the affected residents can enjoy full lift access soon.

Planning Ahead Together

Ms Joan Pereira (Tanjong Pagar): Chairman, as more of our HDB blocks cross the 50-year mark, we need to plan ahead to secure the resources needed for their upkeep. As the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us supplies of materials and manpower cannot be taken for granted.

The flats in my Henderson Crescent estate, in Henderson Dawson, which were built in 1970s, are about 50 years old. Many flats there have problems, such as constant water leak and spalling concrete. Even after continuous repairs, the problem persists. What is HDB's plan for such flats? Would the Ministry share and update on its maintenance plans for ageing estates, like Henderson Crescent, including the Home Improvement Programme scheme or can HDB consider SERS for the flats at Henderson Crescent? Many residents there have expressed to me their desire for SERS. If there are no plans for SERS, can the Ministry provide some information on VERS? Because with more information, residents will be better equipped to plan ahead their housing journey and also other housing matters.

The Chairman: Mr Ang Wei Neng, take both cuts, please.

Same-floor Lift Access for All Flats

Mr Ang Wei Neng (West Coast): Chairman, when HDB designed and built HDB flats in the 1980s, the segmented flats were popular with some of the residents due to the additional privacy. As the residents age, many now prioritise the ability to access to the lifts on the same level over privacy.

In recent years, HDB managed to install additional lift at some of the segmented blocks. One example is the impending Lift Upgrading Programme or LUP at block 906 and 910 of Jurong West Street 91 in Nanyang. The corner odd-floor units of these two blocks would have direct access to the lift on the same level, if more than 75% of the residents support the LUP. I understand from HDB that the cost of providing lift for the remaining 150 segmental blocks may cost \$200,000 per household. For such segmented units, can HDB provide an option for the owners to sell their flat back to HDB at market prices, while enjoying the Lift access Housing Grant or LHG.

If HDB decides to buy back these segmented units, I do not suggest HDB to resell these segmented units back to Singaporeans. Instead, HDB could consider assigning JTC to lease out these segmented flats to younger workers who have no mobility issues.

In summary, I hope HDB will continue to find suitable solutions to build lift for the segmented blocks failing which HDB could provide an option for the owners of the segmented flats to sell them back to HDB at a reasonable price.

Accelerate HIP

The Home Improvement Programme or HIP is a popular programme among the HDB owners, especially when the flats are getting older. In 2018, the HIP was extended to flats built between 1987 and 1997. This means that flats that are 25 to 35 years old, are eligible for HIP.

It is quite a range, thus it is not surprising that the residents staying in the older flats are expecting they should be given priority to participate in the HIP. At the same time, we understand that the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed down the pace of HIP quite significantly. Thus, many HDB blocks above the age of 30 years were not upgraded. In Nanyang, we have 74 blocks that are over 30 years, but there are still no HIP in sight. The residents staying in these blocks are eagerly waiting for HIP and I hope HDB can fulfil their dream soon.

Meanwhile, I would also like to highlight that several residents have given me their feedback about the new retractable clothes-drying racks that are installed at the latest batch of HIP. The new retractable clothes-drying rack is an improvement over the previous T-shaped design. Many residents feedback that the new rack is not sufficiently wide to dry big sheets. The over capacity of the new drying rack is also limited. Thus, I would like to ask if HDB has plans to improve the clothes drying rack further.

The Chairman: Ms Leon Pereira. Take both your cuts, please.

Endangered Animal Products

Mr Leon Perera (Aljunied): Mr Chairman, all of us should care about biodiversity and the protection of endangered species. I propose that we enhance our efforts in tackling the illegal wildlife trade to better reflect Singapore's role as a globally important transport node.

In last year's Endangered Species Act debate, the hon Member Mr Louis Ng asked if wildlife trafficking could be classified as a serious offence under the Organised Crime Act. I understand that Hong Kong has passed a Bill classifying the illegal wildlife trade under a similar law they have, the Organised and Serious Crimes Ordinance. I agree with this call and would also like to ask if the agencies tasked with tackling the illegal wildlife trade could explore coordination with their counterparts in countries identified to be key originating sources for shipments of such goods.

On the local consumption front, can I check if the Ministry engages with traditional medicine practitioners to encourage them to highlight the negative impacts from consuming endangered animal products to potential consumers? This would be a good practice.

Cruelty Towards Animals

Mr Chairman, residents have raised concerns following some brutal cases of animal cruelty recently. NParks receives about 1,200 complaints on average each year, of which about 20 result in warning letters, 38 in fines and six in jail. I am aware it is not easy to obtain evidence in such cases.

However, in my opinion, punishments are too lax. Some members of the public have pointed out that the maximum ban of 12 months for owners is lenient and it appears that the Courts do not often impose upper limits of jail terms, which go up to three years. I call on NParks to expedite its ongoing review of these penalties.

I also hope NParks will consider a complementary, restorative approach to tackling animal cruelty. This could mean requiring abusers to attend follow-ups with psychologists. NParks could also use touchpoints like pet shops and veterinary clinics to explain to owners why physical punishment and other ill-treatment like chaining, confining and not walking dogs, for example, are cruel practices. Afterall, people who mistreat animals may mistreat human beings too, one day.

The Chairman: Mr Chong Kee Hiong. Take both cuts, please.

Crows, Mynahs, Pigeons Overpopulation

Mr Chong Kee Hiong: Chairman, there has been frequent feedback on birds causing a nuisance in our estates in Bishan and Toa Payoh. Since February 2022, the Town Council has received more than a thousand reports about birds.

The most recent reports are mainly of crow attacks. Other common and longstanding complaints include bird droppings on laundry, windows and ledges, and noise nuisance created by the cawing and crowing of the birds. On the other hand, there are also residents who, for reasons of biodiversity, object to actions such as tree pruning, trapping and culling, to reduce the populations of crows, mynahs and pigeons.

The bird droppings cause hygiene and health concerns, affect the general aesthetics of the town and lead to higher maintenance costs. The most effective method to manage the bird population is to eliminate their shelter and food sources.

In NParks' regular crow surveys, NParks would highlight areas in HDB estates with crows' nests to the Town Council for removal. Would it be more effective and efficient if NParks were to remove the nests instantly when spotted instead?

Could NParks increase the frequency of crow trapping and set more traps at different locations in the estates at the same time to increase the effectiveness of the actions? Could NParks be the implementing agency on these issues, take the lead with NEA and waste collection companies to develop more effective waste disposal measures to minimise exposed food waste for birds to feed on?

Besides public education, we also need heavier penalties for bird feeding and improper waste disposal so that the offenders will be deterred from re-offending so as to be fair to other residents who have to suffer the inconveniences brought about by their actions. Second cut.

Chickens and Roosters Overpopulation

Wild, free roaming chickens have multiplied so fast at one of my estates, Thomson Sin Ming Court, that a task force comprising mainly residents, with representatives from NParks, Town Council and Acres in support, was set up to attend to the feedback from two groups of residents with opposing views. At last count, we had about 60 chickens, down from around 100 in December 2021, after a few exercises to relocate some.

One group of residents have been severely affected by the loud crowing made by roosters regardless of day or night. The residents may be working from home, preparing for exams, taking a rest from shift work, or elderlies who need rest. Some have resorted to installing expensive sound-proof windows. Others send me videos or sound files as evidence of how noisy the roosters are. They are unable to rest or sleep well due to the constant disturbances. They are deeply frustrated, despite the various measures the task force has taken. These include relocating some roosters, pruning trees, placing nets over trees at hotspots, an ongoing egg hunt-and-collection and public education through walkabouts and talks by my grassroots leaders, volunteers and agencies' staff about not feeding the chickens.

The other group of residents is very protective of these chickens, literally losing sleep over missing chickens. Some residents continue to feed the chickens against our advice to let them forage naturally. This has contributed to overpopulation and attracted other pests. Recently, a fight even broke out between residents due to chicken feeding and a police report was lodged.

The task force strives to find a balance between having some chickens in the estate while reducing the inconveniences brought about by the overpopulation. However, the issue has continued for far too long and has incurred too much time, effort and resources and it is therefore time to step up efforts. Currently, the task force has to look for farms that are prepared to accept these chickens, build a cage of a suitable size to house them and with each farm only allowed to have ten chickens, this entire process cannot be an efficient solution to the situation.

I would like to request NParks to be more proactive to relocate more of the chickens as they have done so for other constituencies.

We all know that feeding of chickens is a major contributor to the overpopulation. NParks will engage the feeders but there is no deterrence as feeding of chickens is not an offence. Would the Ministry consider including chickens in the Wildlife Act so that those caught feeding them will be deterred by the fines?

The Chairman: I suspect this is the first time that chickens are featured so much in the COS. *[Laughter.]* Mr Louis Ng. Please take both cuts, please.

Cat Ownership in HDB

Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang: Sir, it is the year of the rabbit but it really should be the year of the cat in this House. As a matter of consistency, I am raising the issue of the keeping cats in HDB flats again this year, similar to the last few years. I am speaking up because this policy of not allowing the keeping of cats just does not make any sense, we do not even enforce it and it is not fair. Why discriminate against people who keep cats?

So many people are already keeping cats in HDB, so many Members of this House see our residents breaking this policy and so many people have provided legitimate and good reasons as to why this policy should change. I am glad we have finally done a public consultation on this issue and it seems we are moving forward.

I hope Minister can provide a further update on the progress on this issue and share some of the brief conditions the Ministry is considering imposing to allow the keeping of cats in HDB flats. The cats are tired of running and hiding and it is time to end this cat and mouse game.

Penalties for Animals Abuse and Cruelty

More than a decade ago, before I was elected as a Member of Parliament, I sat in the Animal Welfare Legislative Review Committee to review Singapore's animal welfare legislation. It has been quite some time since we last increase penalties for animal abuse and cruelty. It is time we review this again.

Stories of animal abuse have emerged in the news with worrying frequency. Several cases of animal cruelty and abuse have also come before the Court. We know for a fact that the number of animal cruelty and welfare feedback to AVS has also risen over the years. There is also growing awareness and concerns about animal welfare and rightly so.

It is time for us to increase the penalties for animal abuse and cruelty and also increase the length of time offenders can be disqualified from owning animals. We should also emphasise the role of Mandatory Treatment Order as a sentencing option. I understand the Ministry is reviewing this and I hope Minister can provide an update and timeline for this review.

The Chairman: Mr Baey Yam Keng.

Public Rental Scheme

Mr Baey Yam Keng (Tampines): Chairman, I would like to address the issue of public rental flats and the difficulties faced by those who do not have someone else to co-apply with for a rental unit.

Some of them will get a list of people in similar situations from HDB and try to find someone to co-apply. But according to them, some of these people in the list do not respond, they are not interested or they are not suitable. And for those who manage to find a suitable person, I have come across cases where, sometime later, they will face problems staying together and one of them will end up wanting to get the other person out of the flat.

2.00 pm

Everyone has their own habits, lifestyles and sharing a common living space with a stranger is really not easy. Therefore, I would like to propose that HDB consider a new Single Singles Scheme in addition to the Joint Singles Scheme.

This scheme would accommodate those who do not have someone to apply with, or do not want to live with a stranger. The flats could be smaller to cater to a single person. To ensure fairness, the rental for these flats could be higher, to justify the greater privacy that they enjoy. Allowing this will also prevent many social problems further downstream.

Notwithstanding my proposal for the Single Singles Scheme, I do support the Joint Singles Scheme Operator-run pilot that was launched in 2021. I believe operators would have expertise or would have built expertise to help match suitable tenants to live together and there are people who prefer living with someone for company and mutual support.

I would like to request for an update of the pilot after two years. Out of the 158 units in the pilot, what number of tenants are still living together? Have we met the objective of helping these singles with their living needs? Moving forward, I would like to know how MND intends to proceed with the pilot. Will this operator-run scheme be extended to more operators and locations, whether it will be further

tweaked?

The Chairman: Mr Vikram Nair, not here. Mr Lim Biow Chuan.

Rental Housing Scheme

Mr Lim Biow Chuan (Mountbatten): Sir, last year, I raised the concern about elderly singles having to share rental flats with another stranger. The problem is exacerbated because the rent a flat is small and elderly singles struggle to adapt to the different habits of another stranger. Thus, some of these seniors resort to living in a void deck.

For seniors who do not wish to share the flat with a stranger, they keep appealing to HDB, to be allowed to rent a flat on their own. The amount of administrative time spent processing such appeals again and again must be massive.

Can MND give an update on the Joint Singles Scheme Operator-run (JSS-OR) pilot which was rolled out in end 2021 as an alternative option to the JSS for singles in public rental. What has the response been to the scheme? Are there lesser quarrels among the tenants?

Sir, I have come across a few cases where singles who live alone passed away without anyone else knowing about their deaths. And sometimes a death could have been avoided that had there been another occupant living in the same flat and who could alert emergency services to seek help. Thus, if a senior living alone has a heart attack or a stroke, having another person live in the same flat may mean a life saved.

In some countries where the seniors live in retirement villages, the village is marketed as a place where seniors can come together to enjoy each other's company to partake in senior friendly activities and to come together to celebrate good food as they age gracefully.

Could MND share more about the status of the Joint Singles Operator-run scheme. Is the operator able to think innovatively to place two seniors to a flat successfully? If so, would HDB consider expanding the pilot scheme to more sites?

Strengthening Inclusivity in Housing

Mr Murali Pillai: Sir, in my recent speech in this House, I highlighted the important role that Singapore's public housing played in the development of our people, particularly our young children from less privileged backgrounds.

I have two suggestions to strengthen its role.

First, in cases of divorce involving young children, there may be a case to resolve the information asymmetry between the Courts, HDB and the divorcing couples on the issue of ensuring proper housing arrangements for their young children post-divorce.

As is well known, the Court is required to look into the needs of children when deciding on the division of matrimonial property. I have seen cases where, for reasons of expediency, the husband and wife consent in Court to arrangements that run the danger of leaving the children without proper housing options. Thereafter, one of them will appeal for urgent rental housing for them and their children, presenting HDB with a fait accompli. This is not ideal.

Next, this Government must decisively tackle overcrowding in rental flats that inhibit the ability of our children in these households to grow up well.

In 2020, the hon Minister stated in this House that less than 10% of rental households have more than four members. On the ground, my sense is that there are informal arrangements which may not have been notified to HDB.

The hon Minister also highlighted measures to help these households. All these are commendable but we should aim for zero overcrowding. Each child is precious and we must do our utmost to ensure that they grow up in more conducive housing environment.

Separately, I suggest that the hon Minister look into the plight of seniors who sell their flats to help fund the purchase of flats belonging to their children, relatives or friends but only to be turfed out later. I wonder if the Housing and Development Act may be reviewed to give them a proprietary interest over the purchased house even if they may not have been the registered owners.

Boast Support for First-time Home Owners

Ms Foo Mee Har (West Coast): Chairman, as part of the September 2022 set of cooling measures, the Loan-to-Value (LTV) limit for all HDB loans was further lowered from 85% to 80%, to encourage more financial prudence when taking on loans. I agree with the Government on the need to tighten lending criteria. I support the raising of interest rate floor used to compute mortgage servicing ratio in order to avoid overleveraging amidst a rising rate environment.

However, the lowering of LTV further to 80% means 20% of cash or CPF is needed upfront for the flat purchase. This excludes the significant expenses home buyers need to also put aside for renovation and other cost.

Many first-timers have found this cash outlay substantial and difficult to afford even if they can afford to service the debt repayment based on the latest debt servicing ratio. The need to save for the additional cash for downpayment may set them further back on their home ownership journey.

I call on the Government to have a differentiated LTV for first-time home owners as it exists in some other countries. In fact, is quite commonly practised. For example, in Hong Kong, first-time home buyers qualify for a higher loan-to-value ratio of 90%.

Availability of Flats for Divorce Cases

Mr Lim Biow Chuan: Sir, the current HDB policy is that both parties in the divorce can apply to buy a subsidised flat upon obtaining the divorce interim judgment and resolving ancillary matters on the matrimonial home and custody of their children. But this also means that they cannot buy a replacement flat until after the divorce is finalised. Not every divorcing couple has the option of renting another flat while waiting for the divorce to be settled and their matrimonial flat sold.

For the party who has custody of the children and usually that is the mother. She is left wondering where would she and the children stay after the matrimony flat is sold. It would take time for them to buy another flat while waiting for the matrimony flat to be sold. Thus, it is reasonable that the parent would want to plan ahead for the next home for the children so as to offer them some security and a roof over their heads.

Can HDB review its policy so as to allow a divorcing couple to buy a replacement flat pending finalisation of the divorce? HDB can set a condition that if the matrimonial flat is not sold within six months of the interim judgment for whatever reason, then the party who had bought the replacement flat would have to surrender the flat back to HDB.

BTO in Non-mature Estates

Mr Gan Thiam Poh: Chairman, in view of the rising demand for flats, how many new BTO flats in non-mature estates or new towns are to be built per year in the next three years? Will these include Community Care Apartments (CCAs) which are very popular and expected to be in higher demand, flats with shorter leases and public rental flats?

The Chairman: Mr Vikram Nair, not here. Mr Seah Kian Peng.

Home Ownership

Mr Seah Kian Peng (Marine Parade): Recently, we had an extensive debate on the need to keep housing affordable and to do so in a way that is fair to future generations. Two things struck me in the debate.

First, public housing in Singapore is not just about providing a home for individuals or even families. The HDB realises many objectives including upholding our multiracial society, ensuring the family unit is kept intact, by way of proximity grants, retirement planning and saving, by way of the financial schemes.

Second, because of this, housing issues are often complex and require not just deep cognitive effort, but also knowledge of our political history.

Minister and his colleagues have already corrected some of the mistaken claims and calculations presented earlier, so I shall not repeat them. I bring these points up to show both the salience and the complexity of housing issues and to thank the many public officers in HDB and MND for their effort.

I would like to ask Minister if there are more measures to help first-timers starting their families and first-timers with children in securing a Build-To-Order (BTO) flat as soon as possible?

There is a larger grant for resale HDB flats, but this does not solve the problem of a tight BTO supply in the short run. Is there a way to give some priority in the queue for these two groups?

The Chairman: Mr Xie Yao Quan. Take your three cuts, please.

Accessibility for First-timers

Mr Xie Yao Quan: Sir, I welcome the Government's move to give first-timer couples below 40 years old and first-timers with children and additional ballot so that they have a better chance to secure a BTO flat quickly.

MND has shared that, as it stands now, 90% of all first-timers succeed within two tries for a BTO in the non-mature estate and virtually all succeed within three tries. Could the Ministry share concretely how much it expects the chance of securing a flat quickly to improve for the sub-category of first-timers that it is targeting with its latest move?

Holistic Support for Rental Flat Tenants

Sir, the Government announced the Comlink Rental Scheme last year, so that a public rental flat is not just housing going forward, but part of a broader and comprehensive suite of social support and Government schemes, brought to bear, centered around the families to help families with children achieve stability, self-sufficiency and eventually social mobility.

Could the Ministry update on its progress in and plans for the Comlink Rental Scheme?

Fresh Start for Rental Flat Tenants

Sir, the Fresh Start housing grant helps public rental tenants who are second timers with children to own a home again. In last year's Committee of Supply (COS), MND announced enhancements to the grant amount as well as an expansion of the scheme to offer the option of 3-room flats. MND said it is working on the on the implementation for the offer of a 3-room flat under Fresh Start and will announce the details when ready. I note that in the latest BTO exercise just launched, MND has clarified that now Fresh Start applicants can have the 3-room flat option available.

Could the Ministry provide an update on the plans —

The Chairman: Time is up, can end now.

Mr Xie Yao Quan: — to monitor and evaluate the progress.

The Chairman: Thank you. Ms Nadia Samdin.

Second-timer Housing Applicants

Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin: Chair, housing accessibility has come into the forefront of national discussions in recent months. I am encouraged that MMD has been taking steps to boost the chances of first-time home owners.

However, I encounter residents who are facing challenges as second timers. I would like to ask is MND considering any measures to further support second time home owners, including seniors looking to right-size families with past debts, divorcees or residents affected by Selective En Bloc Redevelopment Scheme (SERS). For example, by changing the quantum of the resale levy or other support schemes.

Many second-timer families under the public rental scheme have also benefited from the Fresh Start Housing scheme. Is the Government considering further enhancements to the Fresh Start Housing scheme and how can outreach be widened? Does HDB have any updates on how the recent announcements shared last year under Fresh Start have benefited residents so far?

The Chairman: Miss Cheryl Chan. Both cuts please.

Future Masterplan

Miss Cheryl Chan Wei Ling: Sir, URA has concluded its long-term plan review last August with engagement from many different stakeholders – ranging from the general public to youths and industry leaders. I was delighted to be part of the engagement which started in 2021 and it was heartening to see many Singaporeans come together to think, discuss and share ideas on how they envision our future Singapore.

Singapore has pockets of heritage that deserves more attention and reviving their vibrancy as we re-invent these spaces. Our heritage cannot be defined by an infrastructure marker but rather placemaking. It has to breathe life with diversity and more interactive activities throughout the day and improve infrastructure that provides ease of movement with comfort of presence under our humid weather.

An example of such a place is Kampong Glam. We can consider revitalising Kampong Glam and link that as an extension of the vibrant Bugis area. To begin, we need to bring the community together including schools, merchants, hotels and community leaders to curate signature concepts that enables raising awareness of the heritage, providing education for more locals while we continue to tout these as tourist destinations. The current business mix can also be further improved to attract variety, uniqueness in concepts and having a balance of local and cosmopolitan feel. This can incentivise our locals to visit and bring synergies across different business types.

2.15 pm

Space in our tiny island always has many competing needs. While we aim to protect and conserve nature biodiversity, how can we expand our limited land space? Will using more subterranean space be a possibility for Singapore? We have done so for the Jurong Rock Cavern, MRT tunnels and common services tunnels. Are we able to move our integrated bus and MRT depots in future below ground and would the revamped Orchard Road or other streets have more underground plans as we go car-lite?

With Phase 4 of LTPR concluding, can MND provide an update on the key findings and what aspects of the public consultation feedback will feature in our land use plans? Will more of the future trends and the land use needs be included in the next Masterplan?

Singapore as a City in Nature

Singapore's reputation has been synonymous as a "Garden City". As part of Singapore's Green Plan (SGP) 2030, a step further was taken to transform Singapore into a "City in Nature". Indeed, with more green spaces interwoven amongst our heartlands, it is not just aesthetically pleasing to the eye and acts as nodes for family and friends to socialise and come together. It also acts as buffers against the effects of climate change.

While all greening efforts are appreciated, one challenge the citizens will have to grapple with is how they can live harmoniously with nature. We have heard of incidents of uninvited animals in the household, citizens attacked by animals when they panic and retaliate and some tree species that have been attracting unwanted birds that are creating much nuisance in the neighbourhood.

As much as we want to progress the effort in giving citizens more access to greenery, we need to utilise more science and technologies to expand the ecological corridor. For example, to use heatmaps in identifying the warm spots in existing living environment to decide how to design the green spaces for natural shades that encourage human walking or socialising near their homes, and overlaying the tree varieties to review how the animal species will interact, be attracted or even migrate to the area. Ultimately, greening should not bring about inconveniences as an afterthought. Can the Minister provide an update on the progress made thus far on this aspect and if there are any areas that we can accelerate the transformation with science-based capabilities?

In 2021, \$25 billion has been planned for our nation's research, innovation and enterprise development landscape, with urban solutions and sustainability being a key research domain. Could MND also shed light on how such R&D impact has on the actualisation of our urban sustainability vision?

URA's Long-Term Plan Review in 2022 saw many participants from the public express interest in having green spaces and sustainability concepts being incorporated in our future land use masterplan. What are the opportunities for the community to play a more active role in these transformation efforts? To take this beyond just community gardens that we have today, will it evolve to having ground-up planning of facilities creation with residents and better use of spaces for functional purpose that fits the local demographics, instead of just generic exercise corners or playgrounds?

The Chairman: Prof Koh Lian Pin. Four cuts, please.

Planning for Singapore's Sea Spaces

Prof Koh Lian Pin (Nominated Member): Sir, Singapore's Masterplan is the statutory land use plan that translates the long-term strategies of our long-term plan into detailed plans to guide developments in our land space. Singapore' sea space is almost as large as our land space. Given the increasing demands on Singapore's sea space, for example, for aquaculture and coastal protection measures, it may be important to also better plan for our sea space to meet our future needs. How is the Government incorporating Singapore's sea space in our Masterplan and long-term plan?

Climate Resilient Housing Estates

Singapore has been experiencing warming temperatures due to climate change and our densely built environment. Passive cooling strategies in newer estates may enable residents to keep cool without resorting to turning on their air-conditioners. But residents in older estates may feel the brunt of warming temperatures. Researchers from the Cooling Singapore project have also identified temperature hot spots in places, such as Geylang and Woodlands. What are the Government's efforts to ensure that our built environment continues to be liveable for residents in all estates in the face of rising temperatures? How will the findings of the Cooling Singapore project be factored into Singapore's land use and development plans?

Marine Environmental Impact Assessments

In 2022, the Government announced the important changes to Singapore's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) framework which includes enhancing the transparency of such environmental studies. However, a number of recent marine EIAs were not made available online. Instead, members of the public had to make appointments to view these reports, which can span hundreds of pages, in person during office hours. Singapore's marine areas will face more pressures due to developments in our aquaculture sector and coastal protection measures. Easier public access to EIA reports can be helpful, for example, in soliciting public perspectives, feedback and suggestions to ensure that our aquaculture and coastal protection activities are implemented, with adequate consideration of the need to conserve our marine biodiversity.

Can the Government share whether it plans to make future marine EIAs available online, perhaps with redaction of confidential portions, if necessary? How would the Government better engage with the public on these findings?

Repurposing our Built Environment

As an island state with limited land, Singapore has to continuously adapt to the changing needs of our society through strategic masterplanning and the constant renewal of our built environment. Tearing down existing concrete buildings to construct new ones will, unavoidably, require cement production, which is the largest single industrial emitter of carbon dioxide, accounting for approximately 8% of global emissions based on a recent peer-reviewed scientific report. An alternative to such a clean-slate development approach is to repurpose existing infrastructure for new uses to minimise both environmental and societal impacts, such as carbon emissions and noise and air pollution. Are there inter-Ministerial strategies to optimise our masterplanning through the adaptive repurposing of our built environment?

Long-term Plan Review

Mr Cheng Hsing Yao (Nominated Member): Chairman, last year, MND and URA concluded the Long-Term Plan Review. Can MND provide an update on how key findings of the review will feature in our land use plans? When can we expect the next Masterplan? What will be featured in the next Masterplan?

Our land has to cater to many competing needs and demands. How can we ensure we will not sacrifice the long-term flexibility for future generations in order to meet immediate demands?

Are there any key emergent trends that have changed the assumptions or objectives of our plans? For example, Singapore has set a target to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. How will that affect our plans and how will that percolate down to other policies?

If our plans were to help us accelerate into a low-carbon built environment, we need to consider that buildings account for over 20% of our carbon emissions. The bulk of the buildings is the existing stock of older buildings which may be less energy-efficient.

MND announced earlier that it was exploring whether to require building owners to conduct energy audits to improve the energy performance of their buildings. Can we have an update on this? Such a requirement will add on to the cost of operating buildings. How can this be done without overburdening building owners?

The Chairman: Ms Nadia Samdin. Three cuts, please.

URA Long-term Plan Review

Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin: Sir, MND has been actively reaching out to citizens to understand views on what the Singapore of the future should look like. Last year, the URA concluded the Long-Term Plan Review (LTPR). I would like to ask whether MND can provide an update on key findings of the LTPR and how will the feedback gathered feature in our future land use plans.

Furthermore, situations may arise when building new human-centric recreational activities requires careful scrutiny and planning to avoid destroying habitats, such as proposals to clear parts of the Springleaf Forest for Nee Soon Park or to increase traffic to our Southern Islands to create tourism opportunities. In these delicate situations, what principles does the URA use to decide on development and conservation and is there a dedicated task force to coordinate the plans of different agencies to ensure that we take a science-based approach and ensure sustainable development?

What are the key takeaways from the coastal and marine ecological profiling exercise carried out in tandem with the LTPR and how will these guide URA's plans moving forward?

City in Nature

In 2020, MND announced its vision to transform Singapore into a city in nature. Under the OneMillionTrees Movement, we aim to plant a million more trees across Singapore by 2030. One day, I certainly hope that we can have one million mangrove trees or one million corals restored. Could NParks provide an update on the progress of this movement and to what extent does NParks work with partners to ensure that all tree species planted will strengthen ecological resilience and provide more habitats for native biodiversity beyond simply increasing the green cover?

NParks also aims to carry out recovery plans for over 70 more animal and plant species by 2030. Could MND please provide an update on the progress of this?

Given recent human wildlife interactions, including, for example, wild boars and otters, is NParks considering shifting strategies to better tackle this issue? How can knowledge better be shared with the wider community as part of everyday norms, as relocation is not a sustainable strategy for the long term in our city in nature and land-scarce Singapore.

There is also a push for greening industrial estates by optimising greenery, creating forested nodes and strings of connected pocket parts being suggested. Could MND also give a progress in this regard?

Citizen Engagement for Heritage Sites

Finally, supported by URA, the National Heritage Board recently concluded the Kampong Glam Citizen Engagement Project. This initiative mapped and documented heritage businesses and explored ways to keep traditional trades alive. It has documented many heartwarming stories of business owners' deep connection to Kampong Glam, their pride in their craft and their steadfastness amidst changing business environments. I would like to ask what are some of the insights and observations that have been gleaned from the public and Kampong Glam stakeholders in this engagement exercise.

How does URA plan to incorporate insights from this exercise into heritage conservation and placemaking efforts, particularly in terms of preserving the deep historical and cultural significance of heritage businesses?

Finally, given the need to factor in cultural sensitivities and cherished traditions, what are some of the key factors that MND is weighing in this exercise and development of Kampong Glam?

The Chairman: Mango trees are good, too. Ms Poh Li San.

Gentrification in the Heartlands

Ms Poh Li San (Sembawang): Chairman, property prices tend to be higher in and near the city as well as in neighbourhoods near popular schools. Many young parents are willing to relocate their homes and pay for more expensive properties just to be near to desired primary schools for the sake of securing places for their children.

The recent announcement of the relocation of ACS Primary School to Tengah will likely increase the desirability of BTOs in Tengah estate as well as improve accessibility of the school. This is a clever strategy by the Government and the ACS Board. Will there be more similar approaches to spread out the concentration of highly-priced properties to different parts of Singapore?

Gentrification in older estates, such as Tiong Bahru, has also resulted in a strong desirability of those HDB flats amongst young home owners, despite the short remaining leases. What is MND's strategy to renew ageing precincts in other parts of Singapore?

The Chairman: Ms Carrie Tan. Both cuts.

Optimising Land Use in Singapore

Ms Carrie Tan: With the climate change crisis, there is urgency for us to go beyond the existing efforts at greening Singapore. I observe from the Long-term Plan Review (LTPR) that URA has taken pains to provide more green spaces for play and recreation. While I appreciate this as an important step, as many citizens do, too, I also believe that there are many citizens who can and wish to be more participative rather than passive consumers of green spaces. How can we create a participative or collaborative model where citizens are actively engaged in realising the "City in Nature"?

How can we better allocate our land for various uses to reflect and fulfil Singaporeans' evolving aspirations and desire for more wellness and balance?

The work adjustments that were forced upon us by COVID-19 present us with an opportunity to consider how much space do we really need for offices. Personnel that were not essential to be on-site worked from home, freeing up many spaces in the offices. Contrary to what many expected, many surveys point to an increase in productivity when people work from home, including one by Prodoscore, a productivity intelligence company that reports that there was an increase in productivity by 47% since March 2020, compared to the same period in the previous year in the US.

In the new era and new economy, do we still need as much land for office spaces? As we rethink what growth means to include well-being, can we not allocate more land away from commercial purposes and towards regenerative and wellness purposes? I proposed the Doughnut Economics model in my Budget debate speech, and it resonated with many Singaporeans who shared how they feel hopeful and vindicated in having their sentiments shared in Parliament – their desire to have a different model of progress.

2.30 pm

Human beings are meant to live as a community and that means we share resources and responsibilities and have one another to lean on.

In my previous cut, I proposed communal and co-living to foster mutual support and optimise land usage. Fostering inter-dependent relationships builds social capital and trust. Having social capital and trust and being helpful to one another increases people's sense of self-worth and self-esteem and security. It takes away the need for material possessions to shore up our self-esteem, to acquire status symbols and helps people to feel happier with much lesser.

Sociologists and anthropologists around the world know this. We can greatly reduce wasteful consumption when people have deep contentment and a sense of connectedness in their lives.

In the same vein, we need to allocate more spaces in Singapore for activities that allow citizens to rebuild our relationship with Nature. Human beings are also meant to live in a symbiotic and interdependent relationships with nature. When we recognise that we are part of a larger ecosystem, interdependent on one another as well as the flora and fauna that we live amongst, we will constantly be reminded that we are one another's keeper, making sustainable daily practices of "Using Less, Sharing More and Wasting Not", a natural way of life.

Spaces for Community Permaculture Pilots

To engage our citizens constructively in action for our people's and the planet's wellness, I propose MND to make permaculture education a national effort.

What is permaculture? It is a way of growing plants and food using nature-based regenerative methods, based on the ethics of "Earth care, People care and fair share". It is a permanent form of agriculture which can be sustained indefinitely. It lowers the carbon footprint of food production and at the same time helps the soil used for agriculture to capture carbon from the environment. It brings and bonds different members of society together in doing so.

I got to know about permaculture from Ms Catherine Loke, the Founding President of The Circle for Human Sustainability – a collective in Singapore made of architects, engineers, sociologists, scientists, design leaders and farmers. She has a visionary idea of Little Farms Everywhere for Singapore, to utilise the currently unused plots of land between our HDB blocks and in our community parks for permaculture gardens, maintained by the community, for the community.

Many more Singaporeans are now showing a greater interest in growing edibles and being in nature. There is societal openness to this, and not just an esoteric interest of a fringe group of enthusiasts. We can ride on this momentum and re-introducing nature's workers such as chickens, bees and fish within our neighbourhoods to produce local food will reduce our reliance on harmful chemicals and machinery that damages Earth.

Fish in ponds help fertilise crops while eating up mosquito larvae – we do not need fogging and we do not need Wolbachia. And we can reduce dengue risk. Our young children will have ample opportunities to interact with Nature, which enhances their physical, intellectual, emotional development.

If permaculture is implemented at scale, food supply chain issues would be less of an issue as it is now for Singapore, because we now import more than 90% of our food. As global fuel scarcity increases, countries will choose to prioritise their own people over exporting to us. How can we ensure our food security when that happens?

There is a little-studied case of the success of Cuba. It was plunged into a severe economic and food crisis in the 1990s when the Soviet Union dissolved. But within a decade, it recovered sufficiently to double agricultural production, increase calorific availability by 25% for its people and maintain a consistent and equitable social food programme. Permaculture methods featured strongly in the reforms of Cuba at that time, and it is worth further studying to see what good practices we can adopt to ensure Singapore's food resilience and future.

I urge MND to avail more land towards regenerative nature technology research, including utilising current unused pockets of land in our HDB estates.

We can work with interested Singaporeans to make permaculture part of the Singaporean way of life. There are scientists in universities, sociologists and even private groups such as Abundant Cities and even passionate individuals like The Tender Gardener Olivia Choong and Urban Jungle Folks led by Ms Michelle Tan who are already rallying Singaporeans in this effort. All MND needs to do is to allow and to support them.

We can even transform the current “illegal planting” problem plaguing many HDB estates into little farms that empower and engage our seniors. Of course, this requires hard work and effort, especially in finding solutions to disamenities, like rooster crowing too early, disturbing residents. But the pros outweigh the cons. And I believe it is possible to enrol our people to co-create solutions to solve these challenges along the way. Where there is a will, there is a way.

Partnering to Co-create Shared Spaces

Ms Jessica Tan Soon Neo (East Coast): Sir, there is an increasing concern on mental well-being of Singapore’s population. The National Population Health Survey 2020 reported 13.4% of the population having poor mental health, of which younger adults aged 18 to 29 made up the highest proportion at 21.5%. Similar trends can be observed with older persons. Older persons are affected more by specific stresses in later life, example, ongoing loss in capacities and a decline in functional ability which could result in isolation, loneliness and depression.

In Changi Simei, together with our community partners Changi General Hospital (CGH) and Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), we have been exploring how the environment can contribute to mental well-being for the young and old in our community. Studying unused common spaces in the estate, engaging residents to understand needs, observing residents’ rituals and ground stakeholders, we co-created with residents, volunteers and agency partners an open design Art Farm in one of our pocket parks. This is now managed by residents and volunteers, with the support of agency partners. Residents from our public and private estates are involved and enjoy the farm as they wish. The initial findings are promising.

We believe that better understanding of the design of space and the involvement of community partners and residents in place-making and place-keeping can contribute to the mental well-being of residents across different demographic groups. How can MND support such efforts in older estates amongst community stakeholders to reimagine and co-create shared spaces in the community to promote residents’ mental well-being and inclusivity? The common shared spaces could include pocket parks, underutilised urban spaces and shared lanes in the private and public estates. Such spaces create opportunities for new nature spaces for mindful living and activities for the young and old; senior empowerment and volunteerism, youth spaces; inter-generational resident engagement.

Nature Parks in the Community

Mr Liang Eng Hwa: Sir, I am very thankful that during the circuit breaker in the period of April to June 2020, Singaporeans were allowed exercise at the parks; either alone or with someone you live with.

Personally, it has been most beneficial to me, as I can get out for some fresh air and sunlight; and it really improved my overall well-being. I am sure this is the case for many others.

Indeed, during the pandemic, having a park to go to near your home is such a blessing. We have our founding leaders to thank for being so steadfast in setting land aside for parks including nature reserves even though Singapore is so land scarce. This passion and conviction to safeguard and develop our green spaces has continued through the generations of leaders; and today Singapore is one of the greenest cities in the world.

Developing and upkeeping a park comes with considerable costs. But it is worth it and necessary, particularly so for a densely populated but small island state.

The pandemic has made Singaporeans even more cherished of our parks and visitorship has risen exponentially.

Sir, at Bukit Panjang town, we are fortunate to have a number nature parks around us with very convenient accesses; including one nature park that is managed by Town Council. It attracted visitors from all over the island.

MND launched the exciting City in Nature vision three years ago. I would like to ask how would National Parks Board (NParks) work with the community including the local agencies like Town Councils to enhance and enrich the green spaces in our neighbourhoods and towns?

Towards Net-zero Carbon

Ms Tin Pei Ling (MacPherson): Chairman, buildings account for over 20% of Singapore's carbon emissions. This is significant. With technology and advancement, new buildings today can use green material and smarter designs to reduce emissions. But in a highly built-up environment like Singapore, we have many mature estates with high concentrations of buildings that are decades old. Many of these buildings are home to our people. I had spoken on this topic in last year's COS debate as well.

How is the Government accelerating our transition to a low-carbon built environment? What are the quick wins and achievements so far? The use of sensors and artificial intelligence can offer predictive analytics and enable predictive maintenance, which can also identify inefficiencies and help to reduce waste of resources and energy. First, leveraging such smart technology at scale could support our journey to go green.

Could the MND share more about how it is leveraging technology to do so? Also, what else is the MND doing to enhance existing buildings to be more energy efficient and reduce emissions, without having to tear down or affect homes where precious memories are forged?

The Chairman: Mr Xie Yao Quan, take your cuts together.

City in Nature and Our Community

Mr Xie Yao Quan: Sir, NParks has made considerable efforts to engage and involve Singaporeans in the community at large in its efforts to transform Singapore into a city in nature, including allotment gardens in parks, tree planting under the One Million Trees movement and so on. What more can be done to bring even more of the community on board these efforts?

Green Buildings

Sir, Singapore aims to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. Since buildings account for over 20% of our carbon emissions, I had asked in last year Committee of Supply about the Government's plans to accelerate our transition to a low-carbon built environment.

Can MND provide further updates in this regard? Specifically, what more can be done to green our existing stock of older and less energy efficient buildings and what exciting job opportunities can Singaporeans look forward to as we continue to push for greener buildings?

R&D in Urban Sustainability

Sir, Singapore has unusual challenges in urban sustainability, as it is a small city-state with many competing demands.

How is MND driving research and development in urban sustainability in our context and, at the same time, generating economic opportunities to export our knowledge and capabilities in urban sustainability to the world?

Enhancing Our Global City

Mr Yip Hon Weng (Yio Chu Kang): Mr Chairman, COVID-19 has hit the construction sector hard. We can do more for the built environment sector in the following areas.

First, contractors must be paid in a timely manner. Currently, the finalisation of accounts is slow, often taking a few years after project completion. Variation Orders (VOs) are also not certified or paid in full, until the project is completed. New written directions are also being issued, after they complied with original written directions. Some VOs for larger projects can amount to millions of dollars, severely affecting contractors' cash flow, without timely payments from clients.

Government Procuring Entities (GPEs) should lead by example. They should streamline their final account process and certification of VOs and pay contractors promptly.

Second, coordination amongst Government agencies can improve. Contractors often experience long waits for Temporary Occupation Permits (TOP) from the various Government agencies. Each agency also takes a significant time for service diversion, sometimes up to six months. Moreover, only their own appointed term contractor can carry out the diversionary works.

We must establish timelines and escalation mechanisms or have an effective coordinating body to resolve inter-agency issues.

Third, we need a bigger push to attract our local workforce to take up the higher value-added jobs, such as engineers. This is to build up resilience when the next pandemic or crisis hits us. Can MND consider a shorter work week of five days for the sector? This may seem counterproductive but when workers are well-rested, this promotes an accident-free environment and improves morale and productivity.

Integrated Facility Management

Mr Raj Joshua Thomas (Nominated Member): Sir, integrated and aggregated facility management – IFM and AFM – will help achieve synergies and cost savings in the built environment sector, consisting of managing agents, security, cleaning, landscaping, waste management, pest control, elevator and escalator maintenance, and repair works.

These industries also form a cluster under the Future Economy Council. Could the Minister elaborate on efforts being made to encourage these sectors to come together to bid for IFM and AFM contracts.

Separately, how can we encourage buyers who are accustomed to tendering for these services separately to start tendering for IFM and AFM contracts instead? And is it possible to introduce incentives to help them craft such tenders?

Built Environment Sustainability

Mr Don Wee (Chua Chu Kang): Chairman, buildings in Singapore account for over 20% of our carbon emissions, what are MND's plan to expedite our transition to a low-carbon built environment? Certainly, more can be done to green our existing stock of older buildings, which may be less energy efficient. Can the Ministry share its initiatives and schemes to reduce the carbon footprint of our older buildings?

2.45 pm

At last year's COS, MND announced that it was exploring whether to require building owners to conduct energy audits to improve the energy performance of their buildings. What is the outcome of this review? Will the Ministry proceed to require this of owners, and if so, will there be any Government assistance to help the smaller building owners to perform the energy audits.

Integrated Planning and Design

Mr Kwek Hian Chuan Henry: Chairman, a key focus area identified in the refreshed Built Environment (BE) Industry Transformation Map (ITM) is integrated planning and design. This is necessary as the built sector adopts more pre-fabricated design technologies, design collaboration and digitisation.

Beyond that, it will also shift the job types within the sector to be more knowledge intensive, which will allow us to attract more young Singaporeans. It will also strengthen the incentive to create efficiency through this supply chain, through stronger collaboration.

For example, if future manufacturing contracts has in-built incentive to share the benefits of design improvements for key members along the entire supply chain, the integrated planning and design systems could quickly allow various parties to coordinate design revisions, as well as to objectively measure the time and cost savings due to each party. Can MND provide more details on its' efforts to drive collaboration at the planning and design stage.

Solving Neighbour Dispute

Neighbor disputes are on the rise. It is great to hear that Municipal Services Office (MSO)'s Community Advisory Panel (CAP) recommends tackling noises in the community as a first step. But is there more that MSO can do to handle neighbor disputes? Specifically, can MSO do more to resolve disputes that is central around a small group of individuals who exhibit strong anti-social behaviours?

Some of these individuals use feedback channels of agencies to create difficult situations for others and civil servants. Some of these also harass neighbours and get away with it as they do not breach the legal threshold. And some of these people also suffer from mental health issues. They need help, but they are not legally obliged to seek it.

Can MND consider getting CAP to set up a framework for Government agencies to proactively identify these individuals, and have a system to intervene to resolve these anti-social behaviours? Can MND also share what other kind of neighbor disputes will MSO look into prioritising to resolve beyond noise?

Strengthening Our Social Compact

Mr Yip Hon Weng: Chairman, last year, Municipal Services Office (MSO) set up a Community Advisory Panel (CAP) on neighbourhood noise. I have several queries: first, how are the extended quiet hours being enforced? Are residents aware of this recommendation? As schools and community exercises have been cited as contributors of community noise, have we consulted the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Health Promotion Board (HPB)? Are condo residents required to abide by the quiet hours? If so, have the Management Corporation Strata Title (MCST)s been notified?

Second, what measures are being used to determine the success of the extended quiet hours? If this does not resolve the conflicts, and perpetrators continue to violate the guidelines, will MND move legislation to resolve the problem?

Third, we need to explore innovative ways to resolve these problems. Are we leveraging technology to monitor and enforce the guidelines? Are we learning from other countries on how they solve similar problems?

Lastly, we should further involve the community to resolve community issues. In 2015, citizens were appointed as community wardens, as a pilot programme to support the Police to respond to noise complaints. What were the outcomes of this initiative? What have we learnt? Are there any plans to reintroduce it in some capacity? How else is MND encouraging the partnering of the community to redefine social norms, besides joss paper burning practices and community noise?

The Chairman: Order. I propose to take a break now.

Thereupon Mr Speaker left the Chair of the Committee and took the Chair of the House.

Mr Speaker: Order. I suspend the Sitting and will take the Chair at 3.15 pm. Order. Order.

Sitting accordingly suspended

at 2.50 pm until 3.15 pm.

Sitting resumed at 3.15 pm.

[Mr Speaker in the Chair]

Debate in the Committee of Supply resumed.

[Mr Speaker in the Chair]

Head T (cont) –

The Chairman: Minister Desmond Lee.

3.16 pm

The Minister for National Development (Mr Desmond Lee): Chairman, I thank Members for their cuts.

I will speak about public housing. My colleague, Minister Indranee Rajah will cover our efforts to transform Singapore into a City in Nature, and guide Singapore's future development. Senior Minister of State Sim Ann will highlight what we are doing to rejuvenate heartland shops and foster gracious communities. Senior Minister of State Tan Kiat How will speak about the transformation of our Built Environment sector.

And finally, Minister of State Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim will share more about our support for seniors and the more vulnerable members of our society.

Sir, last month, we reaffirmed this Government's commitment to provide affordable and accessible housing for Singaporeans and to keep improving our system.

The housing market had been stable for a number of years until COVID-19 severely disrupted our building programme. We responded decisively to stabilise the situation and catch up on lost time, ramped up supply significantly and kept BTO prices almost flat in the last two years.

Therefore, even in 2022, virtually all first-timers who applied for BTO flats in non-mature estates were successful within three tries. And more than eight in 10 BTO and resale flat buyers could service their HDB loans using their CPF contributions, with little to no cash outlay.

What else are we doing to provide affordable and accessible housing for Singaporeans?

Let me start with how we will help young married couples get their first home. Our first priority is to catch up on lost time and deliver keys to Singaporeans who have been waiting for their homes. My colleagues have been working very hard and we will turn the corner soon.

For Waterway Sunrise II, one of the more badly affected BTO projects, my colleagues at HDB, Expand Construction and Surbana Jurong rotated teams and worked overtime. They had to deal with unexpected challenges throughout the pandemic, like finding alternative sources of precast components when Malaysia implemented the movement control order. Thanks to the team's tremendous effort, we will finally deliver keys to all buyers by the end of this month.

You may also recall Greatearth, a former main contractor that ran into financial difficulties. When that happened, HDB quickly onboarded new contractors within a month. We have since completed three of the former Greatearth BTO projects and delivered two of them ahead of their estimated completion dates.

This year, we are on track to complete and hand over keys to another 20,000 HDB flats across 22 housing projects. My colleagues and I would like to thank Singaporeans for their patience and understanding. We know the delays have disrupted many of their life plans.

Sir, across both the private sector and the public market, we are expecting close to 100,000 home completions between 2023 and 2025, with almost 40,000 home completions this year alone – this will be the highest number of home completions in the last five years, including the pre-COVID-19 years of 2018 and 2019.

This increased supply should help to alleviate some of the pressures in the rental market, which Mr Louis Chua spoke about. Households who have been waiting for their keys will leave the rental market for their new homes, and the new homes will provide some additional rental supply.

Second, we have significantly increased the supply of BTO flats. We launched more than 23,000 flats last year and will launch around the same number this year.

HDB is now building aggressively and on a very large scale, overseeing almost 100 BTO projects island-wide. By 2025, there will be more than 150 concurrent projects. As I have said before, we will launch up to 100,000 new flats in total from 2021 to 2025.

Some Members have asked why we cannot build even more or build even faster. Let me explain because the process is not straightforward.

I will speak about land preparation while my colleague Senior Minister of State Tan Kiat How will talk about HDB's productivity and innovation journey to build flats that are much taller than before and more comprehensive than in the past.

Sir, we have land for housing, but many of these are not large tracts of undeveloped greenfield sites that we can readily move into today. Land preparation is a long and complex process. For greenfield sites, we need to ensure that supporting infrastructure like roads and sewers are ready and conduct extensive soil investigations. For brownfield sites, we may need to relocate existing users, clear existing structures and divert services underground, such as cables and sewers.

We also pay special attention to the ecological and heritage significance of sites to ensure that we develop sensitively and sustainably. When needed, we engage extensively and conduct impact studies. This takes time.

With the Old Police Academy at Mt Pleasant, for example, studies and engagements began in 2018, seven years before the launch of the first BTO project at this site in 2025.

So, a lot of forward planning and preparation is required before we can even begin construction – about five to 10 years of lead time, or even more in some cases.

As Singapore recovers from the pandemic, we should also remember that the pace of construction is going up significantly, not just for HDB but other organisations and businesses too. Resources, manpower and construction capacity are not without their limits.

We would not have been able to ramp up our BTO supply by 35% in 2022 if not for our pre-pandemic plans to build Shorter Waiting Time flats.

Before COVID-19 hit, we were already planning to launch more flats with shorter waiting times of three years or less. These are flats that we build ahead of demand, a year or more before they are launched. And the land preparations would have started even earlier.

So, when housing demand rose during the pandemic, we were able to tap on these sites meant for Shorter Waiting Time flats, and bring forward their launch dates and offer them in BTO exercises to meet immediate demand.

After we address the current supply crunch, we will get back on track to launch more Shorter Waiting Time flats from 2024 onwards. By 2025, we plan to return to pre-COVID-19 levels, to launch around 2,000 to 3,000 of such flats per year.

Third, we will have to lend a stronger helping hand to younger married couples and families who are trying to buy their first home.

Throughout our Forward Singapore Housing Conversations, calls to give them more support came across loud and clear.

Today, we already set aside the majority of our BTO flat supply for first-timers – at least 95% of the 4-room or larger flat supply in both mature and non-mature estates.

First-timers are also given two ballots, compared to one for second-timers.

But first-timers are a diverse group, as they include all eligible Singaporeans who have not enjoyed a housing subsidy before. There are some who may have owned private property, some who had purchased a resale flat without taking housing grants and subsidies, as well as couples who are planning to get married.

Among this diverse group, we need to give stronger support to younger married couples and parents. Indeed, one of the participants in our Forward Singapore Housing Conversations told us that, "It is hard to feel like a family or think about having kids if you don't have your own home."

We fully recognise this. Having a home of their own will provide a stable environment for newly married couples to set up their families, and parents want to give their young children a conducive environment. These young married couples and parents also probably have shorter work experience, so they might not have sufficient savings to afford other housing options at the time.

So, we will introduce a new category: First-Timer (Parents and Married Couples), who will enjoy enhanced support when they apply for a new HDB flat.

Who will be in this group? First-timer families with children aged 18 and below, as well as young married couples aged 40 and below, who are embarking on their homeownership journey. They must also not have owned or sold any residential property before, nor had the chance to book a flat in the past five years.

This is so that we can provide more targeted support for families who want to secure their first home quickly and settle down.

That said, HDB may exercise flexibility on a case-by-case basis, if there are extenuating circumstances. For example, I have met adult children who have added themselves as co-owners to their parents' flat so that they could help their parents cope with the mortgage to keep their homes. They tend to come from lower-income families. When they apply for a new flat and set up their own families, HDB may consider allowing them to qualify for this priority category.

In total, about 10% of all first-timer families will be considered first-timer parents and married couples for this sub-category.

Some Members – Mr Zhulkarnain, Mr Seah Kian Peng, Ms Foo Mee Har and others – have asked us how we will improve their chances of securing a flat. We will do so in three ways.

First, as Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong had announced during his Budget speech, first-timer parents and married couples will get one additional ballot when they apply for a new HDB flat.

So, three ballots in total, up from the two that first-timers currently get, when they apply for any flat type in any estate – mature estates, non-mature estates or prime location housing.

Second, we will adjust an existing scheme – the Parenthood Priority Scheme – so that all First-Timer Parents and Married Couples also qualify for this scheme.

The current Parenthood Priority Scheme supports first-timer married couples who have children or who are expecting children. Under the scheme, up to 30% of the BTO flat supply and 50% of the supply of balance flats will be set aside for eligible applicants.

We will now expand the scheme to cover First-Timer Parents and Married Couples too. That means that young married couples who do not yet have children can also qualify.

To reflect this expansion, we will rename it as the Family and Parenthood Priority Scheme.

And with more families qualifying, we will further increase the flat supply that we set aside for them – up to 40% of the BTO flat supply and 60% of the Sale of Balance Flats (SBF) flat supply, in all launches in mature estates, non-mature estates and prime location housing.

Third, for BTO launches in non-mature estates, we will give First-Timer Parents and Married Couples first priority under the Family and Parenthood Priority Scheme if they apply for a 4-room or smaller flat.

This means that they will be shortlisted ahead of all other applicants who are eligible for the Family and Parenthood Priority Scheme, and stand a higher chance of being invited to select a flat.

Take a young couple, say 26 or 27 years old, who have just ROM-ed (Registry of Marriages) recently. They will be considered a first-timer in this enhanced sub-category when they apply for a flat later this year. Let us say they are considering a 4-room BTO flat in Yishun or Tampines to live near either set of parents.

Regardless which one they choose, they will get three ballot chances from the get-go. They will also qualify for the Family and Parenthood Priority Scheme and the Married Child Priority Scheme, which set aside flats for eligible applicants.

And if they choose a 4-room flat in Yishun, which is a non-mature estate, they will be among the first to be shortlisted, across all eligible applicants for the Family and Parenthood Priority Scheme. So, their chances of being invited to select a flat will be substantially higher.

So far, we have observed that virtually all first-timer families have been invited to select a flat within three tries, when they apply for a BTO flat in non-mature estates.

With these new changes, first-timer parents and married couples should be able to select a flat within fewer attempts, especially if they apply for a 4-room or smaller BTO flat in non-mature estates where demand tends to be more moderate.

3.30 pm

Some have asked if fiancé-fiancée couples can receive some extra help too. We understand that they also hope to settle down quickly, similar to young married couples and families with young children. But with the tight supply now, even as we are ramping up new supply, let us first help those who are already married or have children, but have yet to secure their first home.

As first-timers, fiancé-fiancée couples will still continue to receive two ballots when they apply for a new HDB flat. They will also continue to benefit from the large majority of flats that are set aside for first-timers. When they get married or ROM, they will similarly receive extra support to help them secure a flat more quickly.

Sir, even as we give more help to first-timer parents and married couples, we also need to enhance the efficiency of our system, so that flats go to those who need them, as quickly as possible.

Currently, 40% of BTO flat applicants who are invited to select a flat decide not to take up the offer.

When I shared this during our Forward Singapore Housing Conversations, participants were surprised. It seemed at odds with what they had heard about strong housing demand. They thought that some applicants might be trying their luck, hoping for a good ballot number, for an attractive location. My HDB colleagues have also shared that some applicants may be rather selective, wanting only flats, say, on higher floors.

There is probably a range of reasons. For some, the remaining flats may be out of budget. For others, they might be considering other housing options, or prefer flats with specific attributes for specific reasons. Understandably, some would rather give up the opportunity to select a flat now and wait longer for a better flat. But whatever the reason, such applicants do crowd out other home buyers who may have more pressing needs.

This is why we encourage applicants to apply for flats only if they really intend to purchase one because there are other homebuyers who want to buy those flats. To reinforce this, our current practice is to issue what we term a "non-selection count", when applicants are invited to book a flat but do not take up the offer.

After receiving two non-selection counts, first-timers will be considered second-timers for one year when they ballot for a flat. They can still apply for a new HDB flat, but the flat allocation quota for second-timers is lower. As for second-timers who chalk up two non-selection counts, they will not be allowed to participate in HDB sales exercises for a year.

I have heard various suggestions during our Forward Singapore Housing Conversations to bring down the non-selection rate further. Some suggested removing privileges for two years. Some suggested raising the BTO application rate from \$10 as it is today to \$1,000 or more or imposing a financial penalty if applicants do not select a flat and do not have a good reason.

After careful consideration, we have decided for now to tighten the rules for non-selection. We will consider first-timers as second-timers for a year when they ballot for a flat, after they receive one non-selection count, down from the two counts today. Similarly, second-timers will not be allowed to participate in HDB sales exercises for one year, after they receive one non-selection count. So, this is more stringent than what we have in place today.

But, at the same time, we understand that some applicants may have genuine reasons for not selecting a home. So, we want to strike a right balance, because buying a home is a large financial decision. We want to be fair to applicants who have very limited options, when they are invited to select their flat. Therefore, HDB will not issue a non-selection count if BTO flat applicants have 10 or fewer flats left to choose from. For Sale of Balanced Flat (SBF) exercises, where the flat supply is much smaller to begin with, we will use a lower threshold of five flats.

Some applicants may also turn down the offer to select a flat because their circumstances have changed unexpectedly since they applied for the flat. Where there are extenuating circumstances, HDB may exercise flexibility to waive the non-selection count, not issue it in the first place.

The moves that I have just announced will take effect from this year's August BTO exercise. We are announcing them early to give everyone some time to understand how these changes may affect them. And HDB will also need some time to stress-test and implement the system changes needed for all these moves.

Let me now move on to our support for first-timers in the resale market.

As Deputy Prime Minister Wong has announced recently during his Budget speech, we have increased the CPF Housing Grant for first-timer families, to enhance housing affordability in the resale market. Some first-timers prefer resale flats because they want to live near their parents or start raising families sooner.

So, we have increased the CPF Housing Grant by \$30,000 for those who purchase a 4-room or smaller resale flat, and by \$10,000 for those who purchase a 5-room or larger resale flat. Altogether, eligible first-timer families can now receive up to \$190,000 when they buy a resale flat.

To make it easier for buyers who had not completed their resale transaction before this announcement was made, we have extended the enhanced grants to them, so that they would not have to cancel their application and re-apply to qualify for the increased grants. This is unlike grants that are applicable to new BTO flats, which are tied to the prevailing policy at the point of BTO sales launch.

This grant increase was helpful to Mr Zulkhairi, a warehouse logistics trainer and his family of three. They recently bought a 3-room resale flat and will receive a total of \$130,000 in housing grants. Mr Zulkhairi shared with us that this will help to lower the monthly mortgage repayments for him and his family.

Some Members, such as Mr Xie Yao Quan, Assoc Prof Jamus Lim, Ms Hazel Poa, Ms Mariam Jaafar and others, voiced concern that this grant may increase resale prices even further. As Deputy Prime Minister Wong had explained during Budget debate, this was a move that we considered very carefully. We are aware that whenever we increase grants, especially in a buoyant resale environment, there is always this risk. We decided to move on this, given the current context.

First, as I mentioned earlier, we have significantly ramped up supply of new BTO flats to meet strong housing demand.

Second, to manage demand and encourage financial prudence, we had introduced two rounds of property cooling measures, which are working their way through the market.

Third, the outlook for the broader economic environment remains extremely uncertain. The global economy may experience a shallow downturn this year, some analysts say. Mortgage interest rates have increased and could rise further in the coming months from already elevated levels. Some households will be stretched.

With these in mind, we made a considered decision to increase the CPF Housing Grant and give targeted support to eligible first-timers, who made up about one-third of all resale flat buyers in the past two years. It does not apply universally to the entire resale market, but only a very specific group. In this economic climate, buyers are growing increasingly price sensitive, so sellers who raise their asking prices run the risk of pricing themselves out of the market.

We hope these moves give first-timers greater assurance about buying their first homes and you can count on our support to set up and raise strong families.

Next, let me share what we are doing to help singles. Many Members, both present and past spoke about this, like Miss Cheryl Chan, Ms Carrie Tan, Mr Louis Chua, Mr Xie Yao Quan, Ms Heng Ting Ru, Ms Joan Pereira, Miss Rachel Ong and many others.

While we support families strongly, we recognise that society continues to change. More Singaporeans want to live apart from their parents before settling down. There are also singles who help to take care of their ageing parents but hope to have a place of their own. Others are caregivers of older parents and want to have their own space.

Their housing aspirations and needs are important too. And we have been making changes to better support them over the years.

We first introduced the Single Singapore Citizen Scheme in 1991, when singles could purchase HDB resale flats. From 2013, singles could also apply for a new 2-room Flexi flat. Then, in 2018, we increased the Proximity Housing Grant for singles who wanted to buy a resale flat to live with their parents. We also extended it to singles who wanted to buy a resale flat of their own, but remain near their parents, instead of living with their parents, often for caregiving reasons. In August last year, we increased the allocation quota for singles buying 2-room Flexi flats from 50% to 65%, to improve their chances of securing a home.

Eligible first-timer singles can also enjoy the recently increased CPF Housing Grant announced during Budget. We have increased it from \$25,000 to \$40,000 for singles buying 2- to 4-room resale flats and from \$20,000 to \$25,000 for 5-room resale flats.

We are glad to know that this provides more help to singles, like Ms Cheryll Yeo, to purchase flats of their own. Ms Yeo recently bought a 3-room resale flat in Serangoon and will receive the increased CPF Housing Grant of \$40,000. Her new home is near her parents' place in Hougang, so she will receive the \$10,000 Proximity Housing Grant too.

During our Forward Singapore Housing Conversations, many singles, young and older, shared their challenges, perspectives and suggestions with us. We are closely studying what they have told us, to see how else we can support their housing aspirations, including through co-living models or other types of housing arrangements as Ms Carrie Tan and Mr Xie Yao Quan have suggested.

Let me now speak about our housing support for seniors, whom several Members have touched on.

Many of our seniors are homeowners. Over the years, we have introduced various upgrading programmes to help them age-in-place.

To go a step further, MND, MOH and HDB have jointly developed a new housing type, the Community Care Apartment, or CCA. This is a fairly new housing-plus-care option for seniors. We have launched two pilots, at Bukit Batok and at Queenstown, which were well-subscribed. We also received valuable feedback from seniors, who were keen to apply and who wanted us to build more.

So, I am happy to announce that we will launch a third Community Care Apartment project in Bedok later this year, for our seniors.

Given the positive response so far, we are developing a pipeline of Community Care Apartments in different locations across Singapore. We are working out the details and will share more later this year. We will also continue to refine the Community Care Apartment model as we gain experience, especially after our first residents move in next year. My colleague, Minister of State Faishal Ibrahim will elaborate more on our efforts to help seniors age-in-place later.

Finally, let me touch on how we will better assist lower-income families with housing options.

About 85% of our low-income households in Singapore own their homes. We achieve this high rate of ownership by pricing our flats so that lower-income households can afford them too. We also adopt a progressive approach, with more housing grants to support those with lower incomes.

For example, in the ongoing BTO exercise, the typical selling price for a 3-room flat in Jurong West Crystal is \$220,000. A household with a monthly income of \$2,500 can receive \$70,000 in housing grants, which will further reduce the price of the flat to \$150,000. This household will need to use about 19% of their monthly income to pay for their mortgage instalments, which means that they can service their mortgage fully using their monthly CPF contributions, with zero cash outlay.

For those who are not yet ready for home ownership, we provide highly subsidised rental flats as a social safety net. We recognise that some of these households may face other complex, interlocking challenges. So, we pair rental housing with social support, to make sure that tenants receive the support that they need to achieve stability, self-reliance and social mobility.

Many Members have asked about our efforts to support and uplift our rental tenants, and Minister of State Faishal will share more later.

3.45 pm

As I have said before, our public housing system is not perfect. We must learn from our experiences, continually improve and enhance our system for Singaporeans, and I thank Members for their thoughtful suggestions. For example, we used to have the Registration for Flats System, or RFS. This was basically a queue system – HDB built flats based on the number of applicants in the queue and flats were allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

At the height of the property boom in the mid-1990s, there were as many as 150,000 flat buyers in the queue, and the wait for a flat could be as long as seven years. But when the Asian Financial Crisis hit in 1997, housing demand plummeted. The queue disappeared, leaving HDB with 31,000 unsold flats which took many years to sell. It had a very serious impact on the value of existing homes in the resale market, affecting existing home owners.

So, the challenges with the RFS were plain to see then. We acknowledge then that it could not cope with sharp and sudden shifts in demand. So, in 2002, we decided to replace it with the Build-To-Order (BTO) model, but we did not stop there. Over the years, we continued to refine our system. Today, we have a more comprehensive model, which is still developing, comprising of BTO flats, Shorter Waiting Time flats, Sale of Balance flats (SBF) and flats that are offered under open booking. This combination allows us to more dynamically adjust our building plans in response to demand.

If demand surges, including suddenly like now during a crisis, we ramp up our main BTO pipeline and tap on our Shorter Waiting Time flat pipeline to meet immediate needs. And with a greater number of Shorter Waiting Time flats in future, this will be a more effective buffer.

If demand falls, we can scale back the BTO pipeline responsively and allow homebuyers to book unselected flats from earlier launches through SBF or through open booking exercises, to minimise the potential for oversupply.

We have also fine-tuned our current system with priority schemes and ballot chances, so that we can provide additional support to specific groups of buyers, like the First-Timer Parents and Married Couples we talked about earlier. In comparison, the allocation of flats under RFS was much more basic.

The current system may not always work perfectly, and we will continue to adjust and calibrate along the way. But it does seek to strike a reasonable balance across multiple objectives – fairness and efficiency in allocating flats, fiscal prudence and responsiveness to demand. Compared to its predecessors, the pure BTO model and the RFS model, I think it is a clear improvement.

Now, on the affordability of flats and fiscal sustainability. Let me assure Members once again that we aim to strike a good balance between the two. We set prices for BTO flats with affordability in mind. When incomes and prices go up together, flats will remain affordable and we may not need to increase market discounts or subsidies so much.

We also keep our market discounts and subsidies targeted for first-timers as well as households with lower incomes. And we are open to new approaches, like the Prime Location Public Housing Model, which we put in place after lots of engagement, which prevents flat buyers from benefiting from higher market discounts which later translate into excessive windfall gains.

The Progress Singapore Party (PSP) and the Workers' Party (WP) have offered suggestions on how flats can be made even cheaper than today. We thank them for their ideas. We have debated them extensively in the very recent Housing Motion, and we have carefully explained the difficulties that we see with these ideas, so I will not delve into them today.

Mr Henry Kwek, Mr Louis Chua, Ms Hazel Poa and Ms Foo Mee Har also raised some suggestions about housing loans. We use the CPF Ordinary Account (OA) interest rate as a peg, to give borrowers greater stability and certainty, since most service their mortgage repayments using their CPF OA savings.

Overall, in 2022, more than eight in 10 BTO and resale flat buyers could service their HDB loans using their CPF contributions, with little to no cash outlay.

Nonetheless, for homeowners who face difficulties keeping up with their mortgage instalments, HDB has various financial assistance measures in place to help them. HDB also provides one-to-one financial counselling to homeowners who are in arrears and will offer appropriate measures, depending on their situation, to help them. The proportion of households in arrears amongst those servicing HDB loans has also remained fairly stable over the past decade.

On raising the loan-to-value limit for first-timers, as Ms Foo Mee Har had suggested, we appreciate her intent to make flats more affordable for them. We recently lowered the limit for HDB housing loans in September last year to encourage flat buyers, including first-timers, to exercise more financial prudence, especially in a rising interest rate environment and an environment of greater economic uncertainty.

We do not expect this to adversely affect a significant proportion of first-time homebuyers. The significant grants we provide, especially for lower-income first-timers, allows them to offset the cash component of their flats. Nevertheless, I assure Ms Foo that we will keep watch and take this into consideration as we review our policies.

Mr Chairman, allow me to speak in Mandarin, please.

(In Mandarin): [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] The Government is committed to providing good homes for Singaporeans through various stages of life from your first home into your silver years.

We understand that many are anxious about the current housing situation. You might wonder, will your children be able to afford a home?

COVID-19 has significantly derailed our building plans, but we are getting back on track. Apart from ramping up the BTO supply, we will do even more to help first-timers to secure a flat.

If your children are first-timers, have children or are a young married couple aged 40 and below, and have never owned any residential property or had the chance to book a flat in the past five years, we will help them to secure a flat more quickly.

First, First-Timer Parents and Married Couples will get an additional ballot when they apply for a BTO flat in any estate.

Second, we previously had the Parenthood Priority Scheme, where we set aside up to 30% of the 3-room or larger BTO flat supply for married couples with children. We will now expand this programme and rename it to the Family and Parenthood Priority Scheme. Apart from first-timer families with children, first-timer married couples will also qualify for the Family and Parenthood Priority Scheme. And we will increase the proportion of the 3-room or larger BTO flat supply set aside for eligible applicants to 40%.

Third, under the Family and Parenthood Priority Scheme, First-Timer Parents and Married Couples will enjoy first priority, so they will stand a higher chance of being invited to select a flat.

We also recently enhanced the CPF Housing Grant to a maximum amount of \$80,000, to support first-timers who want to buy a resale flat instead.

As with earlier generations of Singaporeans, the Government will help your children to buy their first homes, and support them as they set up and raise their families.

We will take care of our seniors' housing needs too. We are launching a third Community Care Apartment at Bedok later this year. This is an assisted living option designed for seniors. This programme offers senior-friendly flat features, care services and social activities, so that seniors can enjoy their silver years with peace of mind.

(In English): Looking ahead, we are making ambitious, exciting moves to create space for our future needs, for our future generations, including in housing. We have already opened up new towns and housing areas in Tengah, in Miltonia and Ulu Pandan East, to offer some 36,000 HDB flats. Singaporeans can look forward to upcoming projects at Mount Pleasant, Keppel Club and Bayshore, which will yield about 17,000 HDB flats.

And further down the road in the 2030s and 2040s, we will open up the Greater Southern Waterfront for urban living and redevelop the Paya Lebar Airbase area to offer some 150,000 public and private homes. These plans were set in motion over a decade ago, when we started planning for the relocation of the Paya Lebar Airbase, Tanjong Pagar and Pasir Panjang ports.

We are also working on our plans for the Voluntary Early Redevelopment Scheme, or VERS, so that we can redevelop our towns in a sustainable manner and ensure equitable housing across generations. We will share more when ready.

As has been the hallmark of this Government, we will always look ahead to plan sustainably. We will continue to provide good homes for our people; and we will work closely with Singaporeans to ensure that the future of Singapore remains bright, inclusive and liveable.
[Applause.]

Mr Chairman: Minister Indranee Rajah.

The Second Minister for National Development (Ms Indranee Rajah): Mr Chairman, over the last 58 years, we made the journey from mudflats to Metropolis. Now, coming out of a global pandemic, we are poised to embark on the next stage of our city's transformation.

Building on the ideas, hopes, aspirations and dreams of Singaporeans, conveyed to us through extensive engagements, as well as based on Government planning, future Singapore will be one that is inclusive, sustainable, resilient and endearing.

Planning for the future requires us to think long term. In mid-2021, MND and the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) launched the Long-Term Plan Review, which mapped out our land use strategies to guide Singapore's development for the next 50 years and beyond.

This included an extensive engagement with Singaporeans to hear their thoughts on these strategies, as Senior Minister of State Sim Ann mentioned in the COS 2022. Mr Cheng Hsing Yao, Miss Cheryl Chan and Ms Nadia Samdin have asked for an update on this.

Since then, URA had engaged over 15,000 people from all walks of life. Through this process, we found that we sometimes have different needs and aspirations, and therefore, must make trade-offs. It is part and parcel of land use planning, given that Singapore has limited land.

Our collective aspirations and potential strategies to achieve them, were featured in URA's Space for our Dreams exhibition in 2022, which was visited by close to 50,000 people, with 150,000 views on URA's website.

Let me share some of the key takeaways from the public engagement and how we are translating them into long-term strategies for our future city. First, it is evident that Singaporeans take pride in our identity and heritage. While we cannot conserve each and every older building, we nevertheless want to feel that sense of familiarity and connection as we walk through our streets.

Today, we already carefully consider how to safeguard our heritage as a key part of urban planning. In the last 30 years, over 7,200 heritage buildings and structures have been conserved. Beyond individual buildings, we also enhance familiar neighbourhoods and shape new places to make them memorable.

We will reinforce this through Identity Corridors, where we will use urban and streetscape design to enhance the character of historic trunk roads, such as the Historic East corridor that cuts across Joo Chiat and Geylang Serai.

Second, it is clear that we love nature and greenery. But, at the same time, there is both need and demand for development. Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin asked how we would balance the two.

4.00 pm

We take a science-based approach to identify ecologically important sites and prioritise them for conservation. For example, through National Parks Board (NParks)'s Ecological Profiling Exercise, we have gained a better understanding of Singapore's ecological connectivity and have identified key ecological corridors on our land and in our waters.

However, given our physical constraints, we need to balance demands across a wide variety of needs, including housing, community amenities and workplaces. There may be some greenfield sites that we need to safeguard as options for development. But Singaporeans can be assured that any decision to proceed will only be made after we have carefully studied the trade-offs and alternatives in close coordination with the relevant agencies. Where necessary, we will also undertake environmental studies and formulate mitigation measures.

The Government will also engage and involve stakeholders. In response to Prof Koh Lian Pin, for proposed developments that require an Environmental Impact Assessment, we seek views from academics, stakeholder groups and the public on the findings where applicable.

The reports are also made publicly available online, unless there are reasons to maintain confidentiality, such as security considerations. In these cases, we will consider whether the full report can be made public and the disclosure modality, such as, for example, making it available for hard copy viewing. And we do recognise that some may face difficulties accessing hardcopy reports. Where possible, we will

provide accommodations, such as by extending the duration of the public feedback period. All feedback is carefully considered and incorporated into the final report and our plans where relevant.

Third, some participants shared concerns on how Singapore will adapt to the increasingly complex and ambiguous global environment, something which Mr Cheng Hsing Yao also spoke about.

To cater for the uncertainties of the future, we continuously monitor trends, such as an ageing population, to evolving geopolitical tensions, and shifts in the global economic outlook. This enables us to consider a range of possibilities and plan ahead to enhance our resilience.

Ms Carrie Tan suggested we review the allocation of land to various uses, such as residential and commercial, to factor in evolving trends, such as changes to live-work patterns.

Indeed, this is something we currently do and will continue to do. For example, in developing plans for areas, such as the Greater Southern Waterfront, we intentionally keep our plans flexible and pace out their development. This is so that we can adjust the mix of uses to respond to changing trends and needs.

The Long-Term Plan Review, as the name indicates, sets out our goals in the long-term, that is, to say, a 50-year timeframe or so. However, in order to get there, we will have to start giving effect to these strategies and plans over the next 10 to 15 years. This exercise is known as the Masterplan Review and it will provide detailed land use and development plans covering sites all over Singapore, from major transformation areas, such as the Greater Southern Waterfront and Paya Lebar Airbase, to residential towns, neighbourhoods and our heartlands.

The Masterplan presents an opportunity to plan ways to improve our living environment together. As highlighted by Ms Nadia Samdin, we will provide various avenues to engage Singaporeans of all ages and from all walks of life, to share their views on our national and local plans. This will be done over the next two to three years.

In response to Mr Cheng Hsing Yao and Miss Cheryl Chan, URA is currently working on the key ideas, but allow me share some of the strategies that the Masterplan will be built upon.

First, the Masterplan will be centred on liveable towns. As we plan for a new generation of towns, such as the ones that Paya Lebar Airbase will make way for and rejuvenate our older ones, we will pay close attention to making them more liveable for everyone.

Ms Poh Li San asked about plans to spread out amenities to better serve residential estates across Singapore. It remains our priority to make every housing estate a desirable place to live in. We will continue to ensure that our estates are planned with a range of housing options, served by a wide variety of amenities that meet our residents' needs and preferences and are highly accessible.

Second, the Masterplan will work within our land and resource constraints, a necessity for a small city like Singapore.

One way is to recycle our brownfield sites. There are also ongoing efforts to increase and optimise our underground space, as highlighted by Miss Cheryl Chan. Where possible, we place infrastructure, such as transport, utilities and storage spaces underground to free up aboveground space for housing, recreational spaces and other people-centric uses.

We will also repurpose existing buildings, as Prof Koh Lian Pin highlighted.

Today, we have incentives to encourage adaptive reuse. State properties are put to various uses, from residential to lifestyle. During COVID-19, many were activated as quarantine facilities. There are also incentives for owners who renovate their conserved buildings to meet modern uses while enhancing the building character, such as additional floor area and tax concessions. However, there will still be situations where redevelopment is needed.

In such cases, we have incentives to minimise emissions, such as BCA's Green Mark certification scheme that recognises redevelopment projects that conserve existing structures and reuse or recycle demolished materials.

Several Members also suggested repurposing under-utilised spaces for new uses. Assoc Prof Jamus Lim asked if the lowest floor of multi-storey car parks can be repurposed for bicycle parking, echoing a similar call made earlier by Mr Edward Chia in November 2022.

For some public housing developments, bicycle parking is provided at the void deck for our residents' convenience. To optimise space at void decks, HDB also plans to install 40,000 dual bicycle racks, which can each hold two bicycles in 23 existing HDB towns by 2025.

Multi-storey carparks with under-utilised space are currently used for various activities. One example is urban farming. We do not generally co-locate bicycle parking in car parks as this could pose safety issues to cyclists, especially where cars and bicycles have to use the same lanes. However, if a request is made by any precinct for this, HDB will consider on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration other competing uses for the carparks and whether the safety concerns and any other relevant considerations can be adequately addressed.

Ms Jessica Tan, Ms Carrie Tan, Miss Cheryl Chan and Mr Liang Eng Hwa suggested partnering the community to co-create shared spaces, such as permaculture plots or pilots.

Today, there are opportunities for Singaporeans to co-create community projects, leveraging URA's and HDB's Lively Places Programme. Many projects are in under-utilised spaces, including a void deck garden in Bishan.

NParks' initiatives' such as Friends of the Parks and the Community in Bloom movement also encourage the local community to play a part in designing, developing and managing green spaces, while HDB and SFA's urban farms at 14 multi-storey car park rooftops contribute to food security.

For permaculture farms to meaningfully enhance food security, they should be done on a commercial scale. Given the sizeable amount of land required, it is more practical to encourage community gardeners to adopt permaculture principles. Nevertheless, Town Councils have the autonomy to determine how common property can be utilised, subject to our laws and HDB's consent. We are happy to consider proposals that enhance food security and sustainability, where appropriate.

As Prof Koh Lian Pin highlighted, there are diverse and competing needs for our sea space as well. We carefully plan our sea space to meet Singapore's needs.

Today, most sea space within our port limits are used by the maritime and port industry. We also set aside space for other uses, including marine biodiversity conservation, aquaculture, utilities and recreation. For instance, we have safeguarded Marine Nature Areas and Marine Parks at our Southern Islands in URA's Parks and Waterbodies Plan. To optimise our sea space, we will continue working with relevant stakeholders to explore co-locating synergistic uses, such as siting of solar panels together with fish farms along the East Johor Straits.

These ideas, plans and strategies will eventually culminate in URA's presentation of their next draft Masterplan, which will be open for public feedback. I strongly encourage all Singaporeans to participate and share your views.

Next, let me zoom in one level deeper and speak about our plans to rejuvenate HDB estates, which are a big part of our residents' day-to-day lived experiences. As our nation gets older, so do our towns. But this does not mean that they cannot continue to be vibrant and liveable.

In response to Ms Poh Li San, HDB crowdsources ideas from residents to renew and rejuvenate existing HDB towns and estates under the Remaking Our Heartland programme. This spans from upgrading our town and Neighbourhood Centres to opening new community spaces and parks.

Ms Joan Pereira and Mr Ang Wei Neng asked about plans to maintain and upgrade older flats. I would like to assure Singaporeans that we are committed to giving due priority to rejuvenating our estates, for the safety and comfort of our residents.

All flats above 30 years would have already undergone the Main Upgrading Programme (MUP) in the past or will be selected for the Home Improvement Programme (HIP) by 2030 subject to the Government's fiscal position. The next round of upgrading for these flats would be around 60 to 70 years of age. In between, we provide support to flat owners for in-flat maintenance issues, such as repairing ceiling leaks under the Goodwill Repair Assistance.

Besides upgrading, redevelopment is another way to rejuvenate older areas. On Ms Joan Pereira's question about the Selective En bloc Redevelopment Scheme, or SERS, we shared that most projects with high redevelopment potential have already been selected for SERS and we do not expect many more sites to be eligible.

As Minister Desmond has mentioned earlier, we are also working on our plans for the Voluntary Early Redevelopment Scheme, or VERS. More households will be able to benefit from redevelopment before their leases expire and we can renew our towns progressively and create a refreshed living environment with new homes and updated amenities for residents. We will share more details with Singaporeans when ready.

Several Members also asked about HIP's drying racks. The external retractable clothes drying rack that Mr Ang Wei Neng spoke about is designed to maximise laundry capacity while ensuring user safety. Each of the six poles in the rack measures up to 1.7 metres in usable length, to accommodate large items like bedsheets. HDB will continue ways to look for ways to increase the rack's laundry capacity.

On Mr Muhamad Faisal Abdul Manap's suggestion to extend the installation of HIP's laundry hanging rack to flats which do not qualify for the programme, we can consider this when there is sufficient demand.

Allow me to respond to Mr Ang Wei Neng and Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong's cuts on lift upgrading. As of January 2023, there are only about 140 HDB blocks with units without direct access to lifts on the same floor. This is due to technical and site constraints or high costs, some of which exceed \$100,000 per unit.

HDB continues to explore technical methods, though these are still nascent. We will also continue to review requests for lift upgrading, bearing in mind costs, space constraints and technical feasibility.

Mr Dennis Tan has asked about the Lift access Housing Grant (LHG) which provides up to \$30,000 to help residents buy another flat with lift access.

A key condition for this grant is that residents need direct lift access due to medical or mobility issues. Of those who have applied, the approval rate is high, at close to 90%. As our residents aged, we do expect take-up to increase as they face medical or mobility conditions.

Flat owners who have bought another flat with the grants can sell their existing flat on the open market. Hence, there is no need for HDB to buy them back. If they have difficulties selling the existing flat, HDB can grant a time extension on a case-by-case basis. HDB will continue to monitor the situation and assess if further enhancements to the grant are necessary.

Prof Koh Lian Pin asked about our efforts to keep older estates cool as temperatures rise and how we will use the findings from Cooling Singapore 2.0.

HDB has several initiatives under the Green Towns Programme to reduce ambient temperatures, such as:

Introducing greenery to the top decks of selected multi-storey car parks in the form of urban farms, community gardens or rooftop greenery.

There is also an ongoing pilot on cool paint.

Where possible, such as for newer towns like Tengah, we adopt new technologies such as the Centralised Cooling System, which provides a more energy-efficient cooling solution than conventional air-conditioning systems.

We will continue to invest in R&D to deepen our knowledge on urban heat. This includes Cooling Singapore 2.0, an ongoing project where a digital model simulating our urban climate will help us understand the impact of urban heat locally and assess heat mitigation strategies.

Mr Chong Kee Hiong spoke about the need to educate residents on fire safety and provide safety features in HDB flats and estates.

Since 2018, SCDF's Fire Code requires every new flat and existing flat undergoing major renovation to install fire alarms. As optional improvements under HIP, HDB also offers installations of a Home Fire Alarm Device.

HDB and SCDF are further embarking on a trial to place and maintain one fire extinguisher at a lift lobby of every two HDB blocks.

Out of the 934 cases of residential fire last year, 783 took place in HDB flats, which reflects the proportion of public housing in Singapore. Today, SCDF conducts public education campaigns, including door-to-door engagements with residents and educating new homeowners on fire safety together with HDB.

Currently, all flat owners who are taking or have an existing HDB loan to buy their flats are required to be covered under basic fire insurance. An HDB-appointed company provides basic coverage and the premiums payable by flat owners range between \$1.63 and \$8.18 only, for a five-year coverage.

Let me now touch on another important priority for us – transforming Singapore into a City in Nature.

This vision is a key pillar of the Singapore Green Plan 2030. It underscores our strong desire to conserve and extend our natural capital – for the benefit of the environment and for the benefit of our people. Miss Cheryl Chan asked for updates on our progress on this front.

First, we have continued to establish new green spaces and to enhance existing ones.

For instance, last November, we opened the Rifle Range Nature Park. It serves as an ecological buffer to protect the rich biodiversity in the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve and creates more opportunities for families to enjoy nature-based recreation.

Between now and 2030, we have six more nature parks in the pipeline that Singaporeans can look forward to. This includes the Lim Chu Kang Nature Park, which we will be opening later this year. It will feature a variety of natural habitats such as mangroves, woodlands and grasslands, as well as a restored colonial-era bungalow for those who love heritage.

Singaporeans can also soon enjoy the northern section of the Lakeside Garden in Jurong Lake Gardens. It will offer a youth park with skating facilities and panoramic views across Jurong Lake.

We are also enhancing our existing green spaces to make them more inclusive. For example, we currently have 10 Therapeutic Gardens, which are specially designed to improve the physical and mental well-being of people across a diverse range of physical abilities and health conditions. This includes three that we launched over the past year, and we will add 20 more by 2030.

Second, we are pressing on with efforts to restore nature into our urban landscape.

Today, we have around 155 hectares of skyrise greenery, equivalent to almost 220 football fields. We are on track to meet our target of 200 hectares by 2030.

Ms Nadia Samdin asked about our efforts to green industrial estates. Since 2020, we have more than doubled the number of trees in our industrial estates, from 90,000 to 180,000 today. By 2030, these estates will have around 260,000 trees. These will cool the environment and beautify the area for the people who work there.

Third, we are strengthening the connectivity between green spaces. For example, we opened the northern stretch of the Rail Corridor last month, completing over 21 kilometres of green, continuous north-south connectivity.

In total, we have completed over 180 kilometres of Nature Ways and 375 kilometres of park connectors, putting us on track to achieve our goal for all households to be within a 10-minute walk from a park by 2030.

This increases Singaporeans' access to nature and strengthens our ecosystems' resilience, by facilitating the movement of biodiversity between habitats.

This brings me to our efforts to conserve our native plant and animal species, which Ms Nadia Samdin asked about.

We have crossed the three-quarter mark of our 2030 species recovery target, with 82 plant and 42 animal species covered today. This includes the endemic Singapore Ginger and the Singapore Freshwater Crab.

We have also restored and enhanced over 30 hectares of forest, coastal, and marine habitats, well ahead of our target to do so by 2030.

This was made possible through the contributions of our volunteers, who help with planting native trees and shrubs, and removing invasive species.

To provide more conducive habitats for our native biodiversity to thrive, we will raise our ambitions on this front. We now aim to restore 80 hectares of forest, coastal, and marine habitats by 2030, by intensifying the planting of native species and encouraging the establishment of native animal populations.

As we push on with our greening efforts, Mr Liang Eng Hwa and Mr Xie Yao Quan have asked how we can involve even more members of the community.

This year marks 60 years since then-Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew kickstarted our greening journey by launching our first nation-wide tree-planting campaign in 1963.

Under the OneMillionTrees movement, we have partnered more than 75,000 members of the community to plant over 500,000 trees since 2020.

We have planted native rainforest species in our forests to strengthen the ecological resilience of these habitats, so that they can better support our native biodiversity.

The planted trees also help to intensify greenery and strengthen ecological connectivity along our streetscapes, Nature Ways and park connectors.

To commemorate this milestone year, we will create more tree-planting opportunities under the OneMillionTrees movement and we hope that you will join us in celebrating this milestone.

We will also continue to engage Singaporeans on the conservation and celebration of our natural heritage.

Through our City in Nature Conversations, we were inspired by members of the community who shared and worked on ideas to encourage more residents to participate in our efforts.

This included ideas for community stewards to organise nature-based activities, such as biodiversity surveys, and to curate educational resources on the benefits of City in Nature through experiential learning.

We will continue to grow our base of over 60,000 volunteers and over 11,000 citizen scientists.

We will reach out to more youths through platforms such as our Youth Stewards for Nature programme, to nurture future volunteers and stewards of our natural heritage.

Mr Xie Yao Quan and Miss Cheryl Chan have also asked about our research and development (R&D) efforts in urban sustainability. We are collaborating closely with industry and academic partners to support our key initiatives under the Singapore Green Plan 2030, including our City in Nature ambitions.

Under the Research, Innovation and Enterprise 2025 Plan, we have set aside close to \$270 million for research to address new challenges in areas such as climate change. One of the research programmes funded under RIE 2025 is the Marine Climate Change Science programme, for which we have started to award grants. One looks at developing ecological and microbial solutions to enhance the resilience of coral reefs to climate change. Another looks at building up the foundational science for blue carbon accounting in Singapore.

We also recently launched the first grant call under the City in Nature research vertical of the Cities of Tomorrow programme. These research projects will help us deepen our scientific foundations and develop evidence-based management practices. So, I look forward to active participation in our grant call.

The years ahead are going to be very exciting ones as we shape our future city together.

The MND family looks forward to working with all Singaporeans on this transformation journey and to making Singapore a place we are proud to call home. *[Applause.]*

The Chairman: Senior Minister of State Sim Ann.

The Senior Minister of State for National Development (Ms Sim Ann): Mr Chairman, I thank Members for their cuts.

Building an endearing home for Singaporeans goes beyond the hardware or infrastructure development. Software is equally if not more important.

It is about supporting our residents with accessible and affordable amenities, preserving community ties and collective memories, and building a gracious living environment. I will speak about three areas that MND will do more in, in collaboration with the people and private sectors: first, transforming our heartland shops to be more vibrant and better serve the needs of the community; second, ensuring that food and beverage continues to be affordable and accessible; and third, creating a quality living environment.

First, let me share our plans to transform heartland shops.

Mr Liang Eng Hwa, Mr Xie Yao Quan, and Mr Pritam Singh spoke on this subject. We all agree on the importance and relevance of heartland shops. The question is how to ensure that residents' and shoppers' diverse needs are met while also being supportive of businesses and the spirit of enterprise.

This is not something that the Government alone can determine. This is why, in 2021, MND and MTI jointly embarked on an extensive consultation exercise on this subject.

We engaged over 2,800 stakeholders over a 11-month period and obtained many valuable suggestions from residents and heartland shop operators on how these shops can be transformed.

In response, HDB and Enterprise Singapore will launch a new roadmap of efforts to support the rejuvenation and transformation of heartland shops.

Minister of State Low Yen Ling has spoken on Enterprise SG's moves during Ministry of Trade and Industry's Committee of Supply, and I wish to now address initiatives that MND and HDB will undertake as part of this joint effort.

First, part of this transformation is to give existing HDB shop precincts a greater role in incubating startups. The heartlands have been the birthplace of more than a few successful Singapore brands. Charles and Keith, for example, started from a shoe shop in Ang Mo Kio Central in the 1990s, and now has hundreds of stores worldwide.

We believe more such brands can be nurtured in our heartlands. We are excited to work with Enterprise SG to facilitate this.

Since 2018, HDB has been setting aside up to 5% of its new shops for direct allocation to startups or existing businesses with innovative business models.

We will be launching the Enhanced Entrepreneur Scheme, in partnership with MTI and Enterprise SG, to allocate more shop spaces to eligible startups, and provide a 10% rental discount for their first three years. Entrepreneurs will, therefore, have a platform to test out innovative and different models of service in a more conducive environment.

4.30 pm

Second, we will enhance the Revitalisation of Shops (ROS) scheme to support the transformation of our HDB shop precincts. In January, we announced in Parliament that we would relax the threshold needed for upgrading to proceed, from 100% agreement amongst shop owners to 75%. This will make it easier for precincts to benefit from rejuvenation works.

We recognise, through feedback given to us by many local merchant associations, that shop owners may still be hesitant to undertake upgrading works, especially in the face of economic uncertainty and rising costs. Therefore, to better assist our heartland shops, we will reduce the shop owners' co-payment share for ROS upgrading costs from 20% down to 5% and increase HDB's share from 70% to 85%. HDB will also co-fund 80% of the costs for optional works at the shop front, for example, installing vertical blinds or roller shutters, up to a cap of \$3,000.

In response to Mr Liang Eng Hwa, HDB will be shortlisting sites for the ROS over the next few months before inviting local merchant associations to apply. To minimise disruption, areas that have been selected for or are undergoing other HDB upgrading programmes, or where the Town Councils have plans for repair and redecoration works, will be prioritised. Priority may also be given to older neighbourhoods that have not yet undergone ROS upgrading.

To Mr Pritam Singh's feedback on the use of outdoor display areas, or ODA for short, HDB has issued guidelines on the management of these areas, but Town Councils are empowered to manage them as part of common property. The foremost consideration is to ensure public safety and tidiness of these common areas. Hence, we require clear and open passageways, and for the local shop operator to manage the ODA operations directly outside the shop.

Under current guidelines, unrelated trades are not allowed at ODAs as these are primarily meant as an extension of the existing shops' operations to draw crowds into the shops. Itinerant retailers can bring added vibrancy and variety to the HDB retail scene, but the proliferation of commercial activities, if left unchecked, might lead to excessive noise and crowding, as well as unfair competition to existing shopkeepers.

It is the role of Town Councils to enforce against the improper use of ODAs. We know that Town Councils have many roles and responsibilities to discharge, and we leave it to the Town Councils to decide how to prioritise amongst these different responsibilities. If there are instances of violation that need to be reported, please inform HDB and we will look into it.

Third, we will support our heartland businesses to employ locals and to keep food affordable for residents. These efforts will help make HDB heartlands even more inclusive.

There is the potential for heartland shops to provide a variety of employment opportunities close to our homes, specifically through social enterprises and businesses with inclusive hiring practices. Mr Xie Yao Quan has spoken on this. These employment opportunities bring not just an income, but a sense of self-reliance and dignity to vulnerable individuals. We want to support more businesses in making these opportunities available and uplifting more lives.

HDB has been supporting social enterprises and SG Enable-supported shops with inclusive hiring practices, by directly allocating them shop spaces and providing SMEs with a 20% rental discount for the first three-years.

We have seen good results from the 24 beneficiaries of the Social Enterprise Scheme. To further support social enterprises and, at the same time, bring their benefits to local HDB estates, HDB has partnered agencies like the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and Singapore Centre for Social Enterprise (raiSE) to provide more support and benefits for inclusive enterprises. We will adjust the rental discount from 20% to 30% for three-year terms, with the option of renewing for another three years. We will also award additional points for operators who include meaningful employment for seniors aged 65 and above when bidding for HDB shops under the Price-Quality Method (PQM) framework. We hope these measures help to increase employment opportunities for our seniors and persons with disabilities or special needs in our community.

Next, let me talk about the accessibility of amenities and of affordable food in particular, a subject raised by Mr Louis Chua, Mr Henry Kwek, Mr Xie Yao Quan, Mr Gan Thiam Poh and Assoc Prof Jamus Lim.

Today, all HDB towns are planned with a variety of facilities and amenities. I should add that hawker centre placement is done by NEA, and, just now, during MSE's COS debate, the subject of hawker centres and the prices of meals available at hawker centres have been given quite extensive treatment.

Commercial facilities are injected based on the needs of residents, while also considering the viability of operators. In built-up sites, HDB will assess and facilitate requests for new commercial facilities on a case-by-case basis.

For example, in Sengkang, URA and the relevant agencies are currently reviewing plans to further develop the Sengkang Town Centre. The agencies will reply to Mr Louis Chua.

Most residents can access commercial facilities with a food court or eating house within 400 metres from their homes or an approximately five to 10 minutes' walk.

Beyond accessibility, we hear ground concerns about rising costs of living and want to proactively ensure that our residents can continue to access affordable cooked food options within neighbourhoods. In 2018, HDB launched the PQM framework, after considering various mechanisms, where new tenders of rental coffee shops were required to provide six budget meals as well as a budget drink. Operators who successfully tendered for HDB coffee shops under this framework, typically provided budget food options averaging \$3.

The rentals under price-quality tenders were also, generally, lower than before, under pure price bidding tenders. Tenderers, too, shared that they appreciated the opportunity to compete on quality rather than on price alone.

Having seen the success of this implementation of budget meals at new rental coffee shops, we will be extending this requirement to older coffee shops due for their three-yearly tenancy renewal from May 2023 onwards. This will make the availability of cheaper food options in coffee shops more certain and pervasive, as coverage of the budget meal regime will be extended to almost half of all coffee shops and cover all HDB towns by 2026.

As a start, we will require these coffee shops to provide budget prices for four meals, instead of six, and two drinks as a condition for renewal. The budget meal and drink prices will be benchmarked against economically-priced F&B offerings in nearby neighbourhood coffee shops. We will consult operators and remain flexible in assessing their proposed prices, bearing in mind business sustainability.

To help rental coffee shop operators and stallholders with this transition, they will be offered a rental discount of 5% off their renewal rents for one year, from the time the new requirements are in place.

MND and HDB will engage industry players on the budget meal provision and related matters soon.

I thank Assoc Prof Jamus Lim for making some suggestions when it comes to tenders for coffee shops, as well as for his views on affordable food. I would like to make a few points in response.

First of all, our experience with the PQM framework, as I have shared, has shown that lower rents can be achieved, compared to price-based tenders.

When it comes to the factors driving the prices of meals in coffee shops, apart from rents, there are other factors alluded to just now by Senior Minister of State Amy Khor during MSE's COS debate, and these are factors that, I believe, apply not just to hawker centres but also to eating houses or coffee shops and these would be food ingredients, as well as expenditure on manpower. So, even if we were to focus primarily on rents, that alone might not guarantee lower or budget meal prices.

So, this is the reason why HDB has decided to get to the heart of the matter by expanding the budget meal regime, and we will be doing so for all rental coffee shops. We also intend to monitor adherence of the coffee shops that have moved on to the budget meal regime.

There is also the question of sold coffee shops. What do we do about the sold coffee shops? Well, we have just, very recently, extended invitations to eating house chain executives and I will be speaking with them and engaging them on the importance of ensuring affordable meal options, notwithstanding the fact that they are operating out of sold coffee shops,

Next, let me talk about how MND intends to support the maintenance of a quality living environment.

Mr Murali Pillai suggested that there is a need to review funding for Town Councils, given the increasing overall maintenance costs. Let me assure Mr Murali that HDB already factors in considerations, such as the ease and cost of maintenance, when designing estates.

Specifically, the automated fire-rated roller shutters in Mr Murali's estate were installed to meet fire safety requirements due to site-specific considerations. Maintenance costs will be borne by HDB, not the Town Councils, as such shutters are HDB's carpark assets.

We hear the views shared previously by Mr Murali and other Members on how design features of HDB estates must not only be attractive but also practical and cost-effective from the viewpoint of long-term maintenance.

The Municipal Services Office (MSO) has also been engaging Town Councils on their views on specific design features and will be presenting these to HDB.

Government agencies also share best practices with Town Councils to support their maintenance operations. For example, NParks shares advice on how to reduce bird-related disamenities, such as by growing plant species that are less attractive to pest birds.

The Government also provides substantial grants, collectively amounting to some \$239 million a year to offset Town Councils' costs of maintenance so that they do not fully fall on residents.

MND has been closely monitoring the larger macroeconomic environment and cost-drivers affecting Town Councils. As costs of maintenance rise over time, we know Town Councils have been doing their part to raise service and conservancy charges (S&CC) periodically, even as they continually seek to realise cost savings and improve productivity. This is part and parcel of discharging Town Councils' responsibilities for running their towns sustainably.

On its part, the Government acknowledges that some of the cost increases Town Councils are facing now are sharp and steep, due to external factors, such as the spike in energy prices.

To support Town Councils that continue to make adjustments in S&CC to meet long-term financial sustainability, the Government is prepared to consider a time-limited, special funding support to cushion the potential impact on residents.

Let me now touch on the additional efforts we are making to address the "softer" issues that shape the quality of our lived experiences in HDB estates.

Since 2014, the MSO, in partnership with agencies and Town Councils, has made good progress in improving the delivery of municipal services. Through digital services, such as the OneService App, Kaki the Chatbot, and with OneService functions now available in LifeSG, residents can conveniently provide feedback on their living environment to the Government.

We have become better at responding to cases, but there remains a subset of municipal issues that are socio-behavioural in nature. These arise from differences in how we relate to one another and cannot be resolved by the Government alone. They require us to partner the community and refresh our social norms to better reflect society's changing and diverse preferences.

Our experience with the Alliance for Action (AfA) on Norms for Joss Paper Burning shows that promising results can be achieved if we find the right approach to go about norms resetting. Joss paper burning is a longstanding cultural practice in our Chinese community. Practices can be updated, however, and disamenities like excess smoke and ash reduced, if practitioners adopt minor changes to what they do.

4.45 pm

The AfA, led by leaders and cultural experts from the Chinese community, developed public education campaigns for last year's Seventh Lunar Month and the recent Lunar New Year that directly address the mindset and intentions of practitioners, correct misconceptions and demonstrate responsible burning practices in HDB estates.

After several years of annual increase, the volume of feedback received on irresponsible joss paper burning has dropped significantly for both these periods. And this a very encouraging development.

Mr Yip Hon Weng asked how MSO will be leveraging technology and partnering the community to address social norms. One example I can think of is how we worked with the volunteers of from Mountbatten as part of the Love Our 'Hood Initiative to tackle the issue of illegal parking. And this has been met with promising results, specifically, a drop in feedback about illegal parking.

Social norms also play a pivotal role in the complex and subjective issue of neighbourhood noise. Last year, I announced the formation of the Community Advisory Panel on Neighbourhood Noise, or CAP for short, as part of a holistic response to address this issue. The panel engaged the community to establish an understanding of what kinds of noise are acceptable or unacceptable in a residential setting and

has recommended community norms for noise management to the Government.

The panel highlighted the importance of residents being able to engage neighbours to resolve issues amicably in the first instance. The panel also identified a list of considerate behaviours that residents can adopt to manage noise that is created in our daily lives.

Since receiving the CAP's recommendations, MSO has been working with partners to promote the proposed community norms. For example, a group of residents in Pioneer have come together through MSO's Love Our 'Hood Initiative to trial physical calendars at lift lobbies to be used by neighbours to inform one another in advance about potentially noisy activities, such as renovations and large gatherings at home.

Participants in the CAP's feedback gathering exercises agreed that some amount of noise generated from daily activities was acceptable, but there was still a sense that people wished for more quiet and peaceful time to rest at home. Thus, the panel also proposed to extend quiet hours from 10.30 pm until 7.00 am, to 10.00 pm until 8.00 am. During these hours, excessive noise generating activities should be avoided.

Undoubtedly, this CAP recommendation reflects the views of those who suffer the ill effects of neighbourhood noise. After all, those who are not affected by neighbourhood noise or those whose activities generate noise can hardly be expected to turn up at the CAP's feedback sessions or fill in survey forms. But it is important that CAP make this ask on behalf of Singaporeans who hope for more peace and quiet, and it is equally important that we find out whether the rest of Singapore is prepared to go along with it.

Anecdotally, some stakeholder groups have already begun ending their community events before 10.00 pm. So, some shifts have been happening on the ground. But for all of us to move together, we cannot overlook the impact that these extended hours, as recommended, could have on businesses and other community groups.

Thus, MSO is in the process of engaging the wider public and stakeholders to see how this can be adopted. This is part of our ForwardSG commitment to refresh our social compact to promote vibrant and peaceful neighbourhoods that all residents can enjoy living in.

MSO is also working with the CAP to study how a quantitative noise threshold in the form of a decibel limit can be adopted to aid the identification and assessment of egregious cases. To be meaningful, the decibel limit should cater to residential settings and not industrial or construction settings.

To promote an understanding of the cause and effect of inter-floor noise disturbances, MSO will also be setting up an experiential space.

Inter-floor noise is a major category of neighbourhood noise feedback in our dense, high-rise environment. Unfortunately, much of the feedback is subjective and speculative. The feedback provider who suffers from noise can only describe its effect, and, often, after the fact. Without the neighbour's cooperation, it is hard to find out for sure whether and how the neighbour has caused the noise. And as a community, we are none the wiser on exactly what transpired.

The experiential space will allow visitors to test first-hand how different actions create different decibel levels of noise and to challenge their perception on the direction of the noise. Visitors can also look forward to learning about actions to adopt to effectively reduce their noise impact on their neighbours. We hope to open this experiential space to the public in the second half of this year.

I would like to thank Mr Henry Kwek for highlighting the issue of egregious neighbourhood disputes arising from intentional anti-social behaviour. This is a serious matter that the Government has been closely monitoring and studying.

When the COVID-19 pandemic first hit in 2020, public feedback on neighbourhood noise, high-rise littering, smoking within homes and joss paper burning all saw significant increases. Since then, case volumes have receded to pre-COVID-19 levels with the exception of neighbourhood noise, which remains significantly elevated. We will continue to monitor and review how various types of neighbour-related issues can be managed. For a start, our focus is on neighbourhood noise.

While most cases of noise disturbances can be improved through stronger community norms recommended by the CAP, Mr Henry Kwek is right in identifying the reality of a small set of severe cases where conflict between neighbours has become entrenched and acrimonious. Often, there are signs that at least one of the conflicting parties purposely weaponise noise to cause suffering to their neighbours over a prolonged period. We think this is wrong and strong actions are needed to put a stop to this.

MSO is a member of the interagency workgroup led by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) that has been closely reviewing the Community Dispute Management Framework, or CDMF for short. Minister Edwin Tong has shared how the powers and processes of the Community Disputes Resolution Tribunal, or CDRT, will be strengthened in his Ministry of Law (MinLaw) COS speech. We hope this will provide faster and greater relief to residents.

In cases where noise is being used as a weapon to disrupt the peace among neighbours, we will include them under this new legal framework on mandatory mediation for community disputes. Minister Edwin Tong will elaborate further on the enhancements to move community disputes towards resolution during MCCY's COS.

The preferred mode of neighbourhood dispute resolution remains having both parties engage with each other. But we recognise instances where some Government intervention would make a difference.

We will, therefore, pilot a unit of dedicated personnel. They will leverage stronger laws, such as mandating mediation under the enhanced CDMF, and actively work with affected parties to bring serious cases that are beyond self-help towards resolution.

MSO has decided to host the pilot after careful consideration and after studying the experience of the Community Warden programme mentioned by Mr Yip Hon Weng and other efforts across the Government.

I know that many who have been long-suffering victims of neighbour-inflicted noise have pinned their hopes on Government intervention, which is all the more reason why I must highlight the following considerations.

First, this unit of dedicated personnel must not function as a first resort. We do not wish to stunt the community's capacity to resolve disputes early when they first occur. If people rely on Government personnel in the first instance to deal with their neighbours, it can only weaken our kampung spirit over time and we would all be the poorer for it.

Second, this unit is part of and not a substitute for an interlocking system of norm-setting, good neighbourly communication and the CDMF. Having Government personnel stepping in to resolve differences between neighbours all the time is neither desirable nor sustainable.

Third, this unit must, eventually, be vested with appropriate powers and use them sparingly but effectively. These include powers of investigation and powers to require nuisance makers to stop certain behaviours, pending mediation of the dispute.

By making their presence felt at critical points of dispute resolution, we hope that this unit of dedicated personnel can deliver the right amount of intervention, bring relief to those who have a genuine grievance and discourage the wilful weaponisation of noise. We aim to stand up an initial team for this pilot by the end of the year. MSO will share more details when ready. Chairman, in Mandarin please.

(In Mandarin): [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] We recognise that Singaporeans are concerned about the rising cost of living. This is an issue that the Government is paying close attention to as well.

On this front, we are rolling out two measures targeted at helping our heartland shop owners and consumers.

First, to support small businesses, HDB will increase the co-funding support for heartland shop owners undergoing upgrading works under the Revitalisation of Shops scheme. Shop owners will only need to pay 5% of the upgrading costs, down from the current 20%. We will also provide new co-funding support for works at shop fronts, for example, installing roller-shutters or more lighting. We will co-fund 80% of these works, up to a cap of \$3,000.

Second, the Government will require more coffeeshops to provide affordable food options for residents. Since 2018, HDB has required new tenders of rental coffeeshops to provide six budget meals and a budget drink. From May this year, we will require coffeeshops that are due for tenancy renewal to provide four budget meals and two budget drinks. By 2026, every town will have at least one coffeeshop providing cooked food at budget prices.

In addition, we want to tighten measures in managing neighbourhood disputes with a focus on managing neighbourhood noises. In the recent three years, the volume of neighbourhood noise cases has remained high. In some cases, there are people who intentionally weaponise noise against their neighbours. MSO, MCCY and MinLaw will work together to strengthen various steps in the dispute resolution process.

In particular, MSO will pilot having a dedicated team to investigate and issue orders where necessary to facilitate the resolution of egregious noise-related disputes.

I know that many who have been long-suffering victims of neighbour-inflicted noise have pinned their hopes on Government intervention, as they feel that communication and mediation cannot solve the problem. I can empathise with them.

The Government is of the view that effective communication among neighbours remains the best way to maintain peace and harmony in the community. However, under certain circumstances, appropriate intervention from officials coupled with the proper use of mediation channels, can be effective.

More details of the pilot will be announced when ready.

(In English): I have shared how we will be enhancing our “hardware” and adjusting our “software” to build an endearing home for all. While we make progressive adjustments, we must remember our ideal – a gracious and accessible community for all Singaporeans to enjoy.

The Chairman: Senior Minister of State Tan Kiat How.

The Senior Minister of State for National Development (Mr Tan Kiat How): Mr Chairman, the Built Environment sector is steadily recovering from COVID-19 and its associated disruptions. Manpower bottlenecks have eased, allowing contractors to catch up with delayed works.

As of end-2022, the number of Construction Work Permit Holders have exceeded pre-COVID-19 levels. Price increases for construction materials like concrete and steel rebars seem to be moderating. Construction activities are almost back to pre-COVID-19 levels as well.

Construction demand is expected to remain stable. For this year, the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) estimates that the total construction demand will be between \$27 billion and \$32 billion. Over the next few years, the projected construction demand is expected to be between \$25 billion and \$32 billion – remaining steady and stable.

The public sector will be the main contributor as we ramp up BTO supply, build more hospitals and healthcare facilities and enhance our public transportation networks with projects like the Cross Island MRT line.

That said, we need to remain vigilant. There are many challenges and uncertainties ahead of us. That is why, even during COVID-19, we continued to push for sector transformation. The Government will lead by example. Mr Chong Kee Hiong had asked about HDB's efforts.

As the largest housing developer in Singapore, HDB plays a crucial leadership role in investing in innovation and promulgating good practices. HDB has been implementing a range of technologies in the designing and building of new flats, like Building Information Modelling (BIM) and Design for Manufacturing and Assembly (DfMA). Mr Chong will be pleased to note that, in fact, DfMA is used for all new HDB projects since 2021.

5.00 pm

[Deputy Speaker (Ms Jessica Tan Soon Neo) in the Chair]

In addition to Prefabricated Prefinished Volumetric Construction, or PPVC, HDB also adopts Advanced Precast Concrete System, or APCS. APCS offers more opportunities for mechanisation and automation for large orders of prefabricated components. With these efforts, HDB has raised its site productivity by more than 25% compared to its 2010 levels. HDB is also investing in research and innovation to push the frontiers of construction productivity in Singapore.

By 2030, HDB intends to achieve an overall 40% improvement in site productivity compared to its 2010 levels, which means, new flats get built faster, benefiting more Singaporeans earlier. To achieve this ambitious goal, HDB will pilot new initiatives via its Construction Transformation Project at Tengah Garden Waterfront I and II. For example, the flats will be built using a hybrid precast system made up of 3D and 2D components that are designed to be fabricated, transported and assembled more efficiently.

This system will also benefit residents, as it will enable HDB to build beamless flats with higher headroom and provide residents with greater flexibility in configuring the layout of their flats. In addition to new builds, HDB has been exploring new ways to maintain public housing estates. For instance, HDB is trialing a new concrete spalling prevention system, called the Corrosion Retardant System. This forms a protective layer around the steel bars within the concrete to stop existing corrosion and prevent further spalling. The trial results have been promising so far. HDB is studying how this system can address concrete spalling issues, especially in the older estates.

Beyond HDB, we are partnering the industry on broader transformation efforts as part of the refreshed Build Environment Industry Transformation Map launched last September. We are taking step to transform every part of the building life cycle – from the planning and design phase, the construction phase, to the operations and maintenance phase of our buildings.

One key enabler is digitalisation through the adoption of Integrated Digital Delivery or IDD. This is a "digital spine" linking project stakeholders throughout the building lifecycle. We have been making good progress.

In 2022, 45% of all new developments by Gross Floor Area adopted IDD and we are on track to meet our target of 70% adoption by 2025. As part of our IDD efforts, we developed the Common Data Environment or CDE, which is a data standards for the industry. This ensures data compatibility and allows for seamless digital collaboration between project stakeholders.

And we will continue to do more to support our SMEs in their digitalisation journey.

I am happy to announce that BCA will launch a new \$21 million tranche of the Productivity Solutions Grant or PSG. This scheme supports digital solutions that are tailored for the needs in the Build Environment sector and will complement the general digitalisation schemes that our SMEs can already tap on.

The solutions supported include 3D modelling and automation of quantity surveying and valuation tasks. Under this new tranche, the scheme will support manpower training so that SMEs can equip their employees with the necessary skills to make full use of these digital solutions.

One company that has benefited from this is United Force Engineering Pte Ltd, which tapped on the PSG to support the adoption of a Field Service Management software. I spoke to Ms Veni – the engineer behind the deployment of the solution at United Force Engineering.

Traditionally, tasks and payments were tracked manually on spreadsheets. With the new software, Ms Veni and her team were able to automate several processes, like sending service reports to customers and tracking customer details. This has reduced their administrative workload and minimised human errors.

This new tranche provides SMEs with funding support of up to 50% of the qualifying costs in adopting pre-approved digital solutions. So, I invite firms to apply when the new tranche is available from April 2023.

Let me next outline how we are driving transformation at each phase of the building lifecycle. I agree with Mr Henry Kwek and Mr Yip Hon Weng that there are benefits to better upstream planning and coordination between industry stakeholders and the regulators. This is why we have been working with industry and agencies to develop a new regulatory process for building submissions. I would like to thank all

the individuals, from industry and public sector agencies, who have contributed to this effort. This new process streamlines more than 20 existing touchpoints with agencies into three key submission gateways.

We look forward to launching the digital platform that will implement this – CORENET X – by the end of this year. Users will be onboarded in phases and features will be rolled out progressively. The platform will leverage BIM to enhance collaboration between industry stakeholders and between industry stakeholders and regulators on the various submissions. It will also enable agencies to provide consolidated and coordinated responses to firms.

A large project typically takes about three to five years from design to building completion. Preliminarily, CORENET X could reduce the time for a firm to obtain approvals across the development process by 20% to 25%, which translates to an overall four to five months' worth of manpower savings – very significant.

To date, almost 500 consultant firms have participated in various engagements and sharing sessions. So, I encourage the rest of the industry to find out more on the CORENET-X on our website. This contains numerous resources, webinars and links to various community of practices. I also encourage you to sign up for hands-on training courses that will be held throughout the year.

Next, at the construction phase, we have been working to raise the adoption of DfMA technologies. The advantages were outlined by Mr Chong Kee Hiong earlier. This involves shifting construction off-site to more factory-like settings before being assembled on site. The benefits for such construction methods are numerous – there are productivity enhancements and better worker safety outcomes with fewer workers on-site. Residents in surrounding areas also benefit as less noise and dust is generated.

I am pleased to share that the DfMA adoption rate for all new developments by GFA has increased from 44% in 2021 to 51% in 2022 and we are on track to meeting our target of 70% by 2025. To further support firms' productivity efforts, we will extend the Investment Allowance Scheme (IAS) for the construction industry for another five years, till 2028. This provides tax allowance for investments in advanced construction equipment.

Over the last five years, the scheme has helped more than 60 firms make over \$165 million worth of investments.

One such company is Sam Lain Equipment Services Pte Ltd, which tapped on this scheme to purchase a pipe jacking machine. Sam Lain halved the time taken for pipe laying work and was able to reduce the number of site workers from 12 to seven. With less manual and temporary work involved and fewer workers onsite, they can now carry out this work more safely, with less disruption to the public. Beyond deploying a single equipment to improve productivity for a specific task, Sam Lain has also invested in a suite of equipment, like silent piler machines and cranes to support different tasks related to underground and soil improvement works.

Like Sam Lain, to achieve greater productive improvement, firms will need more fundamental redesigned work processes across multiple tasks and to make use of integrated systems instead of just a single machinery. Therefore, we have decided to raise the minimum capital expenditure value per application to \$1 million to encourage firms to do so. The minimum capital expenditure per equipment will remain at \$100,000. I encourage all firms to consider applying for the IAS.

Finally, we agree with Mr Raj Joshua Thomas that transforming the way we operate and maintain buildings is key. Proper maintenance ensures that a development is safe, functional and enjoyable for its users and greatly reduces energy emissions. At the same time, the maintenance costs of a building over its lifetime can be around three to four times that of the initial construction costs. There is hence a need to manage these costs more effectively.

The Government will do more to champion transformation in the FM industry. First, the public sector will take the lead for the buildings under our care. We require all new public sector developments, existing public sector buildings undergoing retrofitting works and developments on Government Land Sales sites to adopt best practices in designing for maintainability. This will reduce the workload of FM firms downstream.

BCA is also working with agencies to drive greater adoption of Integrated Facilities Management, or IFM, and Aggregated Facilities Management, or AFM in their buildings. We will continue support the industry in this effort. We launched a \$30 million grant last September to support the adoption of progressive FM procurement, processes and technologies.

To date, about 20 companies have expressed interest and I encourage more firms to apply. I am very glad to see that many industry partners are also playing their part. The Singapore International Facility Management Association, or SIFMA, and the Trade Associations and Chambers of other FM related sectors, like Security and Landscaping have stepped up to explore potential collaboration projects to improve integration across the various FM disciplines. I commend them for their effort and look forward to partnering them to transform our FM sector including promulgating good practices like outcome-based contracting.

Let me now turn to how we are transitioning towards a low-carbon Built Environment sector. In particular, we are stepping up efforts for buildings, which account for over 20% of Singapore's carbon emissions. I agree with Mr Xie Yao Quan, Ms Tin Pei Ling, Mr Don Wee and Mr Cheng Hsing Yao that we need to operate and maintain buildings more sustainably.

Under the latest edition of the Singapore Green Building Masterplan, we set out three ambitious targets, or "80-80-80 in 2030". With the hard work of industry partners, we are on track to meet these targets. We have greened close to 55% of our buildings, seen about 20% of our new buildings in the past year achieve Super Low Energy standards and achieved over 70% improvement in energy efficiency over

2005 levels for our best-in-class buildings. But collectively, we must intensify our greening efforts, to reach our national target of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

In particular, we need to do more to green our existing stock of older buildings. These buildings may not have been designed with sustainability in mind or may not be operated or maintained efficiently. And this can result in significant energy wastage, sometimes more than a quarter of the buildings' overall energy use.

Currently, BCA requires buildings that undergo major works or chiller retrofits to meet minimum energy performance requirements. This ensures that older buildings are upgraded to meet prevailing sustainability standards when they undertake extensive works. However, there is currently no requirement for building owners to improve their buildings' energy performance if they do not undertake such works.

This is why we will introduce a new Mandatory Energy Improvement, or MEI regime by the end of 2024.

5.15 pm

We will require the owners of buildings with poor energy performance to conduct an energy audit and implement measures to reduce energy consumption. These buildings will be required to maintain an improved level of energy performance over a stipulated period. These measures can include simple, cost-effective solutions, such as replacing faulty parts and sensors, or getting tenants to use energy saving lighting. Building owners who would like to undertake more extensive retrofits can also apply for grants under the Green Mark Incentive Scheme for Existing Buildings 2.0, which provides up to 50% co-funding for retrofitting works to achieve at least Green Mark Platinum standards.

For a start, the regime will apply to the most energy-intensive commercial buildings, healthcare facilities, sports and recreation centres and institutional buildings with a Gross Floor Area of 5,000 square metres and above. BCA is consulting relevant stakeholders, including building owners, developers, energy auditors and professional associations. These stakeholders recognise the need for this regime as most buildings would unlikely undergo works to reduce energy consumption if such works were not made mandatory. BCA will continue to engage the industry on the implementation details. There will inevitably be extenuating circumstances or practical constraints for certain buildings to meet the requirements. And BCA will take this feedback into consideration. BCA will assure that building owners are notified early and have sufficient time to comply with the requirements.

In the meantime, building owners who would like to know how the energy performance of their buildings compares to others can refer to BCA's building energy benchmarking report. Currently, this annual report provides a summary of the energy performance for each building typology and the individual energy performance data for commercial buildings.

Starting this year, BCA will also provide individual energy performance data for healthcare facilities, sports and recreation centres and institutional buildings and identify them by name. Buildings will be ranked by energy performance amongst other buildings of similar typology. The next edition of the report will be published later this month on BCA's website. I encourage all building owners to study it and use it as a guide to improve your building's energy performance.

Our efforts to transform into a world-class Built Environment (BE) sector will also create exciting job opportunities for our BE professionals. For instance, the push towards digitalisation and DfMA will change the nature of work in our sector. The push towards greater sustainability will also mean greater demand for green professionals. This is something Mr Xie Yao Quan mentioned too. And exciting new roles include energy and sustainability solutions architects, specialists in design for maintainability, solar engineers, facility management data analysts and many more exciting opportunities.

So, I encourage all BE professionals to upskill and reskill yourselves so you can take full advantage of the new opportunities in the BE sector, both locally and abroad. BCA has been engaging industry stakeholders on how to prepare their workforce for the future. We will share more details when ready. We will also consider all suggestions on how to improve HR practices, as suggested by various Members earlier.

Mr Chairman, I provided an update on the various transformation efforts across the building lifecycle. However, fundamental transformation of an industry sector is not just about using technology or improving work processes. Crucially, there is also a need to transform mindsets and culture – aspects which are often harder to do.

At the most basic level, we must make sure that hygiene factors are met. This includes timely payment, as raised by Mr Yip Hon Weng. In this regard, the Security of Payment Act, or SOPA has served to enable regular payments in the construction sector since 2005. The Public Sector Standard Conditions of Contracts (PSSCOC) also stipulates payment timeframes that all public agencies are required to abide by. For instance, agencies should certify the valuation of the Variation Order, or VO within 60 days of the completion of VO works and not the completion of the overall project. Agencies also should finalise the account within 30 days after the Defects Liability Period.

But contractors can also do their part by providing the necessary documents in a timely manner, to facilitate evaluation and approval of payments. If there are specific project issues encountered by Mr Yip, BCA will be happy to follow up with the Member separately. However, I believe most industry stakeholders would very much prefer to resolve issues amicably rather than going to mediation or adjudication or even legal action.

A promising approach to promote a more positive work culture is collaborative contracting. Collaborative contracting aligns the interests of all project parties towards shared project goals. This facilitates proactive project management and prompt resolution of claims before they escalate into major disputes or costs and can help tackle this issue of timely payment. We have seen encouraging successes in other jurisdictions.

The Government is taking the lead to adopt collaborative contracting. There are at least 10 public sector projects that have piloted or will be piloting collaborative contracting. But we also need the private sector on board.

I am happy to announce that an alliance led by CapitaLand will be piloting the collaborative contracting approach. This will be amongst the first in Singapore for the private sector. They have committed to sharing its experiences with the wider industry. BCA will work with them to develop standard collaborative contracting provisions, which the industry can then later reference and adopt.

CapitaLand and its partners, including Woh Hup and Threesixty, will try out new contract provisions. This includes provisions that enable project parties to flag problems, like design deviations early and provide incentives for better performance. To resolve disputes in a more structured manner, the alliance also intends to establish a dispute resolution board, comprising senior management of key stakeholders. Taken together, these will better facilitate the smooth and timely delivery of projects, benefiting not just project parties, but the eventual building users too.

This is one of the alliances being supported by the Growth and Transformation Scheme, or GTS, which Minister Desmond Lee spoke about at the Committee of Supply two years ago.

We have set aside \$90 million under the GTS to help establish alliances between developers, builders, consultants and other stakeholders. The idea is for these groups of firms to collaborate on multiple projects over time. In doing so, they can grow deeper capabilities and develop innovative approaches that can eventually benefit the entire ecosystem.

Another alliance under the GTS is led by UOL. UOL and its partners, including United Tec, will focus on developing new capabilities to enhance construction productivity. To increase automation, the alliance plans to adopt robots for labour-intensive tasks, such as cleaning and installing building components. This can reduce required manpower by up to 40%.

For example, one of the identified solutions is a lift installation robot. This will not only reduce safety risks for workers but will also ensure consistent workmanship and quality across all installation works. It will also adopt more advanced prefabrication techniques and technologies and prefabricate more components, such as Mechanical and Electrical systems. This is expected to reduce the manpower required for such activities by up to 45% and minimise future disruptions to the alliance's supply chain.

I commend CapitaLand, UOL and their respective partners on leading the way. Their commitment to working together will not only help uplift their respective value chains, but also push the boundaries for the rest of the sector. Mdm Chair, in Mandarin, please.

(In Mandarin): [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Although our Built Environment (BE) sector faces headwinds, it is recovering steadily. Manpower shortages have eased and construction material costs have largely stabilised. Projected construction demand over the next few years will remain stable. Most of the demand will come from the public sector, including the construction of new HDB flats, healthcare facilities, the Cross Island MRT Line and Changi Airport T5 Terminal.

I thank all our partners in the BE sector for working side by side with us over the past few years to overcome the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Going forward, we must continue to work together to further transform the BE sector.

First, we will launch the CORENET X electronic platform by the end of this year. This new platform will simplify the process of submitting building plans to regulators and reduce the time taken to obtain approvals.

Second, to continue to support the digital transformation of SMEs, BCA will extend the Productivity Solutions Grant, with a new \$21 million tranche, for another three years. SMEs will be provided with funding support of up to 50% of qualifying costs when adopting pre-approved digital solutions.

Third, we will also extend the Investment Allowance Scheme for the construction industry for another five years. Businesses can enjoy tax allowances when they invest in advanced construction equipment.

We have shaken off the shadow of the pandemic and can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel. The Government will continue to work together with the industry to make our BE sector more resilient and sustainable, as well as continue efforts to improve its productivity and reduce its reliance on manual labour.

(In English): Let me now turn to another important topic of interest to Members here. Let me talk about chicken, birds and cats. Let me first address queries from Ms Nadia Samdin and Mr Chong Kee Hiong.

Everyone has a role to play in ensuring safe and positive human-wildlife encounters. As individuals, we must learn how to share spaces with our wildlife. For example, we can observe from a distance when we come across animals and avoid intruding into their spaces. It may trigger a reaction from animals, especially mothers protecting the young. We can also refrain from feeding wildlife as this can alter their natural foraging behaviour and lead to increases in their population.

Community partners can help to jointly develop and implement solutions for wildlife management. I am glad that we have the support of partners like the Urban Wildlife Working Group (UWG) and Otter Working Group in this regard.

Last April, the UWG members launched the "Our Wild Neighbours" initiative – a country-wide outreach programme to raise public awareness of Singapore's native wildlife. The Otter Working Group closely follows the otter families and their movements and shares this information with NParks. This allows NParks to proactively cordon off areas with young otter pups to minimise the likelihood of human-wildlife conflict.

The Government will also do our part. NParks implements a holistic suite of measures to manage the wildlife population, including habitat modification and food source reduction. This is an inter-agency effort. NParks works with NEA and SFA on many of these efforts, such as reducing food sources for pest birds at food establishments. Where necessary to protect public safety, NParks also undertakes population control measures. NParks monitors bird feeding hotspots and works with Town Councils and NEA to carry out targeted enforcement.

5.30 pm

Over the past two years, we have taken enforcement action against more than a hundred cases of bird-feeding each year, with actions ranging from warnings to prosecution for more serious cases. We will continue to educate members of the community through platforms, such as school assembly talks, public webinars and HDB's MyNiceHome roadshows. These efforts are supported by science, through population surveys and research studies. These help us better understand the ecology of our wildlife, so that we can continue to refine our approach.

Mr Chong Kee Hiong also raised specific pest bird and chicken-related issues in the estates in his constituency. As a fellow Member of Parliament, I fully empathise with Mr Chong on his current situation – caught between different communities of his residents. Recently, we had an extended discussion during Question Time where we spoke about this issue of chickens and cocks. In fact, this was because of the cut raised by Mr Ang Wei Neng, Mr Louis Ng jumped in, and I think Assoc Prof Jamus Lim from Sengkang also raised an intractable Town Council issue of persistent crowing, which we managed to solve with him. I offered some tips to Assoc Prof Jamus Lim at that point of time on how to deal with crowing cocks. I will be happy to share those tips with Mr Chong separately. But I would like to assure Mr Chong that NParks is aware of and will continue to support the Town Council and his grassroots leaders in tackling these issues.

In addition to promoting safe and responsible human-wildlife encounters, we must also protect animal health and welfare.

Mr Louis Ng and Mr Leon Perera have asked about our approach to managing animal abuse and cruelty, specifically on whether we will consider raising penalties for such offences. Again, we had a recent discussion in this House on this topic in response to a Parliamentary Question raised by Mr Louis Ng. I would like to reiterate my assurance to Members that we take a serious view on acts of animal cruelty and abuse. NParks investigates all feedback on such cases and takes the appropriate enforcement action. In cases where individuals suffer from psychiatric conditions, the Courts may already direct a Mandatory Treatment Order. So, it is part of the regime today.

To further strengthen our safeguards on animal health and welfare, as well as public health and safety, we are reviewing the Animals and Birds Act, including the possibility of enhancing penalties for animal cruelty and abuse. We will consult the public and relevant stakeholders on our proposals and will share more details when available.

Let me now turn to the issue of cats.

To Mr Louis Ng's question, we are looking to further promote the well-being of pet and community cats. We are in the midst of a public consultation on the proposed cat management framework. This framework aims to promote responsible cat ownership and caregiving, while safeguarding public health. One of the components being considered is a licensing and microchipping scheme for pet cats. Alongside this, we will study allowing pet cats in HDB flats.

Since last September, we have been consulting extensively on this framework. We are heartened to have received a strong response to our public survey, which garnered more than 30,000 responses. We are conducting a detailed analysis of the results and will share our findings when ready.

So, I can assure Mr Louis Ng that we are not pussy-footing around this issue and this is certainly not a cat-and-mouse game as he mentioned earlier.

Lastly, Mr Leon Perera also provided some suggestions on how we can enhance efforts in tackling the global illegal wildlife trade, such as working with other countries and the local community. As the Member has said, we had an extensive debate on this topic when we moved the amendments to the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act last year and I am glad that the Member supported the Government's approach on the amendments.

But let me briefly reiterate a few points. Singapore is committed to the global fight against illegal wildlife trade. In fact, our efforts have been recognised internationally. At the 2021 United Nations Asia Environmental Enforcement Awards, we were recognised for our contributions in intercepting the illegal trade of elephant ivory.

I am glad that the Member also agrees with us that global action and international cooperation are key. Many cases of illegal wildlife trade involve entities in multiple countries. In the debate to move the amendments last year, Mr Leon Perera asked if Singapore should consider a different approach to regulating wildlife trade, to use a reverse listing model, which will make "no trade" the default. While I can fully

appreciate the spirit behind the suggestion, it will neither be feasible nor effective for us to do so as we cannot unilaterally impose such an approach on the rest of the world.

CITES is currently the only international convention under the United Nations that regulates the trade of endangered species and almost all countries have signed up to this. So, it is important that our approach to illegal wildlife trade is aligned with CITES regulations.

NParks will continue to work closely with counterparts in source and destination countries and share information with international organisations, like CITES and INTERPOL, to assist in their further investigations and enforcement.

At the local level, we will continue to engage various stakeholders, including TCM shops and the community, to raise awareness on the role that they can play in combating illegal wildlife trade.

I would like to assure the Member as well as other Members, including Mr Louis Ng, who had raised these issues on many previous occasions that we will continue to be vigilant to the threat posed by illegal wildlife trade.

In closing, I would like to reiterate our commitment to engaging community and industry partners across a range of issues, from the Built Environment sector transformation to navigating human-wildlife interactions.

Together, I am confident that we will be able to adapt and evolve our approaches to tackle emerging challenges that may come our way.

The Chairman: Moving from wildlife, chickens and cats, Minister of State Faishal Ibrahim.

The Minister of State for National Development (Assoc Prof Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim): Mdm Chair, I thank Members for their suggestions and ideas on supporting the housing needs of seniors and lower-income and more vulnerable households.

In my speech, I will share more about how the MND family is building an inclusive and caring home for Singaporeans.

I will focus on three main areas: firstly, empowering lower-income households by pairing housing with social support; secondly, taking care of the housing needs of seniors; and thirdly, partnering the community to create vibrant and endearing places.

Firstly, on empowering lower-income households through Housing Plus Social Support. Our commitment to provide affordable and accessible housing is for all Singaporeans, including lower-income households. Recognising that they start off with less, we have designed our system to provide more help to them, for example, through housing schemes and grants that are tiered by income, so that, with a stable job, they, too, can buy a home of their own. As a result, Singapore's home ownership rate is one of the highest in the world, including for our lower-income households.

At the same time, some families may not be ready for home ownership yet, because they need to build up and stabilise their finances first.

For low-income households who do not have other housing options, our Public Rental Scheme (PRS) serves as a social safety net – providing these households a safe space and a stable base, where they can build up their stability and self-reliance and, eventually, buy their own flat. The rents are highly-subsidised to ensure that they are affordable.

I thank Mr Chong Kee Hiong and Ms Sylvia Lim for their cuts. I would like to clarify that there is no income ceiling for PRS. As we have shared before, we assess all requests for public rental flats holistically, considering all relevant factors, including applicants' household size, family support, housing budget and housing options. For those who have no other housing options, we will assist them with a public rental flat.

Due to COVID-19, we saw higher demand in 2020 and 2021. The severe labour crunch in the construction industry also disrupted how quickly HDB could build new flats and spruce up vacated ones before renting them out to new tenants. To overcome these sprucing delays, HDB worked closely with its contractors and brought in new ones.

HDB streamlined the customer journey for rental applicants to allow them to select from available flats across Singapore. This alleviated the longer waiting time in certain regions.

As a result of these efforts, we have reduced the average waiting time to about six months currently. For applicants who are in urgent need of a rental flat, HDB will prioritise allocating a flat to them. We will continue to monitor the demand closely, given potential economic headwinds, and we are studying options to augment the supply.

We have also been improving the living environment for our tenants and ensuring that our HDB neighbourhoods are inclusive. Our newer rental blocks and flats have better design, lighting and ventilation. We have also been building rental flats with sold flats in the same BTO projects and, where possible, we build rental flats in the same block as sold flats. I thank Ms Sylvia Lim for acknowledging these improvements.

Mr Murali Pillai and Ms Sylvia Lim spoke about tackling overcrowding in public rental flats and providing larger flats to large families with young children. We understand these concerns and we want to help parents to provide a better home environment for their children.

For all families staying in public rental, our goal is to uplift them, so that they can buy their own flat eventually. That is why we provide significant support to help families to own a home.

While they build up their finances, we do our best to take care of their housing needs, through public rental. Families with at least three members can be allocated to a 2-room public rental flat. Those that form two family nuclei, such as families with children, parents and grandparents living together, can apply for another flat. We will offer them a second flat in the same block where possible.

Some families staying in public rental flats face complex and interlocking challenges, which make it difficult for them to progress to home ownership. So, we are going upstream to provide support in a holistic way that addresses each family's unique set of needs and aspirations.

As part of this effort, we worked with MSF to launch the ComLink Rental Scheme in November last year to pair rental housing with holistic support for families with children.

Once a family applies for a public rental flat from HDB and is assessed to be eligible, the family will be automatically enrolled in ComLink. A ComLink officer will contact the family to understand their situation and connect them with relevant assistance, even before they move into their flat. After the family moves into their rental flat, a ComLink officer will continue to journey with the family, regularly check in on how they are doing, and coordinate support from Government and community partners. As of end-January 2023, ComLink officers have engaged over 130 families under this scheme.

By providing coordinated support early, right from the time that families enter rental housing, we believe that we can support more families to achieve stability, self-reliance and, ultimately, social mobility. MSF will share more about ComLink at their COS.

When families have built up their finances with stable employment and income, they can count on our full support to buy a flat of their own. For example, they can receive one-to-one guidance through their home-buying journey from HDB's Home ownership Support Team (HST). Over the past three years, HST has reached out to about 1,400 households. Among them, about 370 households are assessed to be ready to apply for a flat in the next one to two years, about 100 households are waiting for their new home to be completed, and about 60 households have collected the keys to their new home.

5.45 pm

One family who has moved into their new home is Mdm Nurul and Mr Rozi. After getting married, the couple stayed together in public rental housing for about 11 years. As the family grew in size, they moved from a 1-room flat to a 2-room flat. As their children grew older, the couple set themselves the goal of buying their own home to provide more space for the family. Mr Rozi worked as a cleaner while Mdm Nurul took care of the family.

When they received HST's outreach SMS in 2020, they contacted HST. Our HST officer guided the couple to understand their housing budget and options, and the support available. With that knowledge, the couple applied for a 3-room balance flat at Ang Mo Kio, to be nearer to their child's school.

With a stable job and income, they were able to qualify for the Enhanced CPF Housing Grant and an HDB housing loan. They moved into their flat in October 2021, and they are happy to have their own home. Mdm Nurul has also started working as a canteen assistant to supplement the family's income.

Some families had to move into public rental housing after losing their flat due to financial difficulties or other life events. To provide more help to such second-timer families with children, we enhanced the Fresh Start Housing Scheme last year.

We increased the grant to \$50,000 to boost their housing budget.

In addition to 2-room Flexi flats, starting from the ongoing February BTO sales exercise, Fresh Start families can also buy 3-room flats with a shorter lease, which will be more affordable.

We hope the enhancements will encourage more families to work towards buying their own home.

In the past 10 years, 7,800 households who stayed in public rental housing have progressed to home ownership. We are happy for every one of them. Their success stories show that home ownership is achievable for families staying in public rental housing, with hard work and commitment on their part, coupled with strong support from the Government and the community.

We have also been making improvements to public rental housing for low-income single tenants, who rent under the Joint Singles Scheme (JSS).

While many of them can find a flatmate and live together amicably, we know that some find it difficult. We have been working on addressing concerns about the JSS, while managing within our land and resource constraints.

Since 2015, we have been building new rental flats with high partitions, to provide more privacy for tenants in their sleeping areas. These have been well-received by our tenants.

We have also been installing partitions in existing flats at tenants' request since 2019. There are now about 1,300 flats with partitions.

In 2021, we started piloting the JSS Operator-Run model (JSS-OR). For each JSS-OR site, HDB appoints a social service agency to manage and mediate the flat-sharing arrangements and provide social support for tenants.

Several Members have asked for an update on the pilot. We currently have three JSS-OR sites – in Bedok, Buangkok and Bukit Batok – which can accommodate around 400 tenants in total. The pilot has been well-subscribed, and all three sites are close to full occupancy. The feedback from our tenants has been positive, and they appreciate having the operator on-site.

While some differences between co-tenants are inevitable, most can be resolved through early mediation by the operator, which prevents disagreements from escalating. The operators also conduct regular check-ins with the tenants and organise social activities for them.

One JSS-OR tenant is Mdm Chan, who is 75 years old and stays in a 1-room flat at Bukit Batok with her flat mate. They share a good bond and often help each other out. For example, Mdm Chan, who is bilingual, helps to translate letters and conversations in English for her Mandarin-speaking flatmate. Mdm Chan also gets along well with her neighbours. She enjoys cooking and shares her home-cooked food with her neighbours. She also participates in social activities and celebrations organised by the operator – New Hope Community Services.

When my colleagues met Mdm Chan recently, she shared with them that she was happy to be staying there.

I am happy to share that given the positive experience thus far, we will expand the pilot to three new sites. The three sites at Bukit Panjang, Bidadari and Sengkang will be able to accommodate 600 tenants in total. We expect to open the new sites for application by the end of this year.

We will continue to learn from this pilot and find more ways to improve the lives of singles in public rental.

Some face housing difficulties due to unexpected and unfortunate life events, such as divorce. Mr Lim Biow Chuan and Mr Murali Pillai spoke about some of these difficulties.

We have been adjusting our policies over the years to take care of their housing needs and smoothen the housing transition for them. We want to ensure that they have a stable home, especially for their children.

Divorcees with children can buy a subsidised flat from HDB or a resale flat on the open market and qualify for the same housing schemes and grants as other families.

Those who are buying a flat as second-timers can receive priority under the ASSIST scheme when they apply for a 2-room Flexi or 3-room BTO flat in non-mature estates. Those who require interim accommodation while waiting for their BTO flats to be completed can apply to rent a flat under the Parenthood Provisional Housing Scheme.

For divorcees who cannot afford to buy a subsidised flat and do not have other housing options or family support, HDB will assist them with public rental housing. Those in very urgent need of housing can also seek help from MSF's shelters while applying for a public rental flat.

We understand that divorcing parties want assurance on their next housing arrangement. Since March 2019, HDB allows divorcing parties who have not finalised their divorce to apply for a flat from HDB, once they have obtained the Interim Judgment of divorce and resolved the ancillary matters relating to the matrimonial property and the custody, care and control of their children. These matters have to be resolved as they affect the parties' eligibility to purchase a flat.

Divorcing parties also do not need to wait until their matrimonial flat is sold before applying for a new flat. They are given up to six months after collecting the keys to their new flats to sell their matrimonial flat, which is generally sufficient for flat owners. For those who need more time to sell their flat due to special circumstances, HDB will assess each request based on its merits.

Mr Murali Pillai spoke about ensuring that the housing needs of the children are addressed when the Court decides on the division of the matrimonial flat. When deciding the division of the matrimonial flat, the Court does consider the welfare and needs of the children and may consider HDB's input.

For example, HDB will provide information to the Court on the matrimonial flat and post-divorce housing options for the divorcing parties and their children when asked by the Court. The Court can also refer divorcing parents to HDB for housing counselling before the divorce is finalised, for them to better understand their post-divorce housing options.

We will continue to work with the Court to find ways to improve these processes, to ensure that the housing needs of the children are taken care of.

Let me move on to address the cuts on seniors.

We want to ensure that our HDB flats and towns support our seniors to live long, healthy and happy lives, within the communities they are familiar with. We have been planning ahead and making our homes and towns more inclusive for seniors over the years.

For example, we introduced the Enhancement for Active Seniors (EASE) programme in 2012. We have also been adding senior-friendly features, such as elderly fitness equipment, residents' corners and community gardens, to our HDB estates, as part of our neighbourhood upgrading programmes. More recently, together with MOH, we introduced Community Care Apartments (CCAs) – a new housing typology that pairs senior-friendly housing with care services.

As Minister Desmond Lee shared earlier, we will be launching a third CCA site later this year in Bedok. It will offer about 200 units, alongside other flat types in the development. Residents will be able to conveniently access fitness stations, a playground and community gardens. These amenities encourage active ageing and provide opportunities for residents of different ages to interact. The site will also be located near Active Ageing Centres, community centres, markets and hawker centres.

We are also partnering the private sector to co-create innovative assisted living models that can cater to seniors' diverse preferences and lifestyles.

In collaboration with MOH, URA launched a pilot private assisted-living site at Parry Avenue for sale in September last year. The tender is closing later this month, and we look forward to receiving novel proposals.

For seniors who want to tap on their flat to supplement their retirement income, we offer a range of monetisation options. Those who wish to continue living in their homes can take up the Lease Buyback Scheme (LBS) or rent out spare bedrooms. For those who want to right-size, we offer 2-room Flexi flats and the Silver Housing Bonus (SHB). About 9,700 households have taken up the LBS, and more than 1,500 households have benefited from the SHB.

We will continue reaching out to seniors, through local community events, public talks and the media, to share about these housing monetisation options.

Together with MOH and other agencies, we will also continue to meet the housing and care needs of our seniors and support them to stay healthy and engaged within the community. We will share more details of our plans later this year as part of Forward Singapore. We would like to thank all Members for all their suggestions. We will study them.

Finally, let me go beyond our homes and HDB towns to talk about how we are partnering local stakeholders to enliven and rejuvenate various precincts across Singapore.

One example is the public engagement exercise conducted by Kampong Gelam Alliance (KGA) to shape the place plan for Kampong Gelam Historic Area. Miss Cheryl Chan and Ms Nadia Samdin asked about the Kampong Gelam Historic Area.

In total, we have engaged more than 1,600 stakeholders, such as local businesses and community groups, as well as members of the public, through workshops and online surveys. Many of them shared that it is important to continue supporting traditional trades while attracting new ones to the precinct. There is also strong support for initiatives to showcase the precinct's rich history and culture and recognition of the need for strong local partnerships among stakeholders. KGA and URA will study these findings carefully and incorporate suggestions into the final place plan. This will complement several other projects that have been piloted at Kampong Gelam, such as a recent citizen engagement project by NHB and URA, to document the stories of heritage businesses.

These collective efforts will keep the Kampong Gelam Historic Area thriving as a centre of community, culture and enterprise. Mdm Chairman, allow me to speak in Malay.

(In Malay): [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] In his speech, Minister Desmond Lee provided an update on the further efforts that we will make to take care of the housing needs of different segments of Singaporeans, from those buying their first home to seniors in their golden years.

To support couples buying their first home, we already set aside the vast majority of the BTO flat supply for first-timer families – at least 95% of the 4-room flats, in both mature and non-mature estates.

Last year, we arranged several sessions of the Forward Singapore Housing Conversations, where there was a strong consensus to give more help to young married couples and families buying their first home.

So we will do even more to help first-timer applicant families with children aged 18 and below, and young married couples aged 40 and below.

We will introduce a new priority category, which we will call First-Timer (Parents & Married Couples).

To qualify for this category, they must also not have owned or sold any residential property nor had the chance to book a flat in the past five years.

We will help them to get a flat more quickly in three ways.

First, they will receive one more ballot, up from the two ballots that first-timers currently get, when they apply for any flat type in any estate.

Second, we will expand the existing Parenthood Priority Scheme so that all First-Timer Parents and Married Couples also qualify. We will increase the supply of 3-room and larger flats that we set aside for them by another 10 percentage points to 40% of the BTO flat supply and up to 60% of the supply of balance flats.

To reflect this expansion, we will rename it as the Family and Parenthood Priority Scheme.

Third, for BTO flats in non-mature estates, we will give first priority to First-Timer Parents and Married Couples for the flats set aside under the Family and Parenthood Priority Scheme, if they apply for a 4-room or smaller flat.

This means that they will be shortlisted ahead of all other applicants eligible for the scheme, and thus, stand a higher chance of being invited to select a flat.

We also take care of families that may not be ready for home ownership yet, because they need to stabilise their finances first.

For low-income households with no other housing options, our public rental flats offer them shelter, a safe space, and a stable base where they can build up stability and self-reliance.

For families staying in public rental flats, our goal is to uplift their lives, so that they can eventually buy a flat of their own.

This is achieved by providing holistic support much earlier, to help them address the multiple and interlocking challenges that they face.

The Community Link Rental Scheme, which we launched together with Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) in November last year, pairs rental housing with holistic support for families with children, right from the start.

Once a family applies for a public rental flat from HDB and is assessed to be eligible, the family will be automatically enrolled in ComLink.

A ComLink officer will contact the family to understand their situation and connect them with relevant assistance, even before they move into their rental flat.

After the family moves into their rental flat, an officer will continue to journey with the family, regularly check in on how they are doing, and coordinate support from Government and community partners.

By providing them with coordinated support right from the point of entry to rental housing, we believe we can help more families achieve stability, self-reliance, and ultimately social mobility, including home ownership.

When families have built up their finances with stable employment and income, they can count on our full support to buy a flat of their own.

We have also been making improvements to the public rental Joint Singles Scheme, or JSS.

We started piloting the Joint Singles Scheme - Operator-Run (JSS-OR) model in 2021.

For each JSS-OR site, HDB appoints a social service agency to manage the flat-sharing arrangements, provide social support to tenants, and mediate amongst tenants when needed.

We currently have three sites, which can accommodate around 400 tenants.

Given the positive response, we will expand this pilot program to three new sites.

These three sites, which will be at Bukit Panjang, Bidadari, and Sengkang, can accommodate a total of about 600 tenants.

We expect to open applications for these three sites later this year.

(In English): Madam, let me reaffirm our commitment to build an inclusive home for all Singaporeans – where home ownership remains affordable and accessible, including for low-income Singaporeans; where we integrate housing with social support to empower and uplift our lower-income households; where our homes and towns support the needs of our seniors; and where we partner the community to create vibrant and endearing places.

The Chairman: We have time for questions, I see quite a lot of hands going up. So, I am going to ask that Members be succinct with your questions and two clarifications for each of you. Miss Cheryl Chan.

Miss Cheryl Chan Wei Ling: Thank you Mdm Chair. I have got two questions for Minister Desmond Lee. The first is, with the inclusion of the first-timer, the parents and the married couples in the Family and Parenthood Priority Scheme, will this impact or affect those who are already today eligible for the PPS scheme?

The second one is with the first-timer families, because they are those who have disposed of their private property or even a non-subsidised HDB flat, they because of financial reasons will have a need to go for subsidised flat now. So, what is the rationale for only prioritising the first-timers or those who we think have never owned or sold any local residential property before?

Mr Desmond Lee: I thank the Government Parliamentary Committee (GPC) Chair for the two questions. We are in a situation where demand is high for the various reasons that we have articulated during the Housing Motion. We have ramped up supply but we hear from the various Housing Conversations under Forward Singapore that there is a group of Singaporeans who are undertaking their very first home ownership journey: younger people who have just graduated who just started work looking for their very first home.

While they are first-timers, people think that they should get extra help to get their very first home. Hence, we have scoped the group that will get this extra support and they will be a sub-category within the first-timer group.

Of the three measures that we are undertaking – the Member asked about the Parenthood Priority Scheme, which is now renamed as the Family and Parenthood Priority Scheme (FPTS) – because in addition to couples with children or expecting children, we are also putting in married couples who would be part of the First-Timer Parents and Married Couples group.

And in view of this, we are expanding the proportion of flat supply that we set aside for this group which would include the group formally benefiting under the Parenthood Priority Scheme, from 30% to 40% and through that, we seek to strike a balance ensuring that this group, the young married couples and parents, get extra support while also ensuring that first-timers under the PPS continue also to benefit as first-timers.

On the second question, why did we scope the First-Timer Parent and Married Couple subcategory to exclude those who had formerly owned or sold property. This is to enable us to achieve our aim of giving additional support to those who are buying their very first home. This would tend to be younger people who are just starting out, they may not have worked long enough to accumulate the resources or gain the incomes that older, more experienced Singaporeans have in getting more housing options. And so, helping them in this way allows them to get their very first home. So, those who had previously bought and sold properties would probably have more means. That is a broad proxy. But I hear the Member that they may be extenuating circumstances and I did say that HDB will look at families in extenuating circumstances. Be that as it may, they would still be considered first-timers, like everyone else in that category.

The Chairman: Ms Sylvia Lim.

Ms Sylvia Lim: Madam, I have got clarification for Minister of State Faishal on the eligibility criteria for HDB rental housing. Earlier in his speech, he mentioned that there is no household income ceiling as such but the application will be assessed holistically. However, if you were to look at the HDB website today, there is still a mention of this \$1,500 household income as most applicants fulfilling this criterion.

So, I have two questions relating to this. First, why is the \$1,500 figure still mentioned on the website? What is the purpose of it? And secondly, in our experience residents have been turned away from the scheme because their income exceeded that threshold. So, could he share some information with us about the flexibility HDB has exercised? For example, how many households have they approved to go onto the public rental scheme that have exceeded this income ceiling, or some other data for us to understand the flexibility aspect better?

Assoc Prof Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim: I thank the Member for the question. Like what I have shared earlier, there is no income ceiling of \$1,500. We have approved cases where the proposed tenants or the applicants earned more than \$1,500. So, it is not one but a fair bit of percentage. Let me just double check what is the percentage. I had the number earlier. For example, in 2022 alone, 27% of the applications we approved were for those applicants having an income of more than \$1,500. Essentially, we look at it from a holistic point of view: the household size, the background and whether they have any housing options and so forth.

The amount that we shared on the website that Member referred to, let me read, it states here. So, your income will be used to assess your housing budget and option. I quote, "we do not reject or accept applicants based purely on income. Applications are reviewed holistically taking into account household size and individual circumstances." And that is what we have done. We say that most of our applicants have a household income of below \$1,500, and if yours is above this, you can still submit an application and we will evaluate your eligibility accordingly.

So, our officers have done so. I work very closely with my colleagues in the rental section and this is something that we have been helping fellow Singaporeans on.

The Chairman: Mr Henry Kwek.

Mr Kwek Hian Chuan Henry: Mdm Chairperson, I have a supplementary question for Senior Minister of State Sim Ann. She announced today that MSO will pilot having a dedicated team members to address egregious cases of neighbourhood noise. There are existing efforts such as those by the grassroots and Community Mediation Centre. How does this proposed pilot enhance the current framework for community mediation and for disputes, and how does it complement the existing efforts by grassroots, MCCY and MinLaw?

The Chairman: Senior Minister of State Sim Ann.

6.15 pm

Ms Sim Ann: I thank Mr Henry Quek for the question. We have every intention for this unit of dedicated personnel, when it is piloted, to work with the existing officers, for instance, from HDB, who have been handling such cases from time to time and also the grassroots, to help to bring cases to resolution.

The difference in this case would be that the dedicated personnel would be able, we hope, for instance, to be on site to corroborate reports that there have been noises at certain times, to verify whether that is, in fact, true. We hope to exercise some investigative powers because, today, quite a lot of what the grassroots as well as what some Government agencies' officers are able to do, they cannot get very far if there is no consent given by the person who is suspected of making noise. Of course, today, there are also no powers to ask the person to cease and desist from making noise, pending satisfactory mediation or otherwise resolution of the case. So, that, I think, would be the difference.

The Chairman: Mr Chong Kee Hiong.

Mr Chong Kee Hiong: Thank you, Madam. MND and HDB have committed to building faster and building more. I would like to ask the Minister how MND and HDB plan to sustain the ramp-up in the supply of housing.

The Chairman: Minister Lee.

Mr Desmond Lee: I thank the Member for his clarification. As I have said, between 2021 and 2025, we plan to launch up to 100,000 BTO flats. That is a pipeline that requires a number of years of work beforehand in order to identify the land, in order to identify the things that need to be done, in order to make the land ready for that. We will continue with those efforts.

It is a major endeavour. We have over 100 projects ongoing as we speak, 80,000 flats being built at this very moment. The ramp-up will continue. It will require resources. It will require the building capacity of our built environment sector. My colleague Senior Minister of State Tan Kiat How has spoken earlier about the productivity and innovation journey that HDB had brought onboard in order for us to undertake a building of this scale. Members would also recognise that the flats that we are building today are much taller, more comprehensive, have more amenities and facilities than the flats of yesteryear.

At the scale that we are undertaking, it requires resources, it requires manpower, it requires land. But we are committed to persisting with this ramp-up in order to meet the demand for housing by Singaporeans.

The Chairman: Mr Louis Chua.

Mr Chua Kheng Wee Louis: Thank you, Mdm Chair. I have just two related clarifications on open market rental affordability. Firstly, maybe the Minister can share his considerations in deciding whether or not to grant this, because similar to the granting of the resale grants for singles, we are looking at quite a specific group of individuals rather a broad-based grant being given and it is really those who are eligible for the PPHS and PRS but, yet, are unsuccessful in their application. Secondly, in the absence of which, should the open market kind of HDB rentals not kind of tame itself in the manner which the Minister described, once the people who are renting get the keys to their BTO units, whether or not the Government will consider intervening in the market just so that the rents do not get so out of hand.

The Chairman: Minister Lee, go ahead.

Mr Desmond Lee: May I just clarify that the Member is asking about his proposal to have a voucher to help Singaporeans needing to rent in the open market while waiting for flats?

Mr Chua Kheng Wee Louis: Yes.

Mr Desmond Lee: Mdm Chairman, we study all suggestions and we keep all these ideas in mind. We keep an open mind. At this point in time, we are focused on ramping up the PPHS flats, helping those from lower-income households, the \$7,000 and below, with subsidised PPHS flats. And for those who have urgent housing needs, with Interim Rental Housing (IRH) flats as well.

As I said earlier, with the large number of flats as well as private properties completing this year and over the next two years, we think that that may have some impact on the overall rental market. But we, certainly keep an open mind and keep a close eye on the rental situation and will be prepared to take necessary measures in order to support Singaporeans.

The Chairman: Ms Mariam Jaafar.

Ms Mariam Jaafar: Just a clarification for the Minister. I wanted to follow up on my question or suggestion, in order to unlock the resale market, whether those who are buying private property can be asked to sell their flats or be barred from renting their HDB flat.

Mr Desmond Lee: Mdm Chairman, I think both Ms Mariam Jaafar and Mr Gerald Giam had asked similar questions whether the Government can prevent private property owners from holding on to their HDB flats, that means, they bought HDB and they now bought private, or we stop them from renting out their flats. As I have said previously in response to some Parliamentary Questions, we are studying this issue. Of the home owners who own private properties while being HDB flat owners, half of this group rent out their HDB flat.

So, it is about 1.3% of homeowners. It is a small group, but we will continue to study whether it is necessary and appropriate to prevent HDB home owners who have bought private property from renting out their HDB flats.

The Chairman: Ms Tin Pei Ling.

Ms Tin Pei Ling: Thank you. I have two questions. One is that as we push for more flexible work arrangements, including work-from-home, I am wondering whether MND is looking at how we can enhance or redesign the living environment to better enable this, because one of the feedback is that, sometimes, there is not enough space or it is too noisy for that. Secondly, as the country continues to develop and we also talk about trying to preserve more green spaces for those who love nature, what is the Government's take on the more brownfield kind of sites? How are we going to develop or redevelop those while taking into consideration that some of these sites actually do have emotional attachments that people will have towards them like homes, like flats? I would like to get the Minister's position on this.

The Chairman: Minister Desmond Lee.

Mr Desmond Lee: Madam, maybe I will deal with the Member's first question on what HDB is doing, post-COVID-19, to learn from the experience of work-from-home in order to help Singaporeans, help businesses adopt flexible work arrangements.

As I have shared previously, we are looking at the possibility of HDB housing design where we have more open plan flexibilities for the owner. Already, we have pushed the structural elements of each flat as far as possible to the outer perimeter of the flat. So, you try to avoid having structural beams and columns within the flat, which make it difficult for the homeowner to adjust the interior of the flat. So, more dry walls. But, all in, push the structural elements to the outer perimeters of the flat.

But going further, HDB is studying whether it would be useful to give different configurations for the same flat typologies: 5-room, 4-room, 3-room. But instead of having the typical standard kind of room configurations, to allow some options, including providing options for people to configure a small workspace if necessary.

But beyond that, as part of the Long-Term Plan Review, we are studying the lasting legacy of our COVID-19 experience in terms of how Singaporeans and how our enterprises are adjusting and providing for hybrid work. And this will not just impact our design of the interior of the flat but also causing us to think about the design of future housing estates, that is, not just the flat but the neighbourhood as well as future town centres and neighbourhood centres.

But, already, as the Member may have noticed in the media, we are experimenting with different things, even putting work modules that some companies are piloting at the bottom of the flats in the void decks, with WiFi and other facilities to see whether that is something that Singaporeans take to. Libraries as well as CCs have during COVID-19 and some continued well after the COVID-19 pandemic to offer such spaces for Singaporeans to work away from office. And, of course, there are the private sector co-working spaces that are found in different parts of Singapore. And we are studying with them the kinds of subscription to these kinds of models. So, all in, a continued work-in-progress.

The Chairman: Minister Indranee Rajah.

Ms Indranee Rajah: Mdm Chairman, may I just address the second clarification which Ms Tin Pei Ling put forward?

She has identified something where we need to maintain a balance. We have got green spaces. There are brownfield sites. At the same time, there is heritage. And in the early days, where it was largely just greenfield, it was not an issue. You just expanded into the green spaces. But now, we find that that is becoming increasingly scarce and we have to try and make sure that we preserve green spaces. But at the same time, there is a need for development. So, we have got to balance the two.

But brownfield sites are actually quite exciting. They are exciting because it gives you an opportunity to redevelop and build on something which exists. And the big thing now for anybody who is in the infrastructure space is how do you take something which is an existing building and make it sustainable. And there are a lot of technologies and solutions that are going into this so that you actually turn something which is brown green again. Then, you may also have to tear down something which is existing and build afresh on it, redevelop it. And when you do that, that is when I think some of us, depending on the building, its location and what it was associated with, then you may lose some of the heritage and that cultural association.

So, we have to have a good balance and we assess the buildings and the site. And if there is a heritage value, then we have to see whether you preserve the whole thing or whether you might have to redevelop it but you preserve some parts of it, for example, the old Police Academy where we are going to have residential buildings. But we did not want to raze it completely. So, we consulted, we got public feedback. We also spoke to the old Police officers who had gone through the Police Academy. And there will be a part of it which will be retained there.

And if you look at the URA long-term plan review, there was a segment which was the Paya Lebar Air Base, we can see how, this is still at the concept stage, but they tried very hard to make sure that parts of the runway would still be there so as to preserve that association.

So, if I had to sum it up, I would say that our approach is really heart, home and heritage.

The Chairman: Assoc Prof Jamus Lim.

Assoc Prof Jamus Jerome Lim: Thanks, Chair. I have just two questions. The first is for Minister Indranee. I understand I spoke very quickly given the nature of a 30-second cut, albeit not as fast as some other Members are able to.

The Chairman: Please keep it succinct.

Assoc Prof Jamus Jerome Lim: I had suggested that one alternative use of the MSCP beyond bicycle parking was temporary parking for delivery riders. I think I am not alone in experiencing delivery riders that are illegally parking along HDB service roads. So, I am wondering if the case-by-case consideration for MSCP ground floor repurposing will extend to such uses.

The second clarification is for Senior Minister of State Sim Ann. I appreciate that there are many contributors to the cost of food, including raw ingredients as well as labour. But this should actually apply nationwide, whereas what I had compared, in terms of the significant price differential, was between mature and non-mature estates. So, I reiterate my call to explore alternative option mechanisms for new HDB coffee shops and I am wondering if that is something that you would consider.

The Chairman: Minister Indranee Rajah.

Ms Indranee Rajah: I thank the Member for his clarification, and I had implicitly addressed it, but maybe I gave my reply too quickly as well, so the Member might have missed it.

For multi-storey car parks, we do have, where there is unutilised space, it is possible to have alternative uses. The alternative uses would have to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. So, I think not every multi-storey car park, for example, would need temporary parking for delivery riders. But if there is a need for it, and if the precinct assesses that this is something that they require, they are always free to put up the proposal to HDB.

Ms Sim Ann: Coffee shops that are in HDB estates are either owned by HDB and leased out, or they are sold coffee shops. I have explained that for the coffee shops that are leased out by HDB, our intention is to expand the Budget Meal Regime to all of them, and I believe that will make an impact, in terms of ensuring that there are affordable options in these coffee shops.

As for the sold coffee shops, I have also explained just now, that we have already decided to engage operators, those coffee shop chains that are operating out of this sold coffee shops, to explain to them MND's concerns about the availability of affordable food. And that is a dialogue that I believe will be a fruitful one.

By and large, in terms of coffee shop pricing, it is not in the interest of operators to price themselves out of the reach of their consumers. We also understand that in different precincts, there may be some variations, but the important thing, and I believe the Member also shares his concern, is that the resultant price to the consumers, there should be affordable options.

I believe that our approach would cover both the leased coffee shops, and also, we will start that conversation with the sold coffee shops.

The Chairman: Minister Indranee Rajah, you had some clarifications?

Ms Indranee Rajah: Thank you, Mdm Deputy Chairman. I just wanted to add to my response to Assoc Prof Jamus Lim, which is that the suggestion of having space for delivery drivers is being piloted in some areas. I think this was reported back on 4 November 2021, where it said that delivery drivers who are handling high-volume parcels were doing a pilot. It is called the Pilot Courier Hub and it is being rolled out at two HDB car parks in Punggol and in Buangkok.

The designated lots provide the delivery personnel with space, to sort and to handle the parcels. So, there is these two ongoing pilots which we are studying as well.

The Chairman: Mr Xie Yao Quan.

Mr Xie Yao Quan: Thank you, Madam. I just have two questions for Senior Minister of State Tan, and I promise they are not on chickens and cats. First, on the construction industry, I am glad to hear Senior Minister of State Tan's update that HDB is playing a leading role in driving the demand for productive construction practices to help the industry transform, but the rest of the public sector is also a major developer of buildings and infrastructure, and there are very significant construction budgets.

So, I would just like to ask: how might MND help to corral the whole-of-public service and galvanise the whole-of-public sector to drive the demand for productive construction practices in the industry.

The second question on the Built Environment (BE), in terms of the sustainable solutions that the BE sector is going to generate in the years ahead, be it in construction development or maintenance, what might be MND's plans to help our companies to export these capabilities and generate economic value in the years to come for Singaporeans.

Mr Tan Kiat How: Mdm Chairman, I thank the Member for the two questions. On the first one, BCA is taking the lead to bring together the various Government agencies who are in the infrastructure space. For example, the Land Transport Authority (LTA), JTC Corporation (JTC) for industrial properties and so on. They are known as the Government Procuring Entities, or GPEs for short.

BCA is taking the lead to bring them together. Collectively, we are trying to raise productivity and transform the BE sector.

I just mentioned a few things that might be noteworthy for the Member. First, starting at the contracting stage. I spoke about the collaborative contracting model earlier. Agencies, not just HDB, but the other significant GPEs will be piloting the collaborative contracting approach.

I mentioned earlier, that at least 10 public sector projects have piloted or will be piloting this approach. This is a very important approach that raises the level of productivity and encourages a shared alignment of project stakeholders' interests towards common project goals so that issues are resolved early, tackling issues early. Hopefully, this would lead to reduced cost and reduce time delays as much as possible. So, that is one, at the contracting stage, we are looking how to implement good practices like collaborative contracting.

The second is to support Singapore's transition towards a green economy under the GreenGov.SG programme. The Ministry of Finance (MOF) and Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment (MSE) COS have announced earlier that environmental sustainability considerations will be incorporated in the public sector tenders and evaluation processes, starting from 2024. This will be piloted with construction tenders, with a minimum estimated procurement value of \$50 million and their associated consultancy tenders.

At the planning and design stage, I mentioned earlier how we are bringing together the various regulatory agencies to streamline their processes and to make it easier and more efficient for building developers and their consultants to submit plans and get approvals early.

At the construction stage, GPEs are required to commit to a 25% to 30% site productivity improvement over the 2010 levels, by 2025, for construction projects. So, we are taking lead, not just in terms of streamlining of regulatory approvals, but also setting high site productivity targets for our own projects.

I also spoke about various construction innovations, like Design for Manufacturing and Assembly (DfMA), Prefabricated Prefinished Volumetric Construction (PPVC) and many other techniques. These are some techniques that many of our Government agencies are adopting in their own projects.

I would just like to specifically highlight one, which I think is going to be quite important, because it is not just for new builds. I mentioned earlier, that a lot of the total lifecycle cost of a building is in its operations and maintenance phase. You can build a building for three years, five years, but you may have to operate and maintain the building for decades. And that is where we can make a big difference in terms of efficiency and sustainability targets.

The public sector is taking the lead in adopting design for maintainability as smart facilities management. Under the GreenGov.SG initiative, public sector buildings and developments undergoing Addition and Alteration (A&A) works must attain Green Mark Platinum Super Low Energy standards, with a maintainability badge, which are only awarded to projects demonstrating exemplary design for maintainability performance.

This is significant and public sector buildings above 5,000 square metres are also required to adopt smart FM.

So, in gist, we are walking the talk, we are taking the lead and we are setting high targets for ourselves.

The second question that the Member had – through all this effort of investing in raising productivity, investing in innovation, whether it leads to a competitive advantage for our firms, for our workers, that can be exported, and can be monetised and can be commercialised abroad?

The answer is that we certainly hope so. This is one of the objectives that we have, under the refreshed Built Environment Industry Transformation Map (ITM) that we launched last year in September.

Growing our innovation and enterprise ecosystem, in this space, has always been part of our focus in the Built Environment. And recent years, we have, in fact, placed more emphasis on translating our research and innovation effort into economic outcomes for commercialisation and export. We are working very closely as it is an ecosystem approach, with Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs), industry partners, research institutes, and importantly, Government agencies as lead users.

I will just cite one example, in the interest of time.

The Chairman: Senior Minister of State Tan, can I ask you to make it short. There are still quite a few hands.

Mr Tan Kiat How: I see, okay. I will just cite one example, in the interest of time. It is under the Built Environment Technology Alliance, or BETA, programme. Woh Hup Group and Alliance Concrete Singapore Pte Ltd, in collaboration with the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), have developed a manufacturing process for low-carbon concrete.

This is one of the few in the world that we are trying out, and if successful, this technology could help position companies, like those participating in this project, to better secure overseas construction projects, especially at the time where sustainability and green considerations are at the top of many buyers' minds around the world and our region.

The Chairman: We are running out of clarification time. So, I am going to take four more clarifications. On both sides, can I ask that answers be also kept succinct. Let me read out the order, so you can all put your hands down, I have seen everybody's hands: Mr Gerald Giam, Ms Nadia Samdin, Mr Leong Mun Wai and we will end with Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Gerald Giam Yean Song: Thank you, Mdm Chairman. Just one question for Minister of State Faishal and one for Senior Minister of State Sim Ann.

For Minister of State Faishal, can the Community Care Apartment (CCA) residents be allowed to opt out of this Basic Service Package, which I understand costs about \$164, plus GST per month? I am worried that the cost of this package may be prohibitive for some retirees and may discourage them from applying for CCAs. Just to be clear, they could be allowed to opt in later when they need the services.

And secondly, regarding HDB units with no direct lift access, if lifts cannot be built on each of their floors, would HDB consider installing stair lifts for those units? These are widely available and can be folded when not in use, to ensure that there is a wide enough fire escape pathway. And I believe it will help many residents with mobility challenges to regain their independence.

Assoc Prof Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim: The answer is no. As you can see, we also provide other options available to the seniors, so they can choose whichever options they are comfortable with. So, with regards to the Community Care Apartment (CCA), they cannot opt out.

Ms Indranee Rajah: Sorry, can I just check with Mr Giam if I got the question correctly. He was asking whether we could explore alternative modes for the ease of going up and down stairs, if the lift is not possible, is that right?

Mr Gerald Giam Yean Song: Yes, specifically stair lifts.

Ms Indranee Rajah: Yes, I think the answer is that we will be open to it, but a lot of it depends on the feasibility. I know this because in my area, at Tiong Bahru, I have a number of flats which fall into that category. But when you look at the stairs, some of them are curving stairs, and then, the flat stairs are very steep. And I recall that many years ago, I had asked MND to look into this, which they did, and technically, it was not feasible, given the stair lifts at that time.

So, if there is a good technical solution, making sure that safety is not compromised and that it actually does address the problem, I think we would be open to explore it. But we would have to see what the product actually is.

The Chairman: Ms Nadia Samdin.

Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin: Thank you, Mdm Chairman. My first clarification is, indeed, firmly on wildlife. I really would appreciate more clarity on NParks' strategy and proactive approach to managing this more harmoniously in our City in Nature vision, both for the safety of humans as well as animals. Is there a step plan or framework in place to preempt hotspots or deescalate conflict, and can more thoughtful design of estates, for example, those near waterways or set in nature, such as Tengah? I appreciate public education approach, but I think we really must go beyond campaigns and only responding when there is a wildlife presence, because more animals will be pushed out into sub-optimal territory with more development.

Second, on specific precincts. There have been various challenges faced by Kampong Glam stakeholders in recent times, such as rising costs and also ensuring the commercial viability of their businesses, as well as concerns whether traditional heritage in the area is being eroded by gentrification and newer developments that clash with our culture. Will place plan address these sentiments and also explore solutions to balance and address these issues?

6.45 pm

Mr Tan Kiat How: Mdm Chairman, I will keep it brief. The short answer to the Member's suggestions is yes, we certainly will explore all the different ways in which you can better manage the human-wildlife conflicts, including being more proactive about looking at the habitats of the wildlife and at the specific areas where there are food sources, and how we can make sure we minimise the food source available to them, so that they can stop foraging at the human-inhabited areas.

One important component is how we work with the community. We have seen good successes where we have worked with community groups. For example, I mentioned the Urban Wildlife Group and the Otters Working Group, where we proactively engaged the residents ahead of time, for example, to prepare their facilities better to prevent otters from coming into their homes or minimise the risk or the threat that the otters feel when the young pups are in the habitat.

So, there are many ways we are doing so, and we will continue to do so. We welcome suggestions as we do.

The Chairman: Minister of State Faishal.

Assoc Prof Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim: Madam, to answer Ms Nadia's supplementary question, through the place plan, we have been working very closely with the stakeholders there to identify projects as well to look at strategies to ensure that the precinct continues to thrive.

We also see how we can garner effective partnerships and also harness the resources needed. One thing about Kampong Glam is that there is this notion of cultural and historical value in that area. What we have been doing is we have been working very closely with the businesses there, the investors as well as the community, to see how to find ways to protect Kampong Glam's historical uniqueness.

While doing that, we also are studying the case studies from around the world to see how some of these cities have been able to protect and continue to make their historical and heritage areas thrive.

What is key is that I am very heartened that we have got more than 1,600 people coming onboard to share their views. This in itself allow us to work very closely with the community. In fact, even during COVID-19, we worked very closely with the Kampong Glam's community and the people who used live there.

So, I am quite happy with the support but now, it is about how we want to navigate together with the community and the stakeholders there to develop and deliver the plan.

The Chairman: Mr Leong Mun Wai.

Mr Leong Mun Wai: Mdm Chair, I have two questions for the Minister regarding the distortion of the current public housing system on our Budget structure.

First question, MND's expenditure on public housing development has already ballooned from \$2.9 billion in fiscal year 2021 to \$7.2 billion in fiscal year 2023. And this is mainly due to the difference between the rising land cost that goes into the reserves and what is collected from the BTO buyers. Can I ask the Minister does the MND plan to continue to fund this, even if this amount of expenditure continues to goes up?

Two, related to this is, is it fair for the Singapore taxpayer to pay higher taxes to help to fund this expenditure?

The Chairman: Minister, please keep your answer succinct because we are really running close to guillotine time.

Mr Desmond Lee: Thank you. I will try my best, Madam. Yes, MND's expenditures have gone up. So have many Ministries. A large part of it has got to do with our building ramp-up. We are building a lot more. We are building a lot more in areas where building is more complicated – for example, soil conditions, slopes. We are building taller buildings and more comprehensive estates Construction costs have gone up by 30%. The land costs, of course, have gone up in this current environment.

As Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong had said in the Budget debate, we are in that part of the property cycle where we are dealing with imbalance in supply and demand, resulting in greater demand as well as higher resale prices. We are committed to manage this supply-demand distortion in order to bring the property market to a more stable ground. We will make sure that we spend the resources in order to tackle this issue, in order to provide affordable, accessible housing for Singaporeans. And I think Singaporeans do certainly expect that and that is the response to the second question.

The Chairman: Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Pritam Singh: Thank you, Madam. Minister, I referred to the distinction between mature and non-mature BTO flats. I understand this distinction is currently under review and study. Can I confirm if this change in nomenclature is something that is being studied as part of the Forward Singapore exercise or is it something for the longer term? I ask the question because obviously there would be much interest in the impact of the removal of this nomenclature on prices and subsidies.

Mr Desmond Lee: I thank the Leader of the Opposition. As part of Forward Singapore Housing Conversations, we have gotten views from Singaporeans as well as from experts about a range of issues pertaining to our public housing system. Some are of immediate concern, like the current situation; some are longer term considerations such as whether the mature, non-mature estate classification remains relevant. And so, certainly through the Forward Singapore exercise, we gathered views and are studying the issue. But all in, MND continues to study how to enhance our public housing system.

The Chairman: Miss Cheryl Chan, do you wish to withdraw your amendment?

Miss Cheryl Chan Wei Ling: I would like to say in the past six hours, we have deliberated and have had a very robust discussion on many topics in this Ministry. It is probably one of the Ministries that covers and spans so many things: builds into the sky, on land, beyond ground, on lakes and into the sea as well.

So, I want to thank the entire Ministry, especially the two Ministers, our two Senior Ministers of State as well as Minister of State Faishal and the entire MND team. I think the Members have raised very valid issues and also, they have brought up their concerns but they also brought very good suggestions which I think we need to take forward if we want to be able to build in a very sustainable way and also to make sure that we integrate and build a stronger social compact moving forward. Madam Chair, with that, I beg leave to withdraw my cut.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

The sum of \$7,532,862,200 for Head T ordered to stand part of the Main Estimates.

The sum of \$9,379,351,000 for Head T ordered to stand part of the Development Estimates.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY – HEAD W (MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT)

(An inclusive and sustainable home)

The Chairman: Head W, Ministry of Transport. Mr Saktiandi Supaat.

6.53 pm

Sustainability and Impact on Cost

Mr Saktiandi Supaat (Bishan-Toa Payoh): Mdm Chairman, I beg to move, "That the total sum to be allocated for Head W of the Estimates be reduced by \$100".

Our convenient affordable and well-connected transport system is Singapore's lifeblood. It is important that we can sustain the system's long-term both from an environmental and financial standpoint. This comes down to three things.

First, mindsets. Our ability to transform our public transport system depends on getting commuters on board. Against our aim to move away from private transport and towards public transport and active mobility, a recent survey shows that there are still mixed opinions on the symbolic value of car ownership. We need to further unpack and shape societal attitudes to realise our car-lite vision.

Second, infrastructure. We have already taken steps to enhance the charging infrastructure for increased adoption of electric vehicles. These are important steps, but what are the Ministry's plans to roll out affordable EV motorcycles, for example, and the infrastructure needed for that as part of its sustainability efforts in our land transport plans? Is there an updated assessment of possible early adoption incentives for EV motorcycles.

Our Land Transport Masterplan 2040 also envisions cycling to be a mode of commute by which individuals can complete peak period journeys between home and work within 45 minutes.

Besides building new cycling paths between towns, is it time to separate bicycle lanes on our roads, especially in the Central Business District.

I cycle around my constituency with my volunteers every weekend and I am aware that cyclists are sometimes made to feel unwelcome both by motorists on the roads and by pedestrians on roadside paths.

Third, innovation. The quest for sustainable air and sea transport is a global one given the international nature of such activities. As we explore low and zero-carbon fuels and other sustainability measures, we should look to collaborate with other countries in such endeavours. We have done well in ensuring our hub status in the air and the maritime sectors remain competitive globally but there are opportunities for us to gain more market share going forward and create good jobs at the same time. Bearing in mind that other countries are not sitting on their laurels and are always looking at chipping away our rankings.

So, I would like to ask, what are the Government's sustainability targets across land, air and sea transportation and what are the Ministry's strategies to achieve these targets? Are we on track and what does it mean for the Ministry of Transport (MOT) Budget and resource needs beyond 2023?

Pursuing these objectives will come at some cost. Our bus and rail services were already operating at a loss before the pandemic struck. We must strike a balance between ensuring that the funding gap does not unsustainably widen and managing the cost impact on commuters is key.

In addition, we also need to balance spending on ensuring upgrades to our transport infrastructure and safety checks are there to meet our sustainability targets and possibly gradual changes may be needed to ensure the market microstructure of our pricing mechanisms to control vehicle population remains up-to-date with the sustainability changes.

All these are not easy as we also face at the same time external shocks or factors affecting prices going forward. As such I would like to ask MOT in pursuing our environmental and financial sustainability targets and strategies, what will be the impact on the cost for commuters and Singaporeans at large?

Question proposed.

Electric Vehicle Charging Stations

Ms Poh Li San (Sembawang): Mdm Chair, MOT is pushing for electric vehicles (EVs) in a big way as part of Singapore's transition to a Green Economy. EV chargers are being installed in HDB multi-storey car parks and public spaces to provide accessible charging infrastructure across the island. Working backwards from the 2040 target for 100% cleaner EVs, what is the expected annual expenditure required for installing and maintaining EV charging infrastructure and the cost of additional substations needed to meet the higher power load?

Are there plans to recover part of the development expenses required for EV charging infrastructure from charging fees levied on drivers of EV cars? And what will be the considerations for the charging fee model for EV chargers installed in public premises? What are the plans for existing petrol and diesel pump stations as more drivers switch to EVs?

Mr Gan Thiam Poh (Ang Mo Kio): Madam, the availability of reliable EV charging stations is crucial to our transition to green vehicles. What has been the average utilisation rate for current public EV charging stations? New charging stations will be rolled out in all HDB carparks. How many EV vehicles and motorcycles can these additional EV stations in each HDB carpark support?

Electric Vehicle Chargers

Prof Koh Lian Pin (Nominated Member): Mdm Chair, electrifying Singapore's vehicle population is a key goal of the Singapore Green Plan 2030. The Government has introduced a series of initiatives to encourage and support EV adoption. Can the Government provide an update on some of the key initiatives, including the EV Charging Act and the EV Common Charger Grant? Are we on track in terms of the rate of EV charger deployment and EV adoption?

Road Tax for Electric Vehicles

Ms Sylvia Lim (Aljunied): Madam, the current formula for road tax for EVs consists of two components. The first requires a computation based on car's power rating.

7.00 pm

The second is a figure to be added, called the additional annual fixed component (AAFC). The AAFC is fixed from this year as \$700 per year. This has caused some unhappiness among EV owners due to the weakness of the principle behind imposing the AAFC.

In the Parliamentary answer to Sengkang Member of Parliament Mr Louis Chua in May 2021, MOT stated that the AAFC sought to put EV users on par with those using internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles.

As ICE vehicle users paid fuel excise duties at the pump, but EV users did not, AAFC was added to put both categories of vehicle users on par. MOT stressed then that the AAFC was not punitive but was an interim measure. However, some EV owners find it punitive as the AAFC arbitrarily raises their road tax by as much as one-third despite the whole-of-Government avowed push towards green policies and clean energy.

I understood from the Budget Statement in 2020 that the end game for road tax on EVs is distance-based charging using the next-generation Electronic Road Pricing (ERP) system. However, in a Parliamentary answer to Member of Parliament Mr Louis Chua in 2021, the Government stated that it was studying different approaches and options for distance-based charging that were fuel

independent. Would the Ministry clarify what this means exactly?

Electric Vehicles

Mr Ang Wei Neng (West Coast): First of all, I would like to declare my interest as the President of Strides Mobility Services, a subsidiary of SMRT Corporation.

As part of the Green Plan, there is a strong push to encourage adoption of electric vehicles (EVs). We understand that 11.8% of all the new vehicles registered last year, in 2022, were EVs. This is an encouraging sign.

But we need to peel the onion further to understand the composition of the EVs registered last year. In particular, we hope MOT can reveal how many of the EVs were registered as passenger cars under COE Cat A and Cat B respectively. How many of the EV-registered vehicles were commercial vehicles and motorcycles?

I supposed electric cars and electric commercial vehicles users face different sets of challenges. What is MOT's plan to encourage EV adoption in passenger cars and commercial vehicles respectively? Is there an order of priority?

In addition, could MOT share the EV adoption rate among the Government vehicles? What is the Government's plan to adopt EVs across the different Government departments? Is there a centralised plan or is each Ministry responsible for their EV adoption or conversion plan by themselves?

Meanwhile, we know that there is an overwhelming majority of public buses that are running on diesel engines. Is LTA accelerating the purchase of electric buses? How many electric buses is LTA buying this year and next year? What are the challenges in running electric buses? Are electric buses more costly to acquire and run? If so, will that translate to higher bus fares?

On the other hand, there are also opportunities to run EVs at the airport and seaport as the range anxiety is less of an issue in the confined space of the airports and seaports. Would MOT update us on the electrification plan at the airports and seaports?

Electric Public Buses

Mr Gan Thiam Poh: Madam, about half of our public buses will be electric by 2030; and all buses are expected to be electric vehicles by 2040. Will the Ministry consider expediting the conversion of our public buses to electric buses? What are the main challenges facing the conversion process?

Public Bus Connectivity

Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap (Aljunied): Madam, I have received feedback from my Kaki Bukit residents requesting for enhancement of the public bus services serving my ward covering namely, Bedok North Street 3 and partially Bedok North Avenue 1, 2 and 3.

Currently Kaki Bukit ward is being served by bus services 225G, 225W, 137 and 137A. Buses 225G and 225W are feeder services, starting and ending at Bedok Interchange and they cover the loop of Bedok North Avenue 1, Avenue 2 and Street 3, each going in the opposite direction. I understand from residents that these two feeder services have been around since the early days of Kaki Bukit estate.

The newest and only trunk bus service that was made available to Kaki Bukit ward is bus service 137, launched in October 2017, in tandem with the opening of the Downtown Line, stage 3. Bus service 137A, which is a short-trip service variant of bus service 137 was introduced in February 2019. Bus service 137A only operates on weekday mornings to cater to peak hours commuting, making a total of four trips – first at 7.18 am and final at 8.07 am.

One of the common feedback received is to enhance the connectivity of the feeder services serving Kaki Bukit to wider parts of Bedok North, Bedok South and also Bedok Reservoir by introducing Townlink feeder service. Such a service can be found in some HDB towns such as Pasir Ris. Many who had called for this mentioned that such Townlink feeder service will, in particular, benefit groups with different mobility needs, such as the elderly, persons with disabilities and families with young children because it will do away with the hassle of bus transfers.

There are also requests to increase the frequency for bus services 137 and 137A during peak hours. The feedback is that these services is often crowded and impossible to board, especially for residents taking the bus services from the last three stops away from the Downtown Line, Bedok North station bus stop.

Madam, I do hope the Land Transport Authority (LTA) will look into this feedback and, if possible, conduct a study and see how best to improve the overall public bus service, especially on bus connectivity, for Kaki Bukit ward.

The Chairman: Mr Gan Thiam Poh, please take your three cuts together.

City Direct

Mr Gan Thiam Poh: During the morning peak travel hours, residents have to compete to get on the buses and the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) to the Central Business District (CBD). Would the Ministry consider providing more direct city bus services during the peak hours? I would like to appeal, in particular, for an additional trip for SBS Transit City Direct Bus service 671 from Fernvale to the CBD in the morning to meet the higher demand.

MRT Network

Would the Ministry consider a feasibility study for an extension of the Cross Island Line to extend from Punggol West to support residents at Jalan Kayu and Yio Chu Kang Road, as well as Fernvale? They are especially in need of MRT access to travel to other parts of Singapore.

Ridership of Downtown and Thomson-East Coast Lines

The construction of the Downtown and Thomson-East Coast Lines greatly enhances accessibility across our island. Would the Minister provide an update on these lines? What is the average ridership for both the Downtown and Thomson-East Coast Lines so far?

Review of Public Transport Fare Formula

Mr Lim Biow Chuan (Mountbatten): Mdm Chair, it was reported in the last Committee of Supply (COS) debate that for every journey on our public transport, the Government subsidises the journey by more than \$1.

In October last year, the Government announced that it will provide an additional subsidy of about \$200 million in 2023, and this is on top of the current subsidies of more than \$2 billion annually to run bus and train services. Hence, the fare increase was kept at 2.9% for the 2022 fare review exercise.

The various support from the Government has enabled the bulk of the fare increases to be deferred and kept our public transport fares affordable.

Madam, I appreciate the support from the Government for public transport fares and the subsidies are a large sum of money. However, the reality is that fare subsidies do come from all the taxes that we all contribute towards – income tax, corporate tax, goods and services tax (GST), plus the Net Investment Returns Contribution (NIRC).

I understand that the public transport fare formula is due for review in 2023.

May I seek an update on the fare formula review so that commuters and Singaporeans can also share their views as to how public transport costs should be shared between commuters and the tax-paying public. If all public buses are operating on EV mode, would this help reduce the costs of operating the buses as there would be substantial savings in fuel?

Land Transport – Managing Rising Costs

Ms Poh Li San: Mdm Chair, to achieve a sustainable Green Economy, we need more citizens and residents to use our public transport system. That would require our public transport system to be accessible and affordable, safe, reliable, clean and comfortable, and not overcrowded.

With six MRT and three LRT lines in operation, what are the annual operation and maintenance expenses? Also, with the recent increase in fuel prices and electricity tariffs, what is the increase in annual operation and maintenance expenses for public buses?

To cope with the rising costs of operation and maintenance, what is the expected fare revenue that will be collected from commuters from MRT and bus ridership?

With the return to DORSCON Green, public transport ridership has largely recovered, what is the projected annual Government subsidy that is still required in order to ensure a safe, reliable, accessible and affordable public transportation system?

Point-to-Point (P2P) Drivers

Mr Gan Thiam Poh: In addition to our MRT and public bus services, commuters have the options of taxis or private hire cars. With the convenience of almost instant matching on mobile apps, point-to-point transport services have never been more popular. Can the Ministry provide an update on the availability of P2P drivers? What are its plans in the event of a shortage?

P2P Transport

Mr Mark Chay (Nominated Member): Mdm Chair, the Public Transport Council (PTC) Survey showed that there is generally high satisfaction with the P2P service. However, the report also revealed that the wait times were less satisfactory.

Acknowledging that there can never be such anything such as a "perfect" system, I have to make three points.

First, I would like to ask MOT how it intends to improve P2P service waiting times.

Second, it is good that the PTC has expanded the scope of research to persons with disabilities (PwDs) and their caregivers. Important service attributes that PwDs identified to include in Singapore's public transport system are reliability, safety and security, and accessibility. I want to ask MOT how it has taken the data collected from the PTC Survey to enhance the experience of PwDs and their caregivers. Can MOT also share its plans to improve the user experience of the elderly to achieve its objective of providing a sound transport system?

Third, I would like to ask MOT to share more about its plan to increase awareness and growth of the Caring SG Commuters movement, which promotes courteous behaviour, such as giving up seats for the elderly, pregnant women and PwDs.

Strengthen Support for P2P Livelihoods

Ms Yeo Wan Ling (Pasir Ris-Punggol): The past three years have taken a long toll on our taxi and private-vehicle-hire drivers, with many drivers having disrupted livelihoods, depleted savings and sometimes, battered mental and physical health. While endemic living has given some form of reprieve to our P2P community, they remain worried about their future and their livelihoods, due to an ageing driving workforce, the ever-widening MRT coverage, the roll-out of EVs and rising costs of business.

I have brought these issues up previously in this House and I seek an update on the Ministry's considerations.

Our drivers have asked if it would be possible for a later statutory upper age limit for Taxi Driver's Vocational Licence (TDVL) and Private Hire Car Driver's Vocational Licence (PDVL) holders. It is currently at 75 years' old, and our drivers have asked for this to be stretched to 78 as many still feel they are healthy enough to be driving.

This will also help alleviate the retirement pressures that many are feeling, especially after the three-year pandemic.

Vehicles are key to our P2P livelihoods and rentals can often eat into more than 50% of a driver's revenues. Our P2P association leaders have given the ground feedback that rentals for vehicles have jumped as much as 35% over the past year for some rental models. Very often too, renters are asked to sign onerous rental agreements which must include vehicle insurance that can bear unequitable terms, such as high excess sums.

We call on the Ministry to work with the Labour Movement to look into the pressing issue of setting out fair practice guidelines for the rental of vehicles used for trade.

Our P2P community has also brought up the growth of a grey economy, ride sharing or car-pooling – a practice which lies on the fringes of what can be considered not legal P2P ride-hail travel.

Over the past year, this community has grown, and at last count, on just one online chat channel, there are 200,000 participants. This has impacted the livelihoods of our drivers. Can Ministry share on what measures have been taken or will be taken to address these issues?

Our P2P drivers are excited to join Singaporeans in a sustainable green future and are keen to make the shift to EVs. However, the rollout speeds and norms of charging point use are top of the mind for drivers and the Labour Movement and our P2P associations call for priority use of charging points for drivers who use vehicles for livelihoods.

We also call for more support for our early adopters as they will be expected to take on more costs due to a nascent EV ecosystem.

7.15 pm

Growing New Transport Modal Options

Ms Poh Li San: Mdm Chair, with better accessibility and affordability, car sharing has seen increasing uptake. This option fills a demand gap in serving the needs of public transport commuters who require the use of a private vehicle occasionally.

What is MOT's assessment of the effectiveness of the car sharing option as an alternative to car ownership? Has MOT implemented programmes or incentives that would help car sharing companies scale up their operations to enhance the attractiveness and increase the accessibility of this mode of transportation?

Would the Ministry consider formalising the framework for this sector to ensure nationwide coverage by the various companies, as well as the availability of different types of vehicles, such as those that can accommodate wheelchairs, so that more people facing difficulties using public transport can be served?

Motorcycle Quotas and COEs

Mr Saktiandi Supaat: Last week's COE tender results saw motorcycle premiums rose to \$12,189, nearing the record high \$13,189 set in November 2022. Demand continues to be high since last year's COS debate and measures implemented in March 2002 have only provided temporary respite. We must identify the specific drivers of this persistent and strong motorcycle demand to effectively address the soaring COE premiums.

Do we have enough data to assess if the measures undertaken last year to raise the bid deposit for motorcycle COEs to \$800, from \$200 previously and validity of a secured COE will be halved to three months, had made an impact to encourage prudent bidding behaviour? Will there be a need to review bid deposits much higher, possibility to \$2,000 and shorten the validity period?

Is the Ministry and LTA looking at other market microstructure measures on the retail side to reduce demand? Considering the value of motorcycles to delivery services and to lower income Singaporeans who rely on motorcycles for their livelihoods, what are the Ministry's plans to ensure motorcycle COE supply remains adequate and affordable going forward?

Parking and environmental sustainability are possibly some other reasons behind maintaining the zero-percent growth rate for motorcycles until January 2025. But these issues can be targeted in other ways and not just by constricting the number of motorcycles. As the COE and vehicle quota system are mainly to control traffic congestion, is there room for calibrated marginal increase in motorcycle quotas, whether by creation or reallocation from other categories, as motorcycles do not take up as much traffic space as cars?

Motorcycle COEs

Mr Pritam Singh (Aljunied): A Bloomberg article late last year put it aptly. Singapore's reputation as one of the world's most expensive cities now extends to one of its cheapest modes of transportation: motorcycles. Many Singaporeans who earn wages at the lower deciles rely on motorcycles for transport, gig work or undertaking deliveries.

In March last year, LTA attempted to arrest high COE prices by increasing the deposit for motorcycles COE and halving their validity period from six months to three months. These moves did not arrest the rise in motorcycle COE, which rose to more than \$13,000 in November last year. Clearly, more needs to be done.

In response to last year's changes, the Motorcycle Trade Association suggested raising the COE bid deposit to \$2,000 and reducing the COE validity period to one month. Can the Ministry share if it has looked at this to further manage motorcycles COE premiums?

Secondly, in years past, LTA had transferred motorcycles COEs to the open category. At one point, the number of motorcycles COE transferred to the open category was up to 25% before being reduced to 10%. This practice was ended around 2017. Would the Government consider redesignating some open categories COEs to motorcycle COEs for reasons of equity and fairness for our low-income Singaporeans and of course, the gig economy landscape?

Thirdly, an important but seldom discussed aspect of high motorcycle COE prices revolves around the largely unregulated motorcycle financing ecosystem. The fact here is that it is the motorcycle traders and sellers that overwhelmingly offer in-house financing. In some cases, the interest-bearing component of such loans can be oppressive for our motorcyclists. High COE prices mean motorcyclists will require more financing to buy motorcycles. There have been concerns expressed about how the prospect of offering such financing in and of itself provide an opportunity to profit from financing, even if a motorcycle is prematurely returned before the loan is fully settled since the unused portion of the COE can be redeemed.

Do high COE prices for motorcycles create a perverse incentive for some motorcycle finances to drive up motorcycles COE prices in a largely unregulated space? Would MOT look at motorcycle finance as an area of deep study and review to ensure that motorcycle riders – almost 70% of whom ride Class 2B motorcycles and who are more than likely earning well below the median income – are not unfairly penalised because of a lack of Government regulation?

Safer Worker Transportation

Mr Melvin Yong Yik Chye (Radin Mas): Madam, I had raised on multiple occasions in this House, about the importance of ensuring that our workers travel to and from work safely every day.

On 1 January this year, the Government rolled out new rules to improve the safety of workers ferried in the rear decks of lorries. Measures included a designated vehicle buddy and a requirement to ensure that drivers must be well-rested if they happen to be a worker too.

Migrant worker groups, however, have continued to highlight that these do not adequately address the core issue that transporting workers on lorries, where heavy equipment and human passengers co-mingle, is fundamentally unsafe.

According to data from the MOT, about two-thirds of Singapore's registered lorries, or about 34,000, will have their COEs expire within the next five years. This presents us an opportunity to phase out lorries that are currently approved to ferry passengers on the rear deck but without the proper safety measures installed.

Can MOT consider revising the lorry homologation process so that only those that can allow for proper seats and proper seat belts to be installed in rear decks can be sold in Singapore? By doing so, we can gradually refresh our lorry fleets without imposing additional costs on business owners.

Madam, we should do all we can to improve the safety of our workers' transportation and I reiterate my calls once again for safe, dedicated transport for all workers, especially for those who rely on company transport to and from work every day.

Cycling Paths

Mr Ang Wei Neng: Madam, as part of the Green Plan 2030, we would want to encourage more Singaporeans to take public transport, cycle and walk. We understand that LTA has plans to build cycling paths to reach 1,300 kilometres by 2030.

From LTA's website, we can see that most of the cycling paths are concentrated in the central, northern and eastern parts of Singapore. In contrast, there are very few cycling paths in the western part of Singapore with the exception of cycling paths around Jurong Lake and Bukit Panjang. In Nanyang Division, for example, many residents feedback to me that we have many cyclists but there are no cycling paths that are built by LTA.

Based on the LTA's current plan, how many kilometres of cycling path would LTA build this year and next year? How many towns, like Nanyang, do not have any dedicated cycling paths built by LTA as of now? What would it take to accelerate the construction of cycling paths?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many more Singaporeans started to cycle and used the Park Connectors Network (PCN). As the champion for green transport, I hope MOT or LTA can ride on the momentum to accelerate the construction of cycling paths to reduce carbon emission and promote healthy living at the same time.

Increasing Dedicated Cycling Tracks

Ms Ng Ling Ling (Ang Mo Kio): Mdm Chair, this year, a new rule kicks in for cycling groups on roads to be kept at five in a single file or 10 if cycling two abreast. Besides space constraint on our road network, this is another measure to ensure road safety, an area that I feel strongly about in safeguarding lives.

While there has been a positive increase in the popularity of cycling during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have also seen a spike in the number of traffic accidents involving cyclists. The number of such accidents rose to 572 cases in 2020, or 25% more than 2019.

I am a keen supporter of cycling as a great sport to keep healthy but prefer that there be a dedicated cycling track separated from drivers and pedestrians as far as possible for safety reasons. In my Jalan Kayu Constituency, there is a stretch of vacant land, along Yio Chu Kang Road, on the south and Sengkang West Road on the east, that can be developed with dedicated cycling path all the way to the beautiful Seletar Aerospace area.

I would like to ask the Government what are the considerations and how soon can such a development be approved and built?

The Chairman: You are out of time. Ms Poh Li San.

Land Transport – Improving Road Safety

Ms Poh Li San: Madam, with MOT's push for active mobility, there has been an increase in cyclists seen on the roads. Some cycle as a means of transport while others cycle for recreation and sports using the PCN and roadways.

To enhance safety for pedestrians, can LTA bring forward, in all towns, the construction of dedicated bicycle paths to improve the first and last mile connectivity, from MRT stations? For shared paths within a certain radius from an MRT station, there is usually a higher density of both cyclists and pedestrians. Dedicated cycling paths and pedestrian paths between MRT stations and the next major junction would help to segregate traffic and improve safety, especially during the morning and evening peak periods.

Use of E-scooters and Electric Bikes

Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong (Hougang): Thank you, Madam. Recently, Minister Iswaran replied to my Parliamentary Question informing that 760 persons were caught using personal mobility devices (PMDs) on footpaths in January to November 2022, down from 1,100 in 2021 and that 170 persons were caught riding PMDs on roads in January to November 2022, as compared to 210 in 2021.

While I applaud the enforcement efforts of the LTA officers and I appreciate that we have come a long way from the heyday the e-scooter menace. Many people are still using their e-scooters illegally despite the enforcement and public education efforts. Our Enforcement Officers cannot be at every street, junction or footpath. I still see e-scooters being used almost every day on footpaths or on the roads. I see e-scooters on Park Connectors too. Though allowed, most houses or flats are not directly linked to a Park Connector and how often do we see anyone pushing their e-scooters along footpaths, enroute to Park Connectors? We also read of fires from charging e-scooters which imply continual use.

I would like to ask the Minister, beyond existing enforcement and public education efforts, does LTA have any new initiatives to further reduce the illegal use of PMDs? The restrictions on e-scooters led to the rise in the number of electric bikes. E-bikes are not allowed on footpaths, yet many are still being used on footpaths. I have seen them on HDB void decks too. On the roads, it is comments to common to see some e-bike riders —

The Chairman: You are out of time.

Safer Conditions for Delivery Riders

Ms Yeo Wan Ling: Delivery riders rough it out, rain or shine, night or day, to keep logistical networks in Singapore alive in the new normal, be it courier services, food delivery or other forms of logistics.

Unfortunately, in a normal course of their work, our delivery riders sometimes have really bad odds stacked against them, causing them their livelihoods and sometimes, in extreme, even their limbs and their lives.

Our riders have given the feedback that due to them using bicycles and power-assisted rides for delivery, they are often in no man's land. When on pathways, they share the space with pedestrians and many pedestrians are on their headsets or seniors and young children with slower reaction times. When on roads, they share the space with cars, buses and other heavy vehicles. While rules have been put into place to help protect our riders, example, the 1.5 metres distance when overtaking. When the rubber hits the road, literally, our riders stand no chance in a collision with a vehicle.

No doubt gracious, pathway and road sharing is important to cultivate. And I ask the Ministry to provide an update on what programmes would be put in place to give awareness to all stakeholders on sharing norms.

In addition, in areas where there's no possibility of broadening out pathways, how will the Ministry look to demarcate their use? Currently the laden weight of delivery ride is set at 20 kilograms. This includes the bicycle, additional batteries, delivery items and the frame used to carry the items for delivery. Our riders are given the feedback that this 20-kilogram limit causes them to compromise on safety, for example, taking on the lightest bike frame and this can lead to instability with a full delivery load and of course, bumpy road conditions.

Our riders appreciate the 20-kilogram safety feature for pathways but are very worried about the risk they take on the road. The Labour Movement calls for the Ministry to consider, to allow a higher laden weight for delivery rides and to consider differentiated laden weights, a lighter one for riders who use pathways and a heavier one for riders who are on the roads primarily.

Active Mobility

Mr Eric Chua (Tanjong Pagar): Mdm Chair, since personal mobility devices (PMDs) became a popular transport option for last-mile commute in recent years, the safety of both PMD users and pedestrians on footpaths and cycling paths have surfaced as a cause for concern amongst many.

"Detention order for PMD rider who left woman with fractured skull in collision and fled". "Twenty-two-year-old man pleading guilty to causing the death of a 64-year-old woman while riding his PMD."

These are attention-grabbing headlines that have unnerved many residents, particularly so for those living in older estates, such as in Queenstown, where I serve. Residents often narrate to me their near-miss encounters with bicycles and mobility devices on footpaths and cycling paths. "I wonder whether a short trip on foot to our neighbourhood amenities, such as the polyclinic, stadium, or local hawker centre these days, can really be safe!", some lament.

7.30 pm

Recently, the Active Mobility Advisory Panel proposed a set of rules that would allow for the use of cargo bicycles and other novel mobility devices on our roads and paths. While the Panel also recommended that a set of rules on size and weight be consistently applied for these new additions, as with all active mobility devices, many residents are still rightly concerned. With our foot- and cycling-path sharing culture between various user groups admittedly still in its infancy, what can we do to ensure that even as we nudge changes in behaviour in our last mile commute, we do not do so at the expense of the safety of our residents?

Forward Singapore – Transport

Mr Ang Wei Neng: Once again, I would like to declare my interest as the President of Strides Mobility Services. I understand that MOT has conducted at least four sessions of Forward Singapore engagement exercises to gather Singaporeans' view of what they want to see in the future of the Singapore transport system.

In these sessions, I understand that many Singaporeans were keen to have a more inclusive transport system that can cater for people with disabilities, the elderly and people with dementia. It is sensible. But, there are also trade-offs. Would people in a rush be willing to wait for passengers who are less mobile to board the bus or train? Would a more inclusive transport system also means higher costs and what is the vision of inclusive transport system by MOT? If it is more costly to have an inclusive transport system, would it translate to higher transport fares?

Forward Singapore Exercise

Mr Lim Biow Chuan: Mdm Chair, public transport is a topic on many citizens' minds. Many citizens feel that public transport must be affordable, reliable and accessible. I used the public transport regularly and other than during peak hours when I experienced more crowdedness on the MRT trains, I am generally quite happy with the state of public transport.

However, for some of the younger citizens who aspire towards car ownership, they worry about the high costs of COE. They also worry about the high ERP charges and ask whether the only solution to road congestion is to impose higher ERP.

For non-car owners who may need private transport due to the need to ferry young children or the elderly parents, they have seen a spike in hire car charges. Hence, they worry that substitute options like taxis and private car hire are getting more expensive.

May I ask the Minister to share more about the sentiments and key areas of feedback on public transport through the Forward Singapore exercise? What are the expectations of Singaporeans for our public transport system?

Placemaking with Pedestrian-only Streets

Ms Poh Li San: Madam, as part of MOT's car-lite vision, several streets have been converted to pedestrians-only streets, such as Connaught Drive and most recently, Eng Hoon Street in Tiong Bahru. These pedestrians-only streets have become very leisurely stretches where people can connect with each other and engage in community activities together. The placemaking of these pedestrianised stretches have also given these spots a new identity and attractiveness. What are the lessons learnt from the first few pilots of converting streets into pedestrians-only ones? Beyond the central regions and tourists areas, are there plans to extend such pedestrians-only streets into the heartlands' town centres?

Update on Road Repurposing

Ms Yeo Wan Ling: I understand that the LTA is studying how Singapore's road infrastructure, can better support walking and cycling in neighbourhood centres to create a more livable and inclusive environment for all Singaporeans. This includes the pedestrianisation of roads or the creation of wider foot and cycling paths.

Punggol is home to many young families and to beautiful waterways and park connectors. Cycling has always been a favourite activity of families and our youths and our Punggol residents have asked if we would be introducing new innovative concepts to our roads and pathways to promote community bonding and healthier lifestyles, especially for our seniors and youths.

Will the Ministry please give an update to the road repurposing projects announced the responses to these projects thus far and the considerations for road repurposing to be rolled out to other neighbourhoods and communities?

Enhancing Walkability

Mr Cheng Hsing Yao (Nominated Member): Thank you, Mdm Chair, last year, MOT shared about plans to enhance walkability at Tanjong Pagar and other areas. For Tanjong Pagar, MOT sought inputs from the local community and carried out a number of enhancement works. These works include enlargement of walkways, introduction of new zebra crossings, new road islands to facilitate pedestrian crossings, traffic calming features and also a cycling route through the area.

I am aware of this because I am a member of Discover Tanjong Pagar, a local business association. I would like to commend the MOT and LTA for a job well-done. Such works are not iconic and do not draw much attention nor publicity. However, they are what matters on a day-to-day basis, in enhancing the experience of pedestrians and commuters.

Can the Ministry provide an update on its effort to enhance walkability and whether any new areas are being considered for such enhancement projects?

Lifts for Pedestrian Overhead Bridges

Ms Hany Soh (Marsiling-Yew Tee): During the earlier Budget debate, I shared that in order for Singapore to become a nation Made for Families, our infrastructure needs to be ready to cater to the needs of families with young children as far as our seniors and those with mobility issues. Improving the accessibility of this group of people to allow for them to travel to places they frequent, is important.

To achieve that, installing lifts to our pedestrian overhead bridges and ensuring that the surrounding areas are sheltered with barrier-free access, are critical.

What is the current progress of installing lifts for the existing pedestrian overhead bridges in Singapore? What is the target timeline to provide barrier-free access to these bridges, so as to create a more inclusive society, enhancing mobility of seniors, families with young children and those with physical disabilities?

One example is the overhead bridge Woodgrove Zone 7, connecting Woodgrove residents to Marsiling Mall, Woodland Sports Complex and PCF Marsiling Mega Centre and for Marsiling residents to travel to the family Service Centre in Woodgrove. Many seniors residing in Zone 7 have shared that they would often get their meals and groceries from Marsiling Mall hawker centre and supermarket just across the road.

Notwithstanding that there is a traffic light crossing a few hundred metres away, if given a choice, they would prefer to take the bridge as a safer option, especially during wet weather. Unfortunately, the sad reality is that many of them when carrying their heavy groceries, find it, almost an impossible task to walk up to overhead bridge. Some had no choice but to resort to jay walking across the road from under the bridge during wet weather especially.

Similar feedback were also received from parents of young children, as they struggle to get across to the infant care preschool, as well as for swimming lessons whenever they travel with prams. Following our appeals to the relevant agencies, I am heartened that NEA has since provided a covered linkway from the Marsiling Mall to the overhead bridge and nearby bus stop. I therefore hope that LTA can expedite in its installation of lifts to this overhead bridge.

Silver Zones for Seniors and Road Safety

Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin (Ang Mo Kio): Madam, by 2030, it is expected that a quarter of our population will be aged 65 and older. We must make sure that our home adapts accordingly to our changing demographic and especially look after our seniors. I would like to ask the Minister, MOT had earlier announced plans to implement silver zones island-wide. Can the Ministry please provide an update on this? How does MOT engage the community living in the area ahead of time on the silver zones? What are some key learnings from existing designs and feedback from both pedestrians and road users and will any of these be taken into the implementation of future silver zones?

Caring SG Commuters

Mr Eric Chua: Mdm Chair, efforts to foster a more caring commuter culture began as early as 2009, when LTA started encouraging pro-social commuter behaviour, such as giving up one's seat to those who it need more. The Caring SG Commuters movement first began in August 2017 with the aim of growing a caring commuting culture. Commuters may also have, over time, become good travel buddies with the "thoughtful bunch" on our public transport system: #StandUpStacey, #BagDownBenny, #HushHushHannah, #MoveInMartin and #GiveWayGlenda. Love those.

Further efforts to create a caring commuting culture was crystallised when the Caring SG Commuters committee was formed in 2020. The committee's mandate was to "facilitate and pull together multi-agency efforts in the ideation, implementation and publicity of initiatives that transforms our public transport system and commuting culture, into one that is more caring, welcoming and inclusive."

Over the past few years, we have kept at our efforts in engendering a more caring commuter culture. In 2021, the Caring Commuter Week was launched. The Outstanding Caring Commuter Award, which was recently renamed the Richard Magnus Award for the Outstanding Commuter, recognises nominees for their acts of care and kindness. These are but a few examples of what has been done to change mindsets and nudge behaviour.

Yet, we hear stories which suggest that inclusivity remains a stretch goal when it comes to our public transport system experience.

Paralympic swimmer Sophie Soon and her guide dog's experience in November last year, was instructive. Sophie is visually impaired and relies on Orinda, her guide dog, in getting from point to point. Yet, Sophie and Orinda's presence in an MRT cabin last November drew the attention of a concerned fellow commuter, who wondered if she and her child were at risk of being attacked by Orinda.

Such incidents aside, the Enabling Masterplan 2030 launched in August last year also featured Inclusive Transport and Inclusive Communities as two of its 14 identified Focal Areas we would need to work on collectively, to become a more disability-inclusive society.

Considering these developments, can MOT and LTA share plans for evolving and extending the Caring SG Commuters movement, so that Singapore's public transport system can truly be one that is caring and inclusive?

Transport for Port Workers

Ms Yeo Wan Ling: The moving of our ports from Pasir Panjang to Tuas also represents a major shift in workplace location for many of our port workers. Our unions have told us that this move will affect thousands of workers and this includes not only port workers, but also other workers in the Tuas ecosystem.

Given the necessity of our port workers to be on site 24/7, the introduction of thousands more workers to the Tuas area, can the Ministry provide an update to the transport options available to our port workers, especially last mile connectivity such as MRT, LRT and other P2P transport.

Maritime Sector Digitalisation Plans

Mr Saktiandi Supaat: The maritime industry is on the verge of a digital transformation and industry experts have voted Singapore, Oslo, Shanghai and Copenhagen to be the best prepared for the industry digitalisation.

First, the digitalisation of services or operations can help reduce costs amid rising prices and interest rates. Various practical, digital solutions to reduce manual, lower-value work, are proposed in the Singapore Shipping Associations Maritime digitalisation playbook and the Industry Digital Plans or IDPs. IDPs are presently available for sub-sectors like bunkering, harbour craft and ship agency and I wonder if more sub-sectors will soon be covered.

Second, digitalisation can facilitate better connectivity and integration within an ecosystem. The digitalPORT@SG Initiative and PSA's launch of more than 50 application programming interfaces, allows users to plug in directly to PSA systems. Is there a progress update on the harmonisation of APIs and data standards across different ports under digital oceans? And what are the Ministry's digitalisation plans for the maritime sector, considering businesses uptake of digitalisation solutions and schemes, thus far?

The maritime sector is digitalisation will also increase the risk of exposure to cyber threats. Malicious actors may launch cyber attacks to steal valuable data for ransom, sabotage critical operations and infrastructure to damage Singapore's reputation, orr a concealed illicit activity that utilises our seaport.

SMEs are especially vulnerable as they are likely to have weaker cyber defences and present higher chances of success for cyber attackers, putting the broader digital system at risk with increased connectivity. SMEs are also unlikely to have the knowledge to synchronise its cyber defences with existing protection such as the Singapore Maritime Cyber Security Operations Centre which provides early detection, monitoring and response to cyber attacks.

How will the Government ensure that the maritime sector is well prepared in the area of cyber security?

The Chairman: Mr Raj Joshua Thomas. Not here. Ms Janet Ang.

Competitiveness in the Air and Sea

Ms Janet Ang (Nominated Member): Mdm Chair, more than 80% of world trade is moved by sea. For Singapore, maritime is our lifeblood. We have some 200 shipping lines with links to more than 600 ports in over 120 countries worldwide. We are a global hub port and international maritime centre, and is consistently ranked top by international publications.

During the COVID years, the maritime industry is one of the bright spots for Singapore's battled economy. With our strong foundation, Singapore can and should continue to play an important role in global trade.

However, the world is changing quickly, spurred on by technology, the sustainability imperative and changing geopolitics. Singapore's Maritime Industry needs to evolve in tandem if we are to remain relevant.

I would like to put forward three points.

First, we must remain an open economy that offers a safe and stable environment that sets us apart from the rest. Last year, the Government announced plans for Tuas Port. Can the Minister provide an update on the progress of the construction of the port?

7.45 pm

Second, we must embrace innovation and, in fact, accelerate the pace to distance ourselves from competition. One such opportunity is the Singapore Trade Data Exchange (SGTraDex) Project which has the vision to provide greater visibility to supply chain logistics partners, such as haulers and shippers as well as bunkering players, and thereby improve asset utilisation, increase productivity and enhance

operational efficiencies. TradeNet put Singapore on the world map in the 1980s. SGTraDex has the promise of doing the same in this millennium. Can the Minister share with us an update of the development of SGTraDex and any other innovative projects that will anchor Singapore as the leader in the industry?

And, of course, we need to have the talent, both local and global, to continue to lead the industry. How does the Ministry plan to attract talented Singaporeans in this sector and ensure they are equipped with the right skills?

The Chairman: Ms Poh Li San, take your two cuts together.

Developing Sustainable Air and Sea Hubs

Ms Poh Li San: Thank you, Mdm Chair. Madam, I would like to declare my interest as an employee in the aviation sector.

Our aviation and maritime hubs are amongst the leading global hubs. They also generate significant carbon emissions due to the reliance on fossil fuels to power the aircraft and ships. On the bright side, Changi Airport has been consistently rated not only as one of the world's best airports but also one of the most environmentally-friendly. It is lauded for its skylights, abundance of greenery, energy-efficient motion sensors and lighting, water-efficient fittings and roof-mounted solar panels.

Singapore remains in top position as the world's busiest container transshipment port, but we may not be amongst the most sustainable ones. According to a 2020 study of 36 seaports selected from North America, Europe (EU) and Asia Pacific, EU seaports had adopted more sustainability initiatives, compared to North American and Asia Pacific seaports.

What is the strategy for both sectors to support our national 2050 net-zero domestic emissions target? What are the pathway, policies and regulations that will be put in place to incentivise sustainability measures? How can research institutes, industry MNCs, financial institutes and regulatory bodies work together to co-create solutions for decarbonisation? How can existing infrastructure and assets be adapted to reduce their carbon footprint to prevent them from becoming stranded assets? And what are the strategic international framework and partnership established so far in bilateral agreements to catalyse our transition?

Strengthen Recovery in Aviation Sector

The global aviation industry has undergone dramatic upheavals throughout the pandemic. Passenger traffic on Singapore Airlines and at Changi Airport have rebounded sharply over the past year since our borders opened in April 2022.

With the Chinese borders fully opened recently, how is our aviation industry poised for further growth and how can our air hub emerge even stronger than before the pandemic, considering the uneven recovery of other global and regional air hubs?

On the other hand, what are the key challenges facing the aviation industry as it rides on this wave of recovery? The airlines and airports suffered severe financial losses in the past three years. Given the strong demand, is there headroom to increase airport charges to recover the losses and to cushion against higher operating costs due to energy and manpower cost increases?

The Chairman: You are out of time.

Ms Poh Li San: What kind of assistance is the Ministry providing to support the recovery?

The Chairman: Mr Dennis Tan.

Changi Terminal 5

Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong: Minister Iswaran said on 5 October 2022 that construction work for Changi Airport T5 has resumed after pausing for two years and T5 is expected to be completed in the mid-2030s. On 9 January 2023, Minister Iswaran also informed the House that the average weekly passenger traffic at Changi Airport has recovered to about 80% of pre-COVID-19 levels and the number of weekly flights had also recovered to nearly 80% of pre-COVID-19 levels. The opening of Chinese borders will, hopefully, lead to resumption of most of our pre-COVID-19 flights with China.

As air travel resumes and continues to grow in the coming months, especially with the possibility of Changi returning to pre-COVID-19 level flights, I would like to ask the Minister now for an update on the Government's plans for the building of T5. Minister had said in October that we are retaining the option to increase the capacity to up to 70 mppa in the longer term. May I ask whether we are making any or any significant changes to our earlier plans for T5?

I would also like to ask whether there are any lessons we have learnt from the last three years of uncertainty caused by the pandemic which we can and would be applying to our T5 design and plans. May the Minister also share with us the likely schedule and dates for the twin phased opening of T5?

May I also ask about the land preparation and drainage works at Changi East and the runway system construction which were said to have started since 2014 and 2016 respectively. Were any of these works halted at any time during the pandemic? What is the status of these works and when are they scheduled for completion? And can the new runway be opened earlier ahead of the projected phased opening of T5?

Finally, I would like to ask whether any study is being done to establish how the two-year pause in the construction of T5 will affect growth and operations in the coming years and, if so, whether we are also considering any alternative plans to deal with such contingency.

Aviation Sector

Mr Saktiandi Supaat: China's decision to reopen its borders to quarantine-free international travel in 2023 means we can expect the number of China-Singapore flights to multiply. This was swiftly followed by our decision to move from DORSCON Yellow to Green which removed some of the last travel restrictions of non-vaccinated travellers entering Singapore. I look forward to hearing more concrete plans and timelines for the construction of T5. As Prime Minister had announced at last year's National Day Rally, we were about to call a tender to build T5 before the pandemic but decided to pause our plans for two years due to COVID-19. Do we now have enough information and data to decide how we intend to proceed or are we going to adopt a wait-and-see stance for a while?

Our aviation hub status is not just defined by size or quantity, but quality as well. The rapid post-COVID-19 recovery of our aviation sector has seen labour shortages, after workers that left the aviation sector for other sectors amidst the one- to two-year standstill. As we ramp up recruitment to ease capacity constraints, we must ensure that these workers are suitably familiarised and trained in airport operations. Some of these hires are newcomers to the industry and not workers who have taken a break during the COVID-19 period and are returning to familiar jobs.

The coming years will be interesting times for the aviation sector. Besides the new variables I have already described, the sustainable air hub blueprint is slated to be unveiled this year. Airlines and other industry operators will have to contend with rocketing costs, including energy prices. So, can the Ministry provide an update on the recovery of our aviation hub and what new competition it is currently and likely to face in the future? Are there plans even for Terminal 6 or Terminal 7? But that is probably way in the future. So, what is the Government's outlook for the sector over the next year and the resource constraints that are likely to remain unchanged?

Aviation Sector Recovery – Sustainability

Ms Ng Ling Ling: Madam, the lifting of restrictions on international travel is expected to help our aviation sector make a strong recovery post-COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst the increasing passenger volume and the aviation sector recovery will be good news to most, I would like to ask the Government some questions.

One, is there better clarity now on the rate of recovery, especially the flow of travels to and from China?

Two, how is the manpower growth in Changi Airport matching up with the recovery pace to ensure that our airport frontline and operations staff can cope with the increasing volume?

Three, as the advisor to DNATA Singapore's Staff Union, I would like to know how the Government will ensure the welfare and safety of more than 1,000 staff providing the full range of aviation security and ground-handling services who will also be managing increasing volume?

Lastly, as the aviation industry is a major contributor to carbon emission, how is the Government enabling more sustainable solutions, like the conversion to low carbon fuels, to align with Singapore's commitment to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050?

Recovery of Aviation Sector

Mr Melvin Yong Yik Chye: Madam, as the world shakes off the shackles of the COVID-19 pandemic, demand for air travel has increased tremendously. In fact, the International Air Transport Association has projected that Asia Pacific will be the fastest-growing region for air travel in the next two decades. What are MOT's plans to ensure that our aviation hub can ride on this long-term growth potential?

The pandemic has been a great reset for the aviation sector worldwide. It is, therefore, heartening that, despite the challenges, Singapore Airlines was named Airline of the Year in January 2023, but we must certainly not become complacent. How will MOT ensure that we do not lose our status and continue as the region's premier air hub? Can MOT provide an update on the plans for the new Changi Airport Terminal 5?

During the worst of the pandemic, our aviation sector lost many skilled and talented workers. How acute is the manpower shortage for the sector now as short-term air travel demand spikes globally? How does MOT intend to attract talents and plan for a steady pipeline of workers into our aviation sector?

The Chairman: Mr Gan Thiam Poh, take your two cuts together.

Passenger Load for Seletar Airport

Mr Gan Thiam Poh: Madam, may I ask the Minister what is the utilisation rate of Seletar Airport in respect of chartered flights and private aircraft operations and commercial flights, which I understand are currently Firefly flights. Are there any plans to increase its utilisation rate?

High Speed Rail

The Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High Speed Rail (HSR) project was expected to bring travel convenience and economic benefits to both Singapore and Malaysia. May I ask the Minister for an update on the progress of the discussions of the HSR between the two nations? What are the chances of the revival of this project?

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY REPORTING PROGRESS

7.56 pm

The Chairman: Leader.

The Leader of the House (Ms Indranee Rajah): Mdm Chairperson, may I seek your consent to move "That progress be reported now and leave be asked to sit again tomorrow."

The Chairman: I give my consent.

"That progress be reported now and leave be asked to sit again tomorrow." [Ms Indranee Rajah].

Thereupon Mdm Deputy Speaker left the Chair of the Committee and took the Chair of the House.

Mdm Deputy Speaker: Leader.

Ms Indranee Rajah: Mdm Deputy Speaker, I beg to report that the Committee of Supply has made progress on the Estimates of Expenditure for the Financial Year 2023/2024 and ask leave to sit again tomorrow.

Mdm Deputy Speaker: So be it. Leader.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, "That Parliament do now adjourn to tomorrow." – [Ms Indranee Rajah].

Adjourned accordingly at 7.57 pm.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

SAFEGUARDING SINGAPORE COMPANIES AGAINST SHORT-SELLING COMPANIES LIKE HINDENBURG REPORT

1 **Mr Yip Hon Weng** asked the Prime Minister (a) how are Singapore companies protected against short-selling companies like Hindenburg Report which earn money by betting on stocks falling, especially when such reports may not be true; and (b) what safeguards do Singapore investment companies have against such short sellers undermining their assets.

Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam (for the Prime Minister): Transparency, in the form of accurate, clear and timely communication, is the best defence for a listed company that is the subject of a short-seller report. The Singapore Exchange (SGX) has a set of published guidance on what listed companies should do when faced with adverse reports or rumours.¹ Listed companies must provide, as soon as possible, a full response to such reports to enable stakeholders to make informed decisions. If more time is needed to issue a response, the company can request a trading halt of its shares on SGX.

The Monetary Authority of Singapore's (MAS) regulatory framework aims to protect the interests of investors and the integrity of our markets, rather than the fund management or investment companies. To this end, SGX RegCo and MAS will closely examine both the short-seller report and the company's response.

SGX RegCo may issue public queries to prompt the relevant company to provide all material information to address the issues raised in the short-seller report. It may also order an independent review if there are areas of concern. Where there is evidence of potential breaches of SGX's Listing Rules by the company, SGX RegCo will launch an investigation and take the necessary disciplinary action.

The short-seller report will also be reviewed and share trading will be closely monitored for signs of irregularities. MAS and the Commercial Affairs Department will step in to investigate if there are grounds to suspect that market misconduct has occurred.

To protect the investments that are managed by fund managers, MAS expects the managers to have robust processes to manage portfolio investment risks. These processes include setting appropriate limits to manage the risks of their portfolios. They must also actively monitor their investment portfolios to enable them to respond expediently to adverse and sudden changes in market conditions.

Note(s) to Question No(s) 1:

¹ SGX Regulator's Column, Focus on clarity and transparency crucial for companies under siege, 20 August 2015, accessible at: <https://www.sgxgroup.com/media-centre/20150820-focus-clarity-and-transparency-crucial-companies-under-siege>.

ACCURACY OF E-BOOK'S REPRESENTATION OF THE SIGNING OF MR LEE KUAN YEW'S LAST WILL

2 **Mr Zhulkarnain Abdul Rahim** asked the Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security whether an e-book, "The Battle Over Lee Kuan Yew's Last Will", accurately represents the circumstances surrounding the signing of Mr Lee Kuan Yew's last will, as found by the Disciplinary Tribunal and the Court of Three Judges in disciplinary proceedings against Mrs Lee Suet Fern, where she was found guilty of professional misconduct.

Mr Teo Chee Hean: Many Singaporeans would prefer to put behind us questions about Mr Lee Kuan Yew's (Mr LKY) Last Will.

But there are continuing efforts to rewrite the facts. The e-book by Mr Sudhir Thomas Vadaketh (Mr Thomas), "The Battle Over Lee Kuan Yew's Last Will", published not long ago in July 2022, is one such example¹.

Mr Thomas claims to have spent a year scrutinising the evidence to shine a light on the events. However, the book is not credible, as it totally ignores the facts and findings which had been established, after an objective and thorough examination of the case, by the Court of Three Judges (C3J)² in November 2020 and a Disciplinary Tribunal (DT) in February 2020³.

The C3J and the DT found that Mr Lee Hsien Yang (Mr LHY) and Mrs Lee Suet Fern (Mrs LSF):

- (a) misled Mr LKY in the context of the Last Will's execution; and
- (b) lied under oath.

On the first point, the C3J and the DT concluded that Mrs LSF was guilty of misconduct. She "focused primarily on what her husband wanted done", and "worked together with Mr LHY, with a singular purpose, of getting [Mr LKY] to execute the Last Will quickly" ⁴. Mr LKY "ended up signing a document which was in fact not that which he had indicated he wished to sign" ⁵. The C3J suspended Mrs LSF from practising as a lawyer for 15 months. This is quite a serious penalty.

On the second point, the DT said that Mr LHY and Mrs LSF had presented "an elaborate edifice of lies ... both on oath ... and through their public and other statements, (which were referred to/relied upon during the Disciplinary Proceedings). The Affidavits were contrived to present a false picture. Several of the lies were quite blatant." ⁶. The C3J also found that Mr LHY and Mrs LSF had lied under oath.

A summary of the relevant findings and quotes from the judgments, on both these points, are provided in [Annex A](#). A timeline of the events relating to the execution of the Last Will is provided in [Annex B](#).

Mr Thomas ignores these findings by the C3J and the DT, and the admissions made by Mr LHY and Mrs LSF.

He comes to the surprising conclusion that the judgments clear Mrs LSF and Mr LHY of "all suspicion of improper motives or manipulations" ⁷.

It is clear that the assertions in his book are calculated to mislead, as they are completely at odds with the findings and conclusions of the C3J and the DT.

Some of the inaccurate statements in the book are set out in [Annex C](#) and contrasted with the facts.

As mentioned above, the C3J and the DT found that Mrs LSF and Mr LHY had lied under oath. This is a serious matter.

I understand that the Police have commenced investigations into Mrs LSF and Mr LHY for potential offences of giving false evidence in judicial proceedings.

As part of the investigations, the Police requested an interview with Mrs LSF and Mr LHY. They initially agreed to attend the Police interview.

However, Mrs LSF and Mr LHY later had a change of heart and refused to attend. Their refusal is disappointing.

- (a) The Police have advised them to reconsider participating in investigations, but they have since left Singapore, and remain out of the country.
- (b) The Police have also informed them that the necessary steps would be taken to complete the investigations in their absence.

Their refusal to participate raises questions.

- (a) If they maintain their innocence, the investigation will give them the chance to vindicate themselves.
- (b) They should participate, take the full opportunity to give their side of the story, and clear their names.

As the investigations are ongoing, I will not say more at this juncture.

Note(s) to Question No(s) 2:

¹ Published on 29 July 2022.

² Law Society of Singapore v Lee Suet Fern (alias Lim Suet Fern) [2020] 5 SLR 1151.

³ The Law Society of Singapore v Lee Suet Fern (Lim Suet Fern) [2020] SGDT 1 ("DT Report").

⁴ C3J at [153]; DT Report at [531].

⁵ C3J at [161].

⁶ DT Report at [617].

⁷ See pp 11 and 40 of the e-book.

FRONTLINE POLICE OFFICERS TRAINED TO IDENTIFY AND HANDLE PERSONS WITH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

3 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Minister for Home Affairs (a) what is the number of frontline Police officers trained to identify and handle persons with mental health challenges; (b) what are the indicators used to measure the effectiveness of such training; (c) whether refresher courses are regularly conducted; and (d) whether the internal Standard Operating Procedures guiding officers to deal with such persons are based on internationally recognised diagnostic guidelines, such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5).

Mr K Shanmugam: Frontline Police officers are trained to manage different situations, including how to identify and handle persons with mental health conditions. More than 3,000 of them have also benefited from the mental health awareness course offered by the Agency for Integrated Care. They undergo assessments and/or discussions to evaluate their competencies.

The Police's internal Standard Operating Procedures do not contain diagnostic guidelines. Frontline Police officers are not trained nor expected to make any formal diagnosis of mental health conditions. Instead, they look out for signs of mental health conditions and may then consult or refer individuals with suicidal tendencies to the Institute of Mental Health's crisis response team for professional assessment.

CAUSE OF BREAKDOWN OF STATE COURTS' ONLINE CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

4 **Mr Zhulkarnain Abdul Rahim** asked the Minister for Law what is the cause behind the hardware failure which led to the breakdown of the State Courts' online case management system for more than two days and what are the steps taken to ensure that such issues do not recur again.

Mr K Shanmugam: Based on the information provided by the State Courts, which manages the State Courts' Integrated Case Management System (ICMS), the disruption to the ICMS in February 2023 was caused by a hardware failure at the centralised hosting centre for ICMS servers, which resulted in database errors. The database was eventually fully recovered, with no data loss.

The State Courts are still investigating the incident. Once investigations have been completed, the State Courts will take steps to address the root causes. The State Courts are also pursuing various improvements to minimise the risk of future disruptions.

NEW ADMISSIONS TO REMAND HOMES AND PLACES OF DETENTION LIVING IN PUBLIC RENTAL FLATS

5 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development for each year in the past five years, of the new admissions to (i) remand homes and (ii) places of detention (a) what percentage of these children live in public rental flats; and (b) whether the Ministry intends to collect this data if such data is unavailable.

Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M: MSF Youth Homes (Singapore Boys' Home and Singapore Girls' Home) serve as a remand home and a place of detention for children and young persons (CYPs). On average, about 28% of the newly admitted CYPs between 2018 and 2022 lived in public rental flats.

PROBATION PERIOD IMPOSED ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG OFFENDERS

6 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development for each of the past five years (a) what are the average and median lengths of probation imposed on children and young persons (CYPs) who commit offences; (b) what are the number and percentage of CYPs who reoffend while on probation; and (c) what are the top three offences for which probation is imposed on CYPs.

Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M: Probation is a community rehabilitation order that requires an offender below 16 years old to be supervised by a Probation Officer for a period of between six months and three years.

From 2018 to 2022, the median length of probation orders was 21 months, and the top three offences were theft, voluntarily causing hurt and housebreaking.

Over the same period, around 9.5%, or seven of youth probationers, reoffended while on probation and had their orders revoked.

ENHANCING PENALTIES FOR SUPPLIERS OF E-CIGARETTES

7 **Mr Yip Hon Weng** asked the Minister for Health whether the Ministry will consider enhancing the penalties for suppliers of e-cigarettes to better deter the sales of such items in Singapore.

Mr Ong Ye Kung: Under the Tobacco (Control of Advertisements and Sale) Act, any person who is convicted of selling, offering for sale, possessing for sale, importing or distributing e-vaporisers, is liable to a fine not exceeding \$10,000 or to imprisonment for up to six months or to both for the first offence, and to a fine not exceeding \$20,000 or to imprisonment for up to 12 months or to both, for the second or subsequent offence.

The Ministry of Health is closely monitoring the trends of e-vaporiser use and holistically reviewing the strategy against vaping, including legislated penalties, enforcement, deterrent and education measures, to reduce both demand and supply of e-vaporisers. We will continue to work with our partner agencies to curb and prevent e-vaporiser use.

DISQUALIFICATION ORDERS AGAINST ANIMAL CRUELTY OFFENDERS OWNING ANIMALS

8 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for National Development in each year for the past five years (a) how many orders have been issued against offenders in animal cruelty cases disqualifying them from owning any animal; and (b) what are the average and median lengths of the disqualification orders issued.

Mr Desmond Lee: The number of disqualification orders issued against animal cruelty offenders from 2018 to 2022 and the breakdown of the disqualification period are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Disqualification orders issued against animal cruelty offenders from 2018 to 2022

	Number of disqualification orders issued			
	6 months	9 months	12 months	Total
2018	0	0	0	0
2019	0	0	2	2
2020	1	1	5	7
2021	3	1	8	12
2022	1	0	10	11

LESSONS FROM EXPERIENCES OF RESIDENTS LIVING IN BLOCKS WITH RENTAL AND SOLD UNITS AND EFFORTS AT INTEGRATION

9 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for National Development (a) what are the lessons learnt from the experiences of residents currently living in integrated blocks with both rental and sold units in promoting integration; (b) what steps have been or will be taken to promote integration between residents of purchased and rental flats living in the same blocks; and (c) what are the Ministry's plans in respect of existing blocks of exclusively rental flats.

Mr Desmond Lee: The Ministry of National Development (MND) has commissioned a study on the lived experience of residents in blocks which have both BTO flats and rental flats on the same floor. The study is still ongoing, but the early findings are that:

- (a) residents are more likely to form ties with neighbours living on the same floor than with others living further away, and building sold and rental flats on the same floors has brought about interactions and ties between owners and tenants;
- (b) block designs that minimised visible differences between sold and rental flats better facilitated interactions and ties;
- (c) shared amenities, such as playgrounds, are important for social interactions; and
- (d) social activities organised by the community are also important, and a critical factor is to treat everyone as equal participants and not differentiate between tenants and owners.

The findings thus far are encouraging and reaffirm that mixed blocks are important for inclusive public housing. We have launched a total of 20 mixed blocks, of which three are completed and 17 are under construction.

The findings will also inform the design of future mixed blocks. For example, we plan to continue building mixed blocks with sold and rental flats on the same floor, and minimise differences in the external appearance of units. That said, blocks with only rental flats still have a place in our housing estates, as they facilitate social service delivery to rental households.

DOCUMENTING GOLDEN MILE COMPLEX'S HERITAGE

10 **Mr Leon Perera** asked the Minister for National Development regarding the conservation of Golden Mile Complex, whether action will be taken to document its intangible heritage given its historic role as an early example of high-rise apartment living and as a transit point for bus links to Malaysia.

Mr Desmond Lee: Golden Mile Complex has been the subject of various heritage documentation efforts. For example, NUS, supported by NHB, had completed a research study in 2021 on post-independence buildings in Singapore, which included interviews with Golden Mile Complex's tenants, visitors and residents on its intangible heritage. In addition, several members of public have documented their experiences at Golden Mile Complex on their own initiative, capturing the building's history through books, videos, blogs and media articles.

PROPORTION OF RESALE FLAT BUYERS WHO ARE UPGRADERS AND DOWNGRADERS

11 **Ms Mariam Jaafar** asked the Minister for National Development what proportion of resale HDB flat buyers are (i) upgraders and (ii) downgraders from larger HDB flats respectively.

Mr Desmond Lee: From 2020 to 2022, about 19% of resale flat buyers bought a larger flat, and about 15% of resale flat buyers bought a smaller flat, within three years of disposing of their previous flat.

APPEALS FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL VOUCHERS AND STEPS TO ENSURE VERACITY

12 **Mr Zhulkarnain Abdul Rahim** asked the Minister for Culture, Community and Youth how are appeals for eligibility of Community Development Council vouchers processed and what are the steps to ensure that the reasons for such appeals are genuine, particularly those whose residential premises are leased out.

Mr Edwin Tong Chun Fai: Every Singaporean household can claim \$300 CDC Vouchers in 2023. This is part of the enhanced support under the Assurance Package to help cushion the impact of additional Goods and Services Tax (GST) for Singaporean households and the \$1.5 billion Support Package announced in October 2022.

Some Singaporean households might be unable to claim their CDC vouchers for a variety of reasons. This could happen, for example, when more than one Singaporean household resides in the same address. In such cases, the relevant household that has yet to claim their vouchers may make an appeal at any community centre/club.

Households making appeals will have to provide supporting documents to show proof of household for assessment, for example, tenancy agreement, marriage certificate and key collection letters from the Housing and Development Board. In general, appeals will be approved as long as the applicant is from a different household and has not claimed the CDC vouchers 2023 before.

FORGERY OF IN-PRINCIPLE APPROVAL LETTERS FOR EMPLOYMENT PURPOSES

13 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for Manpower for each year in the past five years, how many employers have been (i) investigated, (ii) convicted and (iii) issued stern warnings for forging in-principle approval letters for employment purposes.

Dr Tan See Leng: From 2018 to 2022, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) received a total of 70 reports on forgery of in-principle approval (IPA) letters.

The perpetrators of these forged IPA letters are typically overseas agents who are beyond our enforcement reach. The employers in Singapore and local employment agencies were able to show that they had sent the original IPA letter overseas. However, the overseas agent would amend key employment terms, for example, salary, before handing the forged IPA letter over to the migrant worker. Over this period, one employer was convicted for forging the IPA letter.

ANNEXES

Annex A()

Annex B()

Annex C()

VERNACULAR SPEECHES

Vernacular Speech by Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien()

Vernacular Speech by Dr Amy Khor Lean Suan()

Vernacular Speech by Dr Koh Poh Koon()

Vernacular Speech by Mr Desmond Lee()

Vernacular Speech by Ms Sim Ann()

Vernacular Speech by Mr Tan Kiat How()

Vernacular Speech by Assoc Prof Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim()