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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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OFFICIAL REPORT

FOURTEENTH PARLIAMENT

*FIRST SESSION*

*Monday, 6 March 2023*

*The House met at 10:30 am*

VOLUME 95

NO 92

**ATTENDANCE**

**PRESENT:**

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

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.

Mr Gan Kim Yong (Chua Chu Kang), Minister for Trade and Industry.

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 Puthuchear (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 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).

Dr Ng Eng Hen (Bishan-Toa Payoh), Minister for Defence.

Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang (Nee Soon).

Ms Ng Ling Ling (Ang Mo Kio).

Miss Rachel Ong (West Coast).

Ms Joan Pereira (Tanjong Pagar).

Mr Leon Perera (Aljunied).

Ms Denise Phua Lay Peng (Jalan Besar).

Ms Poh Li San (Sembawang).

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

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).

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).

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).

Mr Teo Chee Hean (Pasir Ris-Punggol), Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security.

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

Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam (Jurong), Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for Social Policies.

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.

Mr Vikram Nair (Sembawang).

Dr Vivian Balakrishnan (Holland-Bukit Timah), Minister for Foreign Affairs.

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 Abdul Samad (Nominated Member).  
Mr Leong Mun Wai (Non-Constituency Member).  
Mr Ong Ye Kung (Sembawang), Minister for Health.  
Ms Hazel Poa (Non-Constituency Member).  
Ms Rahayu Mahzam (Jurong), Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Minister for Law.  
Ms Sim Ann (Holland-Bukit Timah), Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and National Development and Deputy Government Whip.  
Ms Sun Xueling (Punggol West), Minister of State for Home Affairs and Social and Family Development.  
Dr Tan See Leng (Marine Parade), Minister for Manpower and Second Minister for Trade and Industry.

**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)
Ms Hazel Poa	03 Mar	07 Mar
Mr Abdul Samad	04 Mar	07 Mar
Ms Sim Ann	04 Mar	08 Mar
Mr K Shanmugam	05 Mar	07 Mar
	06 Mar	07 Mar
Ms Rahayu Mahzam	05 Mar	07 Mar
Dr Tan See Leng	05 Mar	12 Mar
Mr Leong Mun Wai	06 Mar	06 Mar
Mr Ong Ye Kung	06 Mar	07 Mar
Ms Sun Xueling	06 Mar	06 Mar

**[Deputy Speaker (Mr Christopher de Souza) in the Chair]**

**ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

**ASSESSING ESTIMATED EXPENDITURE OF PROVIDING CASH COMPONENT OF BABY BONUS TO SINGLE UNWED PARENTS**

1 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development whether the Ministry will consider studying the estimated costs of providing the cash component of the Baby Bonus to single unwed parents.

**The Minister for Social and Family Development (Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M):** Mr Deputy Speaker, my response will also cover the Parliamentary Question (PQ) for oral answer also filed by Mr Louis Ng<sup>1</sup> which is scheduled for Sitting on or after 7 March. I would invite the Member to seek clarifications if need be. If the question has been addressed, it may not be necessary to proceed with the question for future Sittings.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Please proceed.

**Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M:** Mr Deputy Speaker, while single unwed parents do not qualify for the Baby Bonus Cash Gift, Parenthood Tax Rebate and Working Mother’s Child Relief, we extend Government benefits that support the growth and development of their children. These include subsidies for education, healthcare, childcare and infant care, the foreign domestic worker levy concession and the Child Development Account. HDB also assesses their requests for housing holistically, based on their individual circumstances.

It is not an issue of cost, let alone whether we will study it, but that each of these policies reflect prevailing societal norms and values, that of parenthood within marriage. In addition, those in need of assistance can approach their nearest Social Service Office.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Louis Ng.

**Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang (Nee Soon):** Thank you, Sir. And I thank the Minister for the reply. I have seen first-hand the suffering and pain that single unwed parents go through. So, could I ask for the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) look at it from two different perspectives.

One, for the cash component of the Baby Bonus, it really is not a luxury for them, but a lifeline. Our own data shows that single unwed parents under age 35 have a median salary of \$700. So, when the child is born, the mother and child, with \$700, what can they really do? I hope we can provide this cash component because it really is a lifeline for these parents.

Two, for the Working Mother's Child Relief and the Parenthood Tax Rebate, I hope MSF can look at this not from a fiscal cost standpoint, but one of stigma and discrimination. Minister Indranee, Minister of State Sun Xueling and myself saw first-hand how single unwed parents were in tears when they spoke about this stigma and discrimination. I think this policy of not providing this tax rebate and tax relief really reinforces the stigma and discrimination. So, I hope again, that we will relook this, not from a fiscal standpoint, but how giving them this relief and tax rebate can help to remove that discrimination.

**Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M:** I can understand how Mr Louis Ng feel for single unwed mothers. I think Members in this House feel the same. But policies are implemented, fit for purpose. And even when they are not used up for its intended purpose, policies cannot be reduced, reused or recycled. They must be implemented for public accountability, for the purpose it was intended.

Therefore, if they need support like the areas which the Member has mentioned, our Social Services Offices (SSOs) provide psychological support and social support. Please seek them. If they do not know where to go, I hope Members can point them to where these are.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Louis Ng.

**Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang:** Thank you, Sir. I do agree with Minister – the policies are there for a purpose. But policies can change and that is why in this Budget, we changed the whole rationale of the Working Mother's Child Relief. We thought at first it was to help the higher-income mothers to have children, but now, we are changing it to help the lower- and middle-income mothers. So, why can we not change it to help the single unweds as well? It is not a big group. I do not think a lot of single unwed parents pay taxes because again, the median salary is about \$700 for those under age 35. They cannot be paying taxes. But this is about really removing the stigma and discrimination.

I have raised this for many years now. Every year when I raise it, they said we will review it. I hope we sincerely review this and change our policies.

**Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M:** I note that the Member said the numbers are small. Does the Member want the number to be big? Because we must make a distinction between support and incentive. There is always this worry that that could happen, but more importantly, our policies must reflect the social norms and values of parenthood within marriage. If that shifts in future, certainly, we will move with it.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** We have several PQs to get through, Mr Ng. I will allow the last short supplementary question, please.

**Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang:** The short supplementary question is this: we did equalise the maternity leave; we did provide the CDA component. I do believe that that did not result in a spike in the number of single unweds. I believe, in Japan as well, when they provided more support for single unwed parents, that also do not result in a spike in single unweds in the country. I do not think so as well. I do not think people have children just because —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Ng, a short clarification, please.

**Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang:** Thank you.

**Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M:** Well, the Member did not put a question, but he put his opinion across again. I think he has reflected the needs of the unwed mothers – and all of us should feel the same. But we also have to reflect the needs and the reflections of what social norms are. As I mentioned just now, if social norms change, that too will change.

Note(s) to Question No(s) 1:

<sup>1</sup> To ask the Minister for Social and Family Development whether the Ministry will consider studying the estimated costs of providing the Parenthood Tax Rebate and Working Mother's Child Relief to single unwed parents respectively.

**DATA ON CARE STAFF TO RESIDENTS RATIO IN LOCAL NURSING HOMES**

**2 Mr Gerald Giam Yean Song** asked the Minister for Health (a) in the last six months, how many local nursing homes have not been able to maintain the required ratio of care staff to residents for (i) Category I (ii) Category II (iii) Category III and (iv) Category IV residents respectively; and (b) what are the Ministry's plans to assist the nursing homes to meet the level of staffing and level of professional skills required.

**The Senior Minister of State for Health (Dr Janil Puthucheary) (for the Minister for Health):** Sir, all nursing homes inspected within the last six months met the required staffing ratios. Nevertheless, many healthcare institutions, including nursing homes, face a tight manpower situation, as healthcare workers are in great demand throughout the world.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) works with the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) to attract jobseekers into the community care sector, including nursing homes. They also work closely with nursing homes to develop healthcare workers professionally. This includes the Community Care Traineeship Programme for their newly-hired local healthcare and therapy assistants; and providing subsidies through AIC-appointed Learning Institutes for a range of developmental and skills training programmes. In addition, we are stepping up efforts to recruit foreign nurses to work in Singapore.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Giam.

**Mr Gerald Giam Yean Song (Aljunied):** I thank the Senior Minister of State for his reply. The Lien Foundation's long-term care manpower study found that the compensation of local nurses, local nursing aides and healthcare assistants in the long-term care sector, is low compared to their counterparts in hospitals. Are there any plans to bring local Intermediate and Long-term Care (ILTC) staff's pay and benefits up to, at least, the level of the restructured hospitals, so that they can better attract and retain local staff?

Secondly, among the nursing homes, are there salary norms that are set by the Ministry of Health (MOH) that they are supposed to meet and what is the compliance rate of this among nursing homes?

**Dr Janil Puthucheary:** Sir, I thank Mr Giam for the questions. We do regularly review the compensation for all the healthcare workers in all the sectors, as well as whether there is a significant variance across the norms. This is a matter under review. I do not have any specific announcements about plans to review at this point in time, but it is an ongoing work. We will update the House at appropriate junctures.

I do not have the data for compliance rates amongst the different providers in the long-term care sector. If the Member would like to file a specific question on that, for oral or written answer, I would be happy to provide the data.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Yip Hon Weng.

**Mr Yip Hon Weng (Yio Chu Kang):** I thank the Senior Minister of State for his reply. I just have a very short supplementary question. The waiting list for nursing homes is long, as I understand it. Are there plans to incentivise care staff from the acute hospitals to perhaps try a stint in the nursing homes to help beef up the manpower there?

**Dr Janil Puthucheary:** Sir, I thank the Member for his question. The skill sets for the acute hospitals and the long-term care sector, while there is significant overlap, are not exactly the same. And we should not see the pool of manpower as completely fungible between the two. We do also have needs within the acute care sector as well.

So, the real answer is to increase the overall recruitment and bring people into both sectors.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** No other supplementary questions? Alright.

#### **RATIONALE FOR ADJUSTING BUYER'S STAMP DUTY RATES FOR HIGHER-VALUE PROPERTIES**

3 **Mr Lim Biow Chuan** asked the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance (a) whether he can explain the rationale for adjusting the Buyer's Stamp Duty (BSD) rates for higher-value properties on and after 15 February 2023; and (b) how does the imposition of a condition that the Option to Purchase has not been varied on or after 15 February 2023 before allowing the prevailing BSD rates on and before 14 February 2023 to apply help meet the policy consideration.

**The Senior Minister of State for Finance (Mr Chee Hong Tat) (for the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance):** Mr Deputy Speaker, the revised Buyer's Stamp Duty or BSD, rates will make our BSD regime more progressive by having higher rates when buyers purchase more expensive residential and non-residential properties.

The transitional provision and its three conditions are similar to those implemented for the Budget 2018 BSD rate adjustments, and past Additional Buyer's Stamp Duty or ABSD, rate adjustments. These conditions are designed to ensure that the prior BSD rates apply only to pre-existing Options to Purchase or OTPs, that are granted on or before 14 February 2023, even though they are exercised shortly later. There is a condition that the OTP should not be varied on or after 15 February 2023 to minimise gaming by buyers hoping to circumvent the revised BSD rates.

Buyers who are unable to fulfil the conditions of the transitional provision due to extenuating circumstances may submit an appeal to the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore (IRAS).

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Lim Biow Chuan.

**Mr Lim Biow Chuan (Mountbatten):** Thank you, Sir. May I ask the Senior Minister of State, I understand the rationale, but there are certain parts of it which I cannot understand, which is the part about variation. For example, if the parties cannot complete for reasons that are not within their control, for example, if it is subject tenancy and the tenant wants to vacate, they cannot vary their contract because it has not impact on the progressive nature of the Stamp Duty. Or if, for example, the parties cannot complete because the bank changes the date. How does that impact this provision to make Stamp Duty more progressive?

I mean, at the end of they, the variation must go to the root of the policy considerations. Which is that you do not want parties to game the system and to avoid the progressive nature of the increase in Stamp Duty. So, perhaps, the Senior Minister of State can confirm, if the terms of variation do not go to the root of the avoidance of the Stamp Duty, can parties still proceed with the variation.

**Mr Chee Hong Tat:** Sir, I think the Member raised a valid point that in some situations, the variations to the OTPs are genuine and minor. So, for this kind of situations, as I mentioned in my main reply, they can submit an appeal to IRAS and IRAS will consider if there is justification to provide flexibility. IRAS has done so for the majority of appeal cases it received so far.

However, when we set the criteria, we have to cater to a range of different possibilities, including cases where people are deliberately trying to avoid paying higher BSD. So, I think we need to strike a balance.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Assoc Prof Jamus Lim.

**Assoc Prof Jamus Jerome Lim (Sengkang):** Just a quick clarification. I understand the motivation just like the hon Member, but it strikes me that why do we not just give a little bit more buffer on the front end? Perhaps some individuals will game the system? But rather than go through the exhaustive appeal route which in the long run, ultimately, would not matter if we give them an extra month. In the end, it eases some of these short-term appeal considerations, but in the long run, ultimately, it is still going to be progressive.

**Mr Chee Hong Tat:** Sir, I think what Assoc Prof Jamus Lim raised is different from what Mr Lim Biow Chuan raised. Mr Lim is not asking about the duration. We do provide some time in the conditions that the OTP is exercised on or before 7 March, or within the validity period, whichever is earlier. So, it is not that there is no grace period provided.

But what Mr Lim Biow Chuan asked is a slightly different thing. He is asking if there is a variation to the OTP that has been signed.

As I explained, we do need to cater to a range of scenarios and possibilities, so we state the conditions upfront, so we do allow appeals and IRAS has approved the majority of appeals it has received so far.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Lim Biow Chuan, perhaps a short supplementary question.

**Mr Lim Biow Chuan:** I am so grateful, Sir. I am still not very sure how it works. Supposing parties agree to complete on certain date, but the buyer cannot get his financing on time and ask for one extra month, so, what does he do? They have to write to IRAS – because they have already paid the stamp duty when they exercised option, but he cannot complete the transaction because he cannot get his funds on time, he then has to write to IRAS about that increase in stamp duty or can parties negotiate on their own? How does IRAS expect them to solve this?

**Mr Chee Hong Tat:** Sir, I think I have explained this several times. The appeal process is to consider the circumstances of each transaction case by case. I hope the Members, both Assoc Prof Jamus Lim and Mr Lim Biow Chuan understand why it is very difficult for us to spell out upfront what are all the detailed situations, because it is going to be case by case. But as I had given Mr Lim the assurance, if there are genuine cases and the changes are not major, they are minor changes, do surface to IRAS and IRAS will consider if there are justifications to provide flexibility.

#### **TOTAL VALUE OF FESTIVE GRANT FOR 2023 CONTRIBUTED BY LEE FOUNDATION AND DISBURSED TO COMCARE RECIPIENTS**

4 **Mr Pritam Singh** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development (a) what is the total value of the festive grant for 2023 contributed by the Lee Foundation that will be disbursed to ComCare recipients; (b) what are the qualifying criteria for receiving the grant; (c) how many recipients have benefitted from the grant; and (d) in the last five years, how many of such ad-hoc grants originating from private donors have been disbursed through the Ministry and what is their total value.

**The Minister for Social and Family Development (Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M):** Mr Speaker, the Lee Foundation provides a festive grant during Chinese New Year to persons who do not qualify for ComCare but were referred to them by the Social Service Offices (SSOs). In 2023, they disbursed about \$82,000 to about 680 of such persons.

The Hong Leong Foundation and Shaw Foundation also disburse CNY festive grants annually to ComCare Long-Term beneficiaries. They averaged about \$960,000 per year over the past five years.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Singh.

**Mr Pritam Singh (Aljunied):** Thank you, Deputy Speaker. Just one supplementary question for the Minister. The Minister shared that the Lee Foundation festive grant – which I came to know about because one of my residents received a letter and he did not know when the grant was going to be disbursed to him. I think I heard the Minister say \$82,000 and 680 recipients, and they received it because they applied for ComCare assistance but they did not qualify. So, am I right to say that only 680 people applied for ComCare and all of them got the festive grant?

**Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M:** For 2023, 680 of such persons who did not qualify for ComCare and they were referred to – all of them, yes, the 680.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Any more supplementary questions? None?

#### **TREND OF YOUTHS RADICALISING VIA GAMING, CHAT AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS**

5 **Mr Yip Hon Weng** asked the Minister for Home Affairs (a) what are the trends of youths radicalising via gaming, chat and social media platforms; and (b) what are the steps taken to strengthen the tracking and identification of extremist messaging and ideologies on such platforms.

**The Minister of State for Home Affairs (Assoc Prof Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim) (for the Minister for Home Affairs):** Sir, the number of self-radicalised youths has increased and they are getting younger. From 2007 to 2014, only one self-radicalised youth, aged 20, was detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA). Since 2015, there have been 11 self-radicalised youths aged between 15 and 20 who were detained or issued with Restriction Orders under the ISA. They were exposed to extremist and radical content through a variety of online platforms, including gaming, chat and social media platforms.

The Government has blocked access to some websites that perpetuate extremist messaging and ideologies. Separately, under the amended Broadcasting Act which took effect on 1 February 2023, the Info-communications Media Development Authority can direct social media services to disable access to content instructing or advocating terrorism or violence. As announced during the Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI)'s Committee of Supply debate this year, MCI will study further measures to strengthen online safety on other services, including gaming platforms and app stores.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) will also be introducing later this year, legislation to combat online criminal harms, which will cover content that incites terror-related activities.

But despite our best efforts, it is not possible to block all extremist content, given the vastness of the Internet. New extremist content and new sites are constantly popping up. Determined individuals will find ways to circumvent our blocking.

We have therefore been working with community partners, such as the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) and Inter-Agency Aftercare Group (ACG), on outreach efforts to strengthen the community's resilience to extremist ideologies.

The public, particularly family members and friends, also play an important role. They can seek help for someone close to them whom they are concerned has been radicalised, or report suspicious behaviour by calling the ISD Counter-Terrorism Centre hotline at 1800-262 6473; or 999; SMS to 7199; or using the "Report" function in the SGSecure app. The identity of the informer will be protected. Early reporting will allow the authorities to intervene quickly to avert a tragedy, including to the radicalised person. If the person is only in the early stages of radicalisation, he or she may simply be referred for counselling and may not need to be detained under the ISA.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Yip Hon Weng.

**Mr Yip Hon Weng (Yio Chu Kang):** I think the Minister of State for his response. Just a short supplementary question. What is MHA's overall engagement strategy to counter radicalisation especially for youths, for example, by engaging some of the stakeholders. Specifically, can the Ministry give further details of how it is working with families of these youths to prevent radicalisation.

**Assoc Prof Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim:** Sir, I thank the Member for the supplementary question. Indeed, MHA, specifically ISD, have been working with other Government agencies and community partners to reach out to different segments in the community, to raise public awareness of the threat of terrorism and online radicalisation. So, such upstream efforts are important, preventing radical ideology on taking root in our society. This is especially important for youths, who are impressionable and more easily influenced.

Like what I shared earlier, we work with community partners, such as RRG and ACG, where they reach out to youths and families to have sessions and forums. They also have visits to the RRG resource counselling centres, we did online engagement during COVID-19 and we also reached out to the youth and families via physical engagements after we have recovered from COVID-19. For example, the RRG arranged a visit to ISD Heritage Centre for 50 youths and we also engage youths of Indian Muslim Social Service Association. When doing these, we also asked the media, we invited the media and we usually have good media coverage to share the messages. We also engage in online engagement.

That is one and we also work with our Government agencies such as the Ministry of Education (MOE) – a key partner of our counterterrorism and counter-radicalisation efforts, where we look at how we collaborate with MOE schools and Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) on such efforts.

For example, in 2022, ISD organised at least 69 counterterrorism and counter-radicalisation outreach events, both online and in-person for more than 2,300 participants, including student leaders, educators and other school staff. We also engage the principals, educators and student leaders and we also work with school counsellors and student welfare officers – as of 2022, over 350 school counsellors and school student welfare officers.

At the end of the day, we will continue this journey. We have been engaging families, youths and as many people as we would like and are able to. Recently, we engaged a group of religious leaders and we are happy that they are more than willing to help us in this effort.

What is key is that, as I shared in the MHA's Committee of Supply, we will continue to enhance our operational capabilities and our outreach efforts. In fact, this Thursday, I am engaging another group of stakeholders as part of the counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation efforts. We hope that more Singaporeans can come onboard this journey and play a part. Most importantly, look out for your family members, look out for your children because today, our children spend a lot of time online and you never know what they come across because self-radicalisation is a process. For some, it can happen quickly, for others, it is a process and it is a journey, but we want their journey to be a positive one and a healthy one.

**RATIONALE FOR REQUIRING BOTH EMPLOYERS AND DOCTORS TO SUBMIT INCIDENT REPORT AFTER DIAGNOSIS OF OCCUPATIONAL DISEASE**



6 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for Manpower what is the rationale for requiring both employers and doctors to submit an incident report after an occupational disease has been diagnosed but requiring only the employer to report a death or injury arising from a work-related or workplace accident.

**The Senior Minister of State for Manpower (Mr Zaqy Mohamad) (for the Minister for Manpower):** Mr Speaker, under the Workplace Safety and Health Act, doctors are required to report to the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) patients with occupational diseases (ODs) caused by their work environment or activities related to their work, but not patients with workplace injuries. This is because unlike workplace injuries, a person diagnosed with an OD may have already moved on from the job that caused the OD or be working for a different employer, or may not be working at all, at the time of diagnosis. Requiring doctors to submit such incident reports ensures that these cases are not missed out, helps to expedite the work injury claims process and safeguards employees' interests, as insurers and MOM are informed in a timely manner.

On the other hand, there is no need for doctors to report workplace injuries as the link between the injury, the workplace accident and the employment relationship is generally more direct. Hence the responsibility is placed on employers and occupiers to report these injuries, so there are two reporting channels.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Louis Ng, a short supplementary question, please, because we have to end at about 11.00 am.

**Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang (Nee Soon):** Thank you, Sir. Can I just ask how is MOM making sure that there is no under-reporting of workplace injuries?

**Mr Zaqy Mohamad:** Well, I thank the Member. Firstly, I think on the regulation than 10(1)(a) and (c) of the Workplace Safety and Health (Incident Reporting) Regulations, employers and doctors who fail to report diagnosis, for OD, for example, can be fined \$500 for the first offence. They could also be jailed up to six months or receive a fine of up to \$10,000, if they do not report. So, the laws are there, mandating reporting of injuries as well as ODs.

And at the same time, I think the Member is also aware that when we amended Work Injury Compensation Act (WICA), for example, we have now closed some of these loopholes, where now you have to report from day one of your medical certificate (MC) as opposed to in the past you could – there were some doctors who gamed – some employees who gamed when they did not have to report short duration MCs for example. We have closed the loopholes as and when we find them and we would like to work with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), members of the public or even employees themselves, who could also report to us some of these cases so that we can better understand if there are any loopholes. But at this moment, it does not look as such because we have closed as many loopholes as possible and reporting is mandated from day one.

I assure the Member that the process is in place, but what is more important is that we want to keep the process lean so that it reduce the amount of duplication. The Member himself, also said in this House during the Committee of Supply that some of our healthcare workers already quite stretched. So, the last thing we want is to add administrative burden to them when we do not really need it.

11.00 am

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. End of Question Time. The Clerk will now proceed to read the Orders 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 [7th Allotted Day].

**[Deputy Speaker (Mr Christopher de Souza) in the Chair]**

## **COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY – HEAD X (MINISTRY OF CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND YOUTH)**

### **(A united and caring society)**

**The Chairman:** Head X, Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. Mr Sitoh Yih Pin.

11.01 am

*Building a Home for the Future*

**Mr Sitoh Yih Pin (Potong Pasir):** Chairman, I beg to move, "That the total sum to be allocated for Head X of the Estimates be reduced by \$100".

Sir, last year, at the start of the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY)'s Committee of Supply (COS), I had raised the issue of the need to safeguard and refresh the social compact that we have assiduously built in Singapore over the years.

I believe that our core values of building a caring and inclusive, multiracial, multicultural and multi-religious society remain sacrosanct among Singaporeans. However, it is undeniable that, as each new generation of Singaporeans come to the fore, we will have to continue to evolve as a society and refresh our social compact.



This House will recollect that, emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic last year, we observed a series of highly emotive discourse on issues of race, social economic status and nationality.

We know that views on issues of social importance are progressively becoming more diverse across a wider spectrum of Singaporeans. Our youths, who form the bedrock of our future, are decidedly more seized with such issues and are inclined to speak their minds, even on sensitive issues of race and religion.

Our demographics are also fast changing. The proliferation of inter-racial and intercultural marriages in Singapore will lead to a new generation of Singaporeans that will hold a fresh perspective on racial and cultural identity. An ageing population will require us to review our national policies to address the issues arising, but also to consider how Singaporean families fundamentally function as a foundational unit that is entrusted with bringing up the next generation and caring for our seniors.

Sir, even as we grapple with the changing trends and needs in our society, we must be mindful that discourses on highly emotive issues of social importance can serve to deepen fault lines in our social fabric, if not carefully calibrated. We must never take for granted the social harmony that was painstakingly built over successive generations of Singaporeans since our Independence.

Having said that, I remain optimistic, that discourse that is constructive and respectful can allow us to better reflect upon how we could refresh our social compact and strengthen our sense of national unity and identity. As we have shown to have done in our history, we can harness diversity as an agent for unity, rather than divisiveness.

Sir, the launch of the Forward Singapore exercise by Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong in June last year presents, in my view, an excellent platform where we can gather the diverse voices of Singaporeans, encourage a constructive exchange of views and work towards refreshing our social compact. The Unite Pillar led by Minister Edwin Tong, in particular, is well placed to tackle these issues head on.

I, therefore, invite the Minister to update us on his experience so far as a lead for the Unite Pillar in the Forward Singapore exercise, as well as to share with us MCCY's strategies to ensure that we can create a Singapore, where every citizen belong, is able to maintain strong bonds with one another and is able to contribute collectively to build a strong, inclusive and cohesive society in a country where all of us can proudly call our home.

Question proposed.

**The Chairman:** Mr Saktiandi Supaat. Please take your two cuts together.

*Expanding the Community's Contributions*

**Mr Saktiandi Supaat (Bishan-Toa Payoh):** Thank you. Mr Chairman, in Malay, please.

(*In Malay*): [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Our Malay/Muslim community, with the support of all Singaporeans, has become more successful. 8.5% of the Malay population have a monthly household income of \$15,000 or more in 2020, compared to 2.6% in 2010, and I am confident that figure will continue to rise.

We must therefore think of how we can contribute to the larger society. The Malay/Muslim community, like any other group in Singapore, does not exist in isolation.

(*In English*): Mr Chairman, in English. I have some suggestions on how the Malay/Muslim community can expand its contributions to the nation as it does better for itself.

First, we can enlarge the beneficiaries under the existing initiatives led by Malay/Muslim organisations like M<sup>3</sup>, by extending the mentorship programmes and uplifting workshops to other less-privileged Singaporeans, they could provide valuable inter-community touchpoints.

Second, the sharing of cultural heritage should not be limited to Racial Harmony Day and major festivals. Post-COVID-19, I look forward to the resumption of mosque open houses and other events at which Singaporeans can gain an understanding of our diverse cultural fabric.

We should also learn from the best practices of Muslim minority communities in other countries. Are there any takeaways from the International Conference on Communities of Success (ICCOS) held in September 2022?

How can we encourage individuals, organisations and our religious institutions to step forward, and play their part in fostering social harmony and in building a better Singapore? How can we share stories of successful Singaporean Malay/Muslims abroad even more? They carry our Singapore flag in other countries in various fields. Can we scour more globally those that have ventured abroad and have contributed to Singapore's Gross national product versus Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

*Malay/Muslim Professionals*

(*In Malay*): [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Statistics from 2010 to 2020 show that our Malay Singaporeans are able to secure better jobs and give their families a better standard of life today.

Just like how the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted lives and livelihoods, our exit from the pandemic will similarly bring about new economic uncertainties and challenges. China has just reopened its economy to the world earlier this year. Increased geopolitical tensions have worsened the uncertain outlook.

In the same way that the Government and self-help organisations such as the AMP had supported the Malay/Muslim community throughout the pandemic, in the form of skills upgrading and re-skilling opportunities, I am sure our Mala/Muslim professionals will not be left to navigate today's uncertain waters alone.

Can the Minister provide an update on the extent of the ongoing and upcoming global and domestic challenges, and how are we preparing the Malay/Muslim community for the possible opportunities? What are the plans to better support our Malay/Muslim professionals to ensure that they remain employable and can progress in their chosen careers?

I have a few suggestions.

First, as the world has re-opened, we should encourage our Malay/Muslim professionals and workers to be adaptable and experience new challenges. Perhaps the Ministry can look into the statistics of, and opportunities for, our Malay/Muslim professionals to go abroad for overseas secondments and training opportunities. Can we form partnerships with a few Temasek-linked companies to meet specific targets?

Second, perhaps we can think about how to further utilise the SkillsFuture Credit scheme between 2015 and 2020.

Finally, we can look at ways to further enlarge emerging and growth sectors and increase the number of professionals in those sectors. Thank you.

*Malay Community's Contribution to the Nation*

**Ms Mariam Jaafar (Sembawang):** Mr Chairman, in Malay please.

(*In Malay*): [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Who is the Malay Singaporean and what are his contributions to the nation? The truth is, the Malay community is a diverse community, with many talents. The Malay Singaporean is a CIO at the IMF. The Malay Singaporean is Singapore's favourite footballing son. The Malay Singaporean is a top trade negotiator. The Malay Singaporean is the Asian idol. The Malay Singaporean is a navy officer, an army officer, a police officer, an SCDF officer, a healthcare worker. The Malay Singaporean is the champion of the side hustle, from gifted photographers to thriving home based business that bring joy to customers.

To be sure, the Malay community faces challenges, and there are niggling issues including deep rooted prejudices that we still find troubling. But rather than crippling us, we have become a role model in managing challenges and diversity as a community and other communities learn and can learn a lot from us, whether it is in setting up self-help groups to improve education outcomes or bringing down drug abuse.

In an increasingly noisy and uncertain world, by practicing the values of our culture including humility, respect, moral and ethical living and family, we can continue to set an example. How do we best harness the talents of the Malay community and inspire and motivate ourselves to build a community of success, and to be recognized for our contributions to the nation?

*Progress of Malay/Muslim Community*

**Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap (Aljunied):** Mr Chairman, in Malay please.

(*In Malay*): [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Mr Chairman, I would like to seek clarification as well as share a suggestion on some matters related to the Malay-Muslim community. The first is about the Community Leaders Forum (CLF). The CLF was formed in October 2003.

The objective of the CLF is to provide a platform for Malay/Muslim social agencies to further strengthen and enhance the coordination and collaboration between these agencies so that the Malay/Muslim community can better benefit from their programs and initiatives.

I would like to ask the following questions about the CLF. First, what is the status of the CLF? Second, is the function of CLF still relevant after the establishment of M3? Third, what is the difference between these two platforms and whether, there is duplication between them?

The second point, Mr. Chairman, is about the Malay-Muslim Community Development Fund or MMCDF which was established in 1991 to assist Malay/Muslim organisations in their efforts to empower the community. The questions that I would like to ask the Minister is, first, when was the last review conducted for the MMCDF and when is the next review? Second, what is the amount of funds that distributed and also the number of organisations that received these funds in the past five years, that is, from 2018 to 2022?

Next, I would like to touch on efforts to help the Muslim community understand, embrace and deal with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) issues in Singapore.

At the beginning of 2022, PERGAS formed a special task force team for LGBT issues. Among the efforts held by PERGAS are dialogue sessions with Muslim individuals from the LGBT community and also provide guidance to the Muslim community in Singapore on facing and managing this issue. As I said in my Committee of Supply speech last year, I welcome PERGAS's initiative.

Mr Chairman, in November last year, this House passed an amendment bill to repeal section 377A. I would like to make a recommendation for MUIS to support as well as collaborate with PERGAS to enhance the effectiveness of their initiatives on the LGBT issue.

The fourth and last point is about the efforts on the part of the Minister and the ruling party Malay/Muslim MPs regarding the use of tudung for uniformed groups in the public service.

Mr Chairman, there have been several times when the tudung issue was raised in this House, the Minister in-charge of Muslim Affairs, either the current or the previous one, has said that such matters should be discussed in a closed session or behind closed doors. The last time this was said was two years ago during the 2021 Committee of Supply debates when it was recommended that nurses in the public health sector be given permission to don the tudung.

I would like to seek clarification from the Minister whether, even after the Government had allowed nurses in the public health sector to wear the tudung, are this often-mentioned closed door sessions still ongoing, perhaps discussing with the Government to consider the wearing of the tudung for other uniformed groups in both ministries of Home Affairs and Defence? If there is, how many sessions have been held and, if no, why? That is all, Mr Chairman.

11.15 am

*Developing Malay/Muslim Community Leaders*

**Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin (Ang Mo Kio):** *(In Malay)* [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Sir, Malay/Muslim organisations (MMOs) play a vital role in providing support for the community and are valuable Government partners.

Veteran MMO leaders have contributed a lot to the community's development. We are greatly indebted to their contributions. However, to ensure MMOs' continued relevance and success, leadership renewal must become a key focus area for any organisation.

One example of leadership renewal is the Tunas Bersama M<sup>3</sup> programme. This programme was established to nurture the next generation of MMO leaders, equipping them with the knowledge, skills and networks to lead the Malay/Muslim community and their organizations.

May I ask how can the Government enable the next generation of community leaders to make more impactful contributions to the community and country, including for example driving evidence-based interventions, equipping MMOs with relevant skills to ensure corporate governance and financial sustainability within MMOs?

How can the Government support the MMOs' planning so that their efforts and programmes continue to be relevant for this generation and the next?

How can MMOs play a greater role in nation and community building, and are there plans to support synergised efforts among MMOs as well as encourage collaboration with non-MMOs?

*Strengthening Foundation of Families*

**Mr Zhulkarnain Abdul Rahim (Chua Chu Kang):** *(In Malay)* [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Mr. Chairman, a strong and resilient family is a cornerstone in the development of highly confident individuals and children, and a successful society. Apart from the efforts and initiatives at the national level to help various groups in our community, including strengthening families and marriages, programs carried out by M<sup>3</sup> also complement the efforts within the Malay/Muslim community.

Presently, more than 100,000 individuals have participated in more than 250 programs organized by M<sup>3</sup> in 11 neighborhoods, involving around 700 volunteers. As the former chairman of M<sup>3</sup>@Towns, I have witnessed the development and approaches of M<sup>3</sup> which are now more extensive and has a greater impact on the families within our community who participated in M<sup>3</sup> programs and initiatives. Presently, each M<sup>3</sup>@ Town has its own characteristic and creates programs customized to the town's demographics. This was evident during the exhibition and sharing session at the recent M<sup>3</sup> Forum.

For example the initiatives at M<sup>3</sup>@Chua Chu Kang, are based on a strategy to build current and future leaders of families. This strategy is called Nakhoda Bahtera (Captain of the Ship), in which family leaders steers the future of their families in navigating the ocean of life containing waves of challenges. However, in order to build strong family leaders and resilient families, we need all hands on deck.

Can the Minister share the initiatives that can enable our partners and community organisations to better support married couples in building strong marriages and families?

**The Chairman:** Dr Shahira Abdullah, please take your three cuts together.

*Bersamamu Programme*

**Dr Shahira Abdullah (Nominated Member):** *(In Malay)* [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] The Bersamamu Programme is a great initiative by the Naib Kadis that aims to guide and support a newlywed couple for the first two years of marriage.

While the program has been successful in providing much-needed guidance and assistance to couples, I believe that there is a need for a female perspective to be included in the program. This can be particularly important in situations such as in conflicts where couples may feel more comfortable speaking to a woman or may have concerns related to women's issues.

Therefore, can I suggest having a female marriage counsellor in the partnership to provide a different perspective and set of experiences that can be valuable in helping couples navigate the challenges of marriage? Second cut.

*Wakaf Masyarakat*

*(In Malay):* [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Wakaf Masyarakat is a noble initiative which is a form of endowment that is dedicated to social and community projects. Can the Ministry explain how donors can be encouraged to donate to this fund?

Another concern is whether the establishment of Wakaf Masyarakat will increase competition and create donation fatigue or affect donation streams for other social service MMOs. It is imperative to strike a balance to ensure that other social service MMOs are not adversely affected. I do understand that a certain portion of the Wakaf funds is allocated to MMOs. However, how is the Ministry exploring ways to ensure that the Wakaf Masyarakat does not detract from other charitable efforts but instead complements them? Next cut.

#### *Differing Career Pathways for Asatizahs*

(In Malay): [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] As asatizahs shift to secular careers, can I ask the Ministry how we can encourage their continued contribution to the religious development of the community?

I would like to suggest building a network of asatizahs which could possibly be a scale up of the Asatizah Youth Network (AYN). This group can have regular meetings, conferences, or other events that bring them together and enable them to share their knowledge and experiences. It can provide mentorship opportunities and help asatizahs stay engaged with the community and give back through their knowledge and expertise. Asatizahs who have shifted to secular careers may be interested in mentoring younger members of the community who are pursuing religious education or careers. The network can also provide opportunities for asatizahs who have shifted to secular careers to teach or lead Islamic programs on a part time basis.

#### *Updates on International Conference on Communities of Success*

**Mr Zhulkarnain Abdul Rahim:** (In Malay) [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] History has taught us how many Muslim minority communities all over the world are not only able to adapt in non-Muslim countries but also enjoy success that makes their country proud and benefits its plural society in general. In fact, there is a specific jurisprudence in Islam to deal with the contemporary realities experienced by Muslim minority communities. Muslim minority communities in countries like Singapore face many unique challenges that differ from the Muslim majority communities.

Now with many ideologies that are more divisive, the challenges we face are becoming more critical and it is important that we address these issues together with all Muslim minority communities globally.

Thus, the International Conference on Communities of Success (ICCOS) held last year aims to enable sharing within a scientific framework for Muslim minority communities when facing the challenges of today. We need to continue this effort to learn from the experiences of other Muslim minority communities to drive and support the development of the Muslim Community of Success in Singapore.

Therefore, can the Minister provide an update on how MUIS plans to develop a body of religious knowledge in Singapore following the ICCOS Conference last year?

**The Chairman:** Dr Wan Rizal, please take your two cuts together.

#### *Nurturing Future Religious Leaders*

**Dr Wan Rizal (Jalan Besar):** (In Malay) [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Singapore is a multicultural and multireligious country, where people of different ethnicities and faith can coexist peacefully. Our asatizahs play a significant role in the Muslim community.

They are a key pillar who serve as guides to enable Malay/Muslims to practice our faith confidently while being integral members of the larger Singapore nation.

They provide contextualised religious guidance for our community and offer sound religious advice on contemporary issues. This was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where they navigated and rallied our community with calmness and compassion.

They provided much-needed support and guidance during an extremely challenging time. However, I believe, beyond the pandemic, our asatizah have the potential to significantly impact society as a whole. We have seen how the many mosques in Singapore, driven by our asatizah, work closely with the community at large. One example is Masjid Mohd Salleh. Recently, asatizah from the mosque has collaborated with Geylang Market Traders Association and Wisma Geylang to organize public motivational talks related to mental health.

Could the Minister share how our asatizah can make more meaningful contributions beyond the Muslim community to benefit the larger Singapore society?

#### *Progress of Project DIAN*

(In Malay) [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Sir, some segments of our community still need more assistance than others. One particular group is those who live in public rental flats. Project Dian@M<sup>3</sup> is an initiative launched in December 2021 to support Malay/Muslim families living in public rental flats across M<sup>3</sup>@Towns to achieve stability, self-reliance, and social mobility.

The initiative was launched in three public rental blocks, one each in M<sup>3</sup>@Bedok, M<sup>3</sup>@Geylang Serai, and M<sup>3</sup>@Jalan Besar. Currently, the pilot run covers only three rental blocks. At M<sup>3</sup>@Jalan Besar, I have seen the positive impact of well-organised and highly synergised efforts from the volunteers and the multi-agency task force.

I am encouraged when residents shared that they are getting support in terms of employment advice, children's education and they are working towards owning their own flats. I hope we can do more, but I also understand its challenges.

We may need to recruit more volunteers and at the same time ensure that inter-agency task force is not stretched until its operations on the ground becomes affected.



Nonetheless, I would like to ask the Minister, what is the outreach and progress for Project DIAN so far, and are there plans to further scale up the pilot run to include more blocks in other M<sup>3</sup>@Towns?

**The Chairman:** Mr Mohd Fahmi bin Aliman, please take your two cuts together.

*Update on DIAN Ambassadors Programme*

**Mr Mohd Fahmi Aliman (Marine Parade):** *(In Malay)* [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Sir, to support and encourage the spirit of volunteerism, it is important that incumbent efforts are coordinated between public agencies and community organisations.

Project DIAN is an M<sup>3</sup> initiative to showcase the community's Determination to support households in public rental flats through the integration of assets within the community and the instilling of values. The DIAN Ambassadors Program was launched to support families residing in rental flats by understanding their needs and aspirations to help uplift their situation.

How do Project DIAN Ambassadors support their target families? Are there resources that Project DIAN Ambassadors can tap on, so that they can better engage these families, and are these resources sufficient? If not, could more support be provided to ensure that our ambassadors can run this program better?

*Network of Community Partners through M<sup>3</sup>*

*(In Malay):* [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Sir, in building a Malay/Muslim Community of Success, it would be important for us to further strengthen our social compact. One way to do this would be for the Government to work closely together with the community partners.

Last year, at AMP 4th National Convention, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Lawrence Wong noted that Malay/Muslim organisations need to collaborate strongly with one another, as well as the Government, to address social issues that are increasingly becoming complex. With the formation of M<sup>3</sup>, it seeks to harness strengths from the three agencies, mobilise community assets & resources as well as collaborate with Government agencies & Malay/Muslim organisations to address the community's challenges, particularly in the area of last mile service delivery. The establishment of M<sup>3</sup> is step in the right direction as coordination and resources are amalgamated to better serve our community.

Therefore, how can we expand the network of community partners to better serve the needs of the M<sup>3</sup> beneficiaries?

**The Chairman:** Mr Sharael Taha, please take your two cuts together.

*Education for Our Young*

**Mr Sharael Taha (Pasir Ris-Punggol):** Thank you, Chairman. In Malay, please.

*(In Malay):* [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Sir, a good education remains fundamental to helping both individuals and families achieve success and social mobility. Therefore, it is important for the youth to have access to education. While the more affluent have access to supplementary classes like private tuition, the lower income families may not be able to afford it.

Hence, MENDAKI has played an important role in helping lower income Malay/Muslim children and youths in this regard. Good education begins from young and I am pleased that in 2018, MENDAKI launched the KelasMateMatika@CC to help parents guide their preschool children aged four to six years old on the basic numeracy concepts to prepare their children for primary school.

For school-going children, students have MENDAKI Tuition Scheme which provides affordable tuition for as low as \$10 a year for students who meet the eligibility criteria.

How have MENDAKI programmes such as KelasMateMatika and the MENDAKI Tuition Scheme been successful in enabling our children and youths to fulfil their educational potential?

*Youth Volunteerism*

*(In Malay):* [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] At the M<sup>3</sup> Forum held in February, we saw how the 11 M<sup>3</sup> towns rolled out many initiatives to uplift the Malay/Muslim community.

As each town has different demographics and is unique, M<sup>3</sup> volunteers have tweaked and designed programmes around the four Focus Areas to meet the needs of our community in the towns.

M<sup>3</sup>@Pasir Ris-Punggol for example, have launched 12 new programmes last year such as HashTech and Learning journey where youths were mentored by professionals in the technology and engineering industry to expose our youths so that they develop skills required in the growth industries.

M<sup>3</sup>@Pasir Ris-Punggol also launched BTS (Back To School) programme where kids from lower income families were provided with schooling essentials, textbook and connected to Mendaki Tuition Scheme. We will continue to monitor their academic performance over the year.

All these initiatives to uplift the community is only possible through the efforts of its volunteers, who come from all walks of life. Some of them have benefitted from MENDAKI initiatives and programmes, such as scholarships, bursaries, awards presented to students for their achievements.

How can we encourage more youth to join as volunteers and contribute back to the community?

*MENDAKI Educational Programmes for Youths*

**Ms Mariam Jaafar:** *(In Malay)* [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Sir, flagship programs such as the MENDAKI Tuition Scheme and KelasMatematika are now well known in the community, serving students across all levels from preschool to university. A hallmark of the MENDAKI programs has been the mobilization of volunteers and the community, to bring up the community. In other words, it instills the spirit of cooperation and sense of ownership in the effort to achieve progress for our Malay-Muslim community.

While progress is being made, we must keep pushing ourselves to achieve even more. How can we do more to reduce the barriers that prevent students and parents from enrolling in the programs and getting the most out of it. How can we further improve the quality and consistency of our community engagement? How can we do more to support our children even earlier in their educational journey? How can we continue to work with our community, and also cooperate with other communities to pool resources and do joint projects for our mutual benefit? How do we respond to the shifts that the education system will go through moving forward?

*Malay/Muslim Youth Mentoring Efforts*

**Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin:** *(In Malay)*: [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Sir, mentoring programmes provide emotional support and career guidance to mentees so that they can achieve their aspirations.

Last year I was quite happy when my younger sibling who was studying at university told me about signing up to be a peer mentor with MENDAKI. Mentors can help their mentees to overcome life challenges and give career guidance to assist them in their professional lives.

One youth mentoring programme is the #amPowered Programme. In 2022, there were plans for #amPowered to be gradually introduced in the ITE colleges and M<sup>3</sup>@Towns.

May I ask how has MENDAKI's overall mentoring approach, model and plans evolved over the past two years and what are the targets and KPIs which MENDAKI hopes to achieve through these programs?

What are the timeline and plans for the #amPowered Programme to be expanded to all M<sup>3</sup>@Towns and ITEs, to make it more accessible to the community?

**The Chairman:** Minister Masagos Zulkifli.

**The Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs (Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M):** Chairman, our Malay/Muslim community has played an integral part in our nation-building. Generations of community and religious leaders toiled alongside our fellow countrymen to build Singapore. It is this spirit of citizenry that has carried us far as a society, where everyone steps forward and contributes.

We strive to build a Community of Success based on "three Cs": Character, Competency and Citizenry. I shared how we strengthened our character and developed our competency in previous Committee of Supply debates. This year, I will share about the third "C", Citizenry.

Citizenry comes from a sense of belonging and responsibility to Singapore – our country and its people. It is about coming together to build a better future, being confident in our abilities to make positive changes and showing care for one another. By all and for all. Regardless of race, language or religion. By being active citizens, we become a vibrant and contributing community who uplift those around us, forging a stronger Singapore. Chairman, in Malay, please.

*(In Malay):* [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Our theme this year is "Contributing Citizens, Stronger Nation". It reflects our roles and obligations to one another as citizens of Singapore. This theme exemplifies the spirit of the Forward Singapore movement where the Government rallies Singaporeans to come together to strengthen our social compact.

A core pillar of our social compact is the role of the family. It is through the family that we learn how to take care and fulfil our obligations to one another. Hence, the family provides the foundation to nurture and develop a sincere sense of collective responsibility, one that binds us as our fellow citizens. This sense of collective responsibility drives us to be contributing members of the community and society. This, in turn, strengthens trust between one another.

During MSF's COS Debate, I spoke about the three "S" for all families – Stability, Self-Reliance, and Social Mobility. Within the span of just one generation, many Malay/Muslim families have been able to achieve these three Ss largely because we emphasised education. This is also because of the efforts of our community leaders, who had set up MENDAKI forty years ago. They understood the importance of education in uplifting our community. Today, the education levels in our community are higher. More families have been able to achieve stability, self-reliance and social mobility. In the journey towards success, our community does not leave behind our cultural and religious values. This is because MUIS continues to develop our asatizah's talents and strengthen our religious infrastructure to nurture our character.

I am proud of the success of our Malay/Muslim community, who are also actively contributing to Singapore. Let me share how we will continue building this strong sense of citizenry.

First, strengthening the foundation of the family.

Second, nurturing future religious and community leaders.

Third, expanding the community's contributions to the nation

We are committed to building stable, strong and resilient families. Mr Zhulkarnain asked about initiatives that support the building of strong marriages and families. As the saying goes, we need to go upstream if there's an issue downstream. The Bersamamu programme led by Minister of State Faishal has helped to strengthen the relationships of more than 20,500 couples. This is due to the strong guidance and support from our Kadis and Naib Kadis (Muslim marriage solemnisers). They undertook learning journeys to INSPIRASI Hubs (AMP and PPIS) and PPIS Vista Sakinah last year to gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by young couples and those who remarry. The lessons learnt helped our Kadi and Naib Kadi to provide proactive and effective support to couples.

Dr Shahira suggested including female perspectives in the Bersamamu programme. All religious leaders, including Kadi and Naib Kadi, are trained to provide guidance that addresses the different needs of brides and grooms. Should couples require specialised support from specialists, they are referred to other relevant agencies and services such as PPIS, AMP and Temasek Foundation Project ARIF. We acknowledge that women would also like specialised support from female religious teachers for some matters that they face. We will endeavour to provide this support services for them.

The delivery of the Bersamamu programme is further strengthened by the Marital First Responder Training Programme. This programme empowers members of the community to support couples with marital issues. More than 300 members from the Malay/Muslim community, comprising community and religious leaders as well as volunteers, have been trained to support couples and encourage them to seek professional help if required.

Mr Faisal Manap asked how we can support individuals struggling with issues of gender identity. In matters relating to religion and morality, we should refer to the Mufti and our asatizah. They have guided us to extend our kindness to one another, including to these individuals. Muis will continue to enhance the capabilities of asatizah to better support these individuals and their families with sensitivity. This is on top of the training for asatizah who serve in the education and counselling sectors so that they can provide effective support to these individuals and their families.

All these community efforts will further strengthen our national programmes that seek to support the building of strong families. Senior Minister of State Zaqy will elaborate how we can further contribute to society by developing our competencies.

The spirit of self-help and gotong-royong has always been deeply rooted in our community. As the Malay saying goes, "We carry the burden together regardless of its weight". This spirit of collaboration was the driving force that established the M<sup>3</sup> network and various Malay/Muslim organisation (MMOs). The MMOs provide programmes that not only benefit the Malay/Muslim community, but also the broader society. Minister Maliki will elaborate on the contributions of our MMOs in his speech.

To empower our MMOs, among others, we must continue to support and strengthen their leadership core. Ms Nadia asked about efforts to develop our future community leaders. The "Tunas Bersama M<sup>3</sup>" programme grooms future MMO leaders and equips them with critical skills. This includes building networks and synergy with others, which will help the community more effectively and systematically. I have personally heard the ideas from these leaders which are not only refreshing, but also emphasise synergy in collaboration.

Our religious leaders also play an important role in guiding the community. Last September, MUIS organised the International Conference on Communities of Success (ICCOS) to empower not only Muslims in Singapore, but also Muslims in other minority communities, to lead their lives as good Muslims and good citizens in a plural society. ICCOS offers a construct of how we, as a minority Muslim community, can contribute to the peace and prosperity of our nation. To Mr. Zhulkarnain's and Mr. Saktiandi's queries, MUIS is developing a body of religious knowledge to empower our asatizah to guide the community confidently and contribute to the nation.

Our efforts to develop this body of religious knowledge has attracted interest from religious institutions overseas. During my recent visit to Egypt, the Al-Azhar University and Egypt's Dar Al-Ifta expressed their support to Singapore's efforts. They also expressed interest to work with MUIS to develop this body of knowledge. MUIS had set up the Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS) to expand this body of religious knowledge for minority Muslims. One of the pioneer research fellows of the RPCS is Ustaz Fathurrahman Dawoed. He studied the factors that contributed to an observed over-reliance on halal certification. His research findings help our asatizah to guide the community to preserve our common spaces. This will facilitate social mixing and forge trust between different religious groups, while upholding our religious principles.

MUIS will provide greater support to the RPCS research fellows to develop Singapore's future religious leaders and thinkers. They will be given training opportunities in research methodologies and data visualisation, along with mentorship with esteemed local and international experts. Muis will also establish a digital repository later this year. It will contain resources on Islamic and social sciences covering emerging issues related to Governance, Society, Science and Technology. This repository will help our asatizah provide religious guidance with conviction and able to address contemporary issues in society.

On matters related to religion, Mr Faisal Manap asked for an update on the wearing of the tudung in the uniformed services. As Prime Minister had explained in his National Day Rally speech in 2021, the SAF, Home Team and other uniformed services will remain status quo. These officers wield armed force and enforce the laws of Singapore, and are secular arms of the State. Therefore, they must always be seen to be fair and impartial and performing their duty without fear or favour. This is especially important when responding to incidents that have racial or religious undertones.



Dr Shahira asked how our madrasah graduates can continue serving as asatizah and contribute to the religious development of the community. There are currently over 600 undergraduates pursuing degrees in Islamic Studies and related programmes overseas. After undergoing the Postgraduate Certificate in Islam in Contemporary Societies (PCICS) programme and certified under the Asatizah Recognition Scheme (ARS), they can teach or work at religious institutions such as MUIS, Syariah Court, madrasah and mosques. MUIS is also studying how to connect these graduates to the relevant institutions. To attract asatizah to continue serving in the Muslim religious sector, MUIS is developing the Common Salary Guidelines to review the salaries of asatizah, and ensure competitive remuneration that is commensurate with their qualification and job functions. MUIS will share more details later this year.

To Dr Shahira's query on the Singapore Community Wakaf (WMS), the WMS will support the long-term needs of the Muslim community, including our religious institutions and the development of our asatizah. The WMS will garner funds mainly from legacy planning and planned giving by the community, hence does not compete with MMOs who mainly fundraise for ad-hoc donations.

Mr Chairman, in English please.

*(In English):* Dr Wan Rizal asked how our religious leaders can extend their contributions to benefit wider society. Besides guiding the community, they play an important role in providing solutions to current issues in society and rallying the community for the common good. Their efforts have been recognised internationally.

The Fatwa Committee led by the Mufti Dr Nazirudin was conferred the Al-Qarafi Award last year by the General Secretariat for Fatwa Authorities Worldwide from Dar Al-Ifta, the prestigious religious authority in Egypt. This was in recognition of the Mufti and the Fatwa Committee's strong leadership and outstanding contributions in guiding the community on various contemporary issues during the pandemic. The emphasis on peaceful co-existence in their religious guidance was also recognised by international religious scholars.

Thus far, I have shared how we build strong families and strong leaders. These two pillars strengthen each other and provide an enabling environment for our community to thrive and contribute to the nation. In this regard, I agree with Mr Saktiandi and Ms Mariam that we must not only thrive as a community, but actively give back to the larger society. Many professional bodies, such as lawyers, doctors and educators, are helping to uplift the community.

Captain Jaffar Hassan and his team of Malay/Muslim pilots from the Airline Pilots' Association Singapore are the latest group of professionals who have stepped forward to contribute. They partnered MENDAKI to guide our Malay/Muslim students on career pathways in the aviation industry and have since extended their programme to Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA) to benefit other communities.

Many Malay/Muslims, having done well for themselves, are also contributing at the national level. For example, Dr Nadjad Abdul Rahim is an operations and product development director of Cellbae Private Limited, whose team developed Singapore's first antigen rapid test for COVID-19. He also mentors youths pursuing careers in science and conducts outreach to vulnerable families.

Ustazah Kalthom Muhammad Isa is the Registrar of Muslim Converts Association and contributes to the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) by providing counselling to affected family members of those detained under the Internal Security Act. Her efforts help to address our national concern of combatting extremism.

Mr Abu Bakar Mohd Nor is Chairman of M Kapital Holdings. He was previously Chairman of M<sup>3</sup>@Tampines but has since widened his contributions by serving at the national level as Chairman of the Tampines Central Citizen Consultative Committee.

These individuals do not just inspire us with their success, but also their deep commitment to uplifting others. Our community's contributions across various sectors in society, is something we should celebrate and be proud of.

Indeed, we are a community that live by the ethos of Rahmatan Lil Alamin, or "Blessings to All", actively seeking to build bridges to reach out to those beyond our own. During Ramadan last year, the Rahmatan Lil Alamin Foundation (RLAF) raised more than \$180,000 to support close to 7,000 disadvantaged families from different ethnic and religious groups. They worked with various partners, such as temples, churches, mosques and the Singapore Association for the Visually Handicapped to pack and distribute essential items for families. RLAF not only reached out to the vulnerable but cultivated stronger bonds among Singaporeans.

Mr Chairman, the Malay/Muslim community has made significant strides over the decades, achieving stability, self-reliance and social mobility. Many have become successful and progressed in life. I encourage them to give back to the community and keep the spirit of care and citizenry. Through M<sup>3</sup>, professionals and volunteers from all walks of lives lend their expertise and skills to help the community. While we pursue our aspirations, let us remain connected with those around us, like our neighbours and the wider community.

All of us have a role to play in uplifting the community. It is when each of us become active citizens that we become a community where we are each other's keeper – looking out for one another, extending a helping hand. So, I urge everyone to step forward to uplift others. We can only build a stronger Singapore, together. *[Applause.]*

**The Chairman:** Minister Dr Mohamad Maliki Osman.

**The Minister, Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for Education and Foreign Affairs (Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman):** Mr Chairman, as our Malay/Muslim community continues to progress forward, we strive to capitalise our assets and facilitate active citizenry within the community, to look beyond our own needs and contribute to greater causes.

To do this, we will nurture a strong ecosystem of giving back in the Malay/Muslim community.

First, we will improve coordination across public agencies and community organisations. Second, we will develop a strong volunteer corps with the right knowledge and skillset. And third, we will build a strong network of community partners for broader and deeper impact in the community. Mr Chairman, in Malay, please.

(In Malay): [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Our community is united in supporting the vulnerable group and are constantly finding better ways to uplift them. Often times these families face complex issues that require support from many different government and non-Government agencies. We will improve coordination across public agencies and community organisations, to provide more integrated wrap-around support for this vulnerable group.

For instance, Project DIAN@M<sup>3</sup>. We launched Project Dian in December 2021 to strengthen support for Malay/Muslim families who stay in HDB rental flats. Through Project DIAN, we focus on three groups of families who stay in HDB rental flats. First, the elderly who live alone; second, middle-aged parents with adult children, or multi-generational families; and third, and young families with young children.

The third group of young families is our key priority. They have an average of three children or more, with the mean age of the oldest and youngest children at 11 and four years old respectively. Some even have children who are even younger. During our house visits, we further observed that some children demonstrate developmental delays. Some also, did not attend preschool or missed school regularly.

To provide more targeted assistance to this group, we launched the DIAN Ambassador programme last October, to provide home-based support to Project DIAN families with children between 3 and 6 years old, over a six-month period. Mr Fahmi asked how the DIAN Ambassadors support the target families and are equipped to engage this group. The DIAN Ambassadors will visit the families fortnightly to read with the child and engage them in activities that allows the child to play while learning which assists in the child's cognitive and social skills development. The DIAN Ambassadors will also involve the young parents, to empower them to support their children in early childhood education.

We work closely with the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) to plan the curriculum and educational materials for the children, as well as to implement a robust programme evaluation approach. To measure the progress of each family, SUSS systematically evaluates the case notes recorded by our DIAN Ambassadors at every visit, and will conduct interviews with family members to better understand their situation. Additionally, KidSTART helps to train our DIAN Ambassadors on early childhood development to enable them to effectively interact with these children and provide appropriate intervention. Since the DIAN Ambassador programme was piloted, 30 volunteers have been trained and we look forward to developing subsequent batches of volunteers.

Dr Wan Rizal asked for an update on Project DIAN. I am happy to share that Project DIAN has reached out to over 70% of Malay households in its pilot phase, and has identified young families that could be channelled to our DIAN Ambassadors programme. However, the journey for our DIAN ambassadors has not been easy. Some face challenges in fostering trust with the families. Nevertheless, they persevere and give their best effort for the young children in these families. I thank all our ambassadors for their passion and dedication.

Having said that, Chairman, we do have some early success and are confident that this programme brings about tangible impact on the lives of some of these Project DIAN families. For example, through Project DIAN, Siti (not her real name), a housewife, was referred to the e2i and NTUC to improve her employment opportunity and support her family. Siti's youngest son, aged six, benefited from our DIAN Ambassador programme through the developmental intervention. Her child has shown progress and interest in learning new things. Siti's 8-year-old daughter also receives weekly tuition coordinated by the M<sup>3</sup> Engagement Coordination Office (M<sup>3</sup> ECO) and this 8-year old is now much more focused and confident in her schoolwork.

Given the early success of Project DIAN, we will expand the programme to three more M<sup>3</sup>@Towns, that is, M<sup>3</sup>@Chua Chu Kang, M<sup>3</sup>@Jurong and M<sup>3</sup>@Tampines. Through the expansion of Project DIAN, over 500 more Malay/Muslim public rental household will be engaged, up from approximately 250 households today.

Chairman, the volunteers' passion is the bedrock of an active and vibrant community. To support the growth of our M<sup>3</sup> programmes, such as Project DIAN, we will not only increase our pool of volunteers, but also ensure that each volunteer is well-supported with the knowledge and skills so that they can contribute effectively.

M<sup>3</sup> ECO was set up for this very purpose. M<sup>3</sup> ECO has put in place a robust Volunteers' Capability Building Framework, to equip M<sup>3</sup> volunteers with the right skillsets to engage its target group of families. Since its inception in September 2021, over 150 volunteers have gone through the training programmes. They became more confident in engaging and building rapport with the residents. They provide useful information to these families based on their needs. Besides basic skills training, we also organise specialised trainings with certain Government agencies, where our volunteers are equipped with specific knowledge about Government policies and schemes that could benefit the families. For example, training programmes conducted by HDB focus on the Government's housing schemes which the volunteers could share with these families.

I am heartened that the number of volunteers across the 11 M<sup>3</sup>@Towns have increased from 700 to 800 this year, and they have reached out to close to 7,000 Malay/Muslim households across those towns. Our volunteers come from all walks of life, each bringing their unique experience and expertise to serve those in need. We hope they will continue to be an inspiration to many more to step forward and join us in these programmes.

Mr Chairman, in English please.

12.00 pm

*(In English):* Mr Chairman, for the impact on our community to be further broadened and deepened, it is critical that we expand and strengthen the network of community partners that give back. Mr Mohd Fahmi Aliman and Ms Nadia Samdin asked how we broaden our web of partners, including supporting synergies among existing organisations, as well as with new groups.

Today, our network of established Malay/Muslim Organisations (MMOs) and Indian/Muslim Organisations (IMOs) support many vulnerable segments of the community and we thank them for all their efforts. They play an important role of coralling resources and implementing programmes to meet the diverse needs of our community and fellow Singaporeans.

To Ms Nadia Samdin's question, beyond the individual contributions that each MMO and IMO makes, they can play a greater role in community building through collaborative partnerships. For instance, last December, the Singapore Muslim Women's Association, or PPIS, collaborated with the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday Memorial Scholarship Fund Board (LBKM) to launch a new postgraduate scholarship to support women in achieving their aspirations. The scholarship is open to women pursuing further studies in STEM, community work and gerontology, among other relevant options. The \$15,000 scholarship is co-funded by the organisations and will be given to one recipient a year for 10 years, starting this year. This collaboration is an example of community efforts to grow more female role models within the community and we do encourage many more MMOs and IMOs to come together in partnership to offer more scholarships and programmes for the community.

Beyond existing community organisations, we must also cultivate new partners to harness their influence and capabilities. This is why the other Malay/Muslim leaders and I have been actively engaging different groups to listen to their views and share avenues within the M<sup>3</sup> framework where they can contribute. Last year, we engaged close to 30 different groups, including youth organisations, social service agencies, union leaders and groups from different occupations.

I met close to 30 financial advisors to discuss how the Government can partner the community of financial advisers to improve the community's financial literacy. I was very heartened that many of them were keen to share their knowledge with residents on the ground and we invited them to conduct financial literacy talks at our M<sup>3</sup> Towns. Similarly, the volunteer lawyers under M<sup>3</sup> organised legal sharing sessions for residents and guide them in applying for a Lasting Power of Attorney. On the medical front, the doctors and healthcare professionals from the community also stepped forward. For example, Dr Fadzil Hamzah works closely with M<sup>3</sup>@Tampines and asatizahs at Ghufuran Mosque to conduct talks on prenatal health.

Such collaborative partnerships between the Government and various community nodes often have a multiplier effect on the community. To strengthen and deepen synergy, we actively look into creating platforms to share ideas and strengthen ties across our network of partners. This is why we started the M<sup>3</sup> Forum – to serve as a platform for M<sup>3</sup> partners and volunteers to come together to take stock and reflect on past work done, while forging new insights and partnerships for the road ahead.

Last month, our second M<sup>3</sup> Forum saw over 400 participants from more than 25 public agencies and community organisations, of which, 15 were new partners borne out of fresh collaborations over the years. For example, through this year's M<sup>3</sup> Forum, the Malay Youth Literary Association (4PM) and M<sup>3</sup>@Jalan Besar are coming together to promote youth empowerment, by providing youths with resources for personal and professional growth. I urge more Muslim community groups to come forward to be part of the M<sup>3</sup> family to reinforce a network of care for our community.

Mr Chairman, I have shared our efforts in nurturing a culture of active citizenry within the Malay/Muslim community. However, this cannot be achieved overnight, nor by the Government's efforts alone. Building a contributing community requires close partnerships between volunteers, public agencies and community organisations. And, at the heart of it, the dedication and passion of this coalition of partners towards a common goal of creating a better future for our fellow Singaporeans.

**The Chairman:** Senior Minister of State Zaqu Mohamad.

**The Senior Minister of State for Defence and Manpower (Mr Zaqu Mohamad):** Mr Chairman, our Malay community can be proud of the significant progress that we have made over the years. As more achieve success, we must continue mobilising and rallying one another to contribute back, inspire others and help those in need. With this spirit of togetherness, we can overcome challenges, achieve our aspirations and lead meaningful lives. To empower a capable and contributing community, we will provide a strong educational foundation for our young; nurture a strong community spirit through youth volunteerism and mentoring; and help Malay/Muslim professionals fulfil their potential and enable them to inspire others to pursue their dreams. Chairman, in Malay please.

*(In Malay):* [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Education remains a cornerstone for success as it opens doors to opportunities that help us reach our aspirations. MENDAKI will help our children and youth fulfil their potential by regularly improving our education and developmental programmes. Mr Sharael Taha and Ms Mariam Jaafar asked about the effectiveness of MENDAKI's programmes.

A key programme run by MENDAKI under the auspices of M<sup>3</sup> is KelasMateMatika or KMM.

This programme has supported close to 4,000 children, aged four to six, since 2018. It also builds parents' confidence in assisting their children in Mathematics. In the last three years, about eight in 10 students who joined KMM were prepared for Primary 1 Mathematics and did not need to enroll in the Learning Support Programme for Mathematics (LSM). This is encouraging because a joint study by MENDAKI

and Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) showed that a strong educational foundation in Primary 1 has a long-lasting impact and correlates to how well our students do at PSLE.

Besides early exposure to Math, KMM students will join specially curated coding camps and learning journeys to inculcate Mathematics into their everyday lives.

KMM classes are conducted both physically and online to make them more assessable to children and their parents. This year, we are targeting to enrol 2,500 students into the programme. Special sessions will be organised at targeted preschool centres including all 15 mosque-based kindergartens.

Another programme that has become synonymous to MENDAKI's academic efforts is the MENDAKI Tuition Scheme or MTS.

Last year, MTS supported more than 7,600 students across Singapore. I am happy to update that we have launched the 100th MTS centre at Greendale Primary School last February. Since last year, we have also reduced the MTS fees to just \$10 per year from \$210 previously. With the opening of MTS centres in the neighbourhood and more affordable fees, I hope more will join and benefit from the programme.

Besides academic achievements, it is important for our youth to have a good social support system. Besides their families, mentors can guide and help our youth expand their world view. As they become more aware of available education and career pathways, we hope that they will set higher goals and work hard towards achieving their aspirations.

In my COS speech last year, I announced that the #amPowered mentoring programme will be launched in all Institutes of Technical Education (ITEs) and M<sup>3</sup> towns progressively. To Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin's query, the #amPowered programme are currently available at the three ITE Colleges and across three M<sup>3</sup> towns in Jurong, Chua Chu Kang and Marsiling-Yew Tee.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we were forced to shift our mentoring sessions online. This made it challenging for our youth to build strong connections with their mentors. Fortunately, from this year, the mentoring sessions can be conducted physically. We have also infused experiential learning and community building activities into our mentoring programme so that our youth can be exposed to more educational and career opportunities and be more cognisant of current issues.

Throughout this year, MENDAKI will organise at least one youth mentoring programme in each M<sup>3</sup> town. So, all these will be provided. This will make it easier for our youths to sign up for the programme, no matter where they reside in. MENDAKI is currently evaluating our mentoring programmes to understand how far our youth have benefited from them.

Through these education and mentoring programmes, we hope our youth will excel in school and build strong foundations and network to set themselves for greater achievements in the future.

Mr Chairman, in English please.

12.15 pm

*(In English):* Uplifting a community requires each of us to play a part. At the centre of our education and mentoring programmes is a strong, dedicated team of volunteers who understand the needs of the community. In the past three years, more than 1,000 volunteers were deployed across MENDAKI programmes to engage beneficiaries at different life stages. Therefore, our volunteers need to be equipped with the necessary skillsets and expertise to engage the beneficiaries effectively. One of our volunteers is Ms Nur Alwany.

Ms Alwany was a recipient of the Tertiary Tuition Fees Subsidy (TTFS) when she undertook her studies in polytechnic and then the university. She wanted to give back and first volunteered with MENDAKI in 2016 for the KidsRead programme and, subsequently, with KMM.

As a KMM facilitator, Ms Alwany builds her students' interest and capability in basic numeracy through fun and engaging ways. She also encourages her students to actively participate in her class to build their self-confidence.

For her dedication, MENDAKI encouraged Ms Alwany to attend a family conference by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) last year. Through the conference, Ms Alwany gained better insights into the needs of her students and was able to apply the lessons she learnt to her role as a KMM facilitator.

I have met many like Ms Alwany, who had benefited from MENDAKI's programmes, and now feels a sense of duty to help others. I am heartened by their generosity and spirit of gotong-royong. This virtuous cycle of support will be the engine of our community's progress.

Mr Sharael Taha asked how we can encourage more youths to come forward as volunteers. Last year, as we celebrated the achievements of our students, we made a call for them to step up and make positive contributions to the community. MENDAKI has established the YOUth@M3 platform to engage TTFS and Anugerah recipients at the respective M3 Towns to encourage them to befriend and help their peers. I am heartened that over 130 youths have so far indicated their interest to be volunteers across our M3 towns.

We will continue to support the passion and energy of our youths to make positive changes they want to see within their community. It is through these volunteering opportunities that our youths develop skills, discover interests, build relationships and guide others to success.

While we create strong foundations for our young, we must also focus on supporting our Malay/Muslim workforce. As a community, we must continue supporting one another to improve employment and upskilling opportunities so that more can have good jobs and achieve their career goals.

I thank Mr Saktiandi Supaat for his suggestions and would like to update him that we have strengthened the partnerships across the M3 network and the Malay/Muslim Organisations (MMO) to support our workers. We established our employability networks involving agencies, such as NTUC e2i, NTUC Learning Hub, Workforce Singapore (WSG) and SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG), to better assist our Malay/Muslim workers with their employment needs, and this covers from training to upskilling to landing job placements. Since establishing this referral process, we have reached out to close to 2,000 Malay/Muslim workers to advise and guide them on their careers.

MENDAKI has formed the Professional Networks programme for Malay/Muslim professionals to know others in their field, exchange ideas and help younger workers entering growing industries. Last year, MENDAKI connected with more than 400 Malay/Muslim professionals in the care, green and digital sectors.

This year, MENDAKI plans to expand its Professional Networks to include other in-demand industries, such as finance, sustainability and engineering. This will create more opportunities to connect our youths with professionals who can inspire and guide them to pursue a wide range of career pathways. I would like to encourage early- and mid-career professionals in these sectors to join our efforts to build this community network of success.

MENDAKI also shares best practices with other MMOs through the Community Leaders' Forum (CLF) to help them deliver more effective programmes. Mr Faisal Manap asked for an update on the CLF and the Malay/Muslim Community Development Fund (MMCDF).

The CLF serves as a platform to ensure efficient and effective management of resources by the various MMOs to avoid duplication of programmes and services. In 2022, more than 170 participants attended sharing sessions on programme evaluation, volunteer management and governance. This provided an opportunity for CLF partners to come together to contribute to the learning and development of best practices.

Since 2013, the MMCDF has been expanded to support project implementation and organisational development efforts of our MMOs. Through the MMCDF, CLF provides funding support for our MMOs to develop and implement programmes that uplift the community.

To the Member's question, our last review was in 2021, and, last year, we disbursed \$900,000 in support of 47 such community projects. One such project supported by CLF was AMP's Micro Business Programme. The programme empowers individuals from less-privileged households by equipping them with trade and business skills to start or enhance their home-based business as an additional source of income. Beyond projects, MMCDF also supports initiatives to groom the next generation of leaders of our MMOs through the Tunas Bersama M3 programme. This is our way to build capacity because these are leaders who will be at the helm of the MMOs in charting the community's way forward in the near future.

MENDAKI will continue to work with the Government, fellow Malay/Muslim organisations, sector leaders and employees to ramp up efforts to empower the community, whether through M3 or through CLF, to gain good employment and, together, support all our community members who are in need.

Mr Chairman, Minister Masagos, Minister Maliki and I have spoken on the theme of Contributing Citizens, Stronger Nation, and how we intend to strengthen the foundation of the family, nurture future religious and community leaders, and expand the community's contributions to the nation.

As new challenges emerge, we must continue to build up and leverage our community support, knowledge and resources to become a Community of Success. As the saying goes, alone we can do so little, together we can do so much more. I am confident that our Malay/Muslim community will continue to forge forward as one and contribute towards the prosperity of the nation.

**The Chairman:** We will take clarifications on this topic now – about 10 to 15 minutes of clarification time – because the other MCCY political office holders (POHs) also have to respond to the cuts. So, could I invite Members, if there are any clarifications? Mr Zhulkarnain Abdul Rahim.

**Mr Zhulkarnain Abdul Rahim:** Thank you, Chairman. Thank you, Minister. I have two questions.

One, on the International Conference on Communities of Success (ICCOS). Moving forward, we also need to look at the online spaces, be it social media or online gaming platforms, which are the new frontier in the jostle for influence and ideologies. So, perhaps MUIS and its foreign counterparts can consider strategies to occupy this space and perhaps have a permanent ICCOS online platform for this.

Second, on strengthening the foundation of families, I thank the Minister for the comprehensive reply. Lately, we read about a family violence case against a young child. Family units are complex. There are blended families – single parents, unwed mothers, grandparents or elder siblings – playing the parenting role. Are there any focus areas, perhaps consolidated focus areas, on this group of our community so that we do not forget them, perhaps focusing on parenting skills and working together with organisations like PPIS, AMP or BAPA?

**Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M:** Thank you. On ICCOS, I certainly agree. If we look at the population of Muslims living as minorities, their number is about 400 million. Many of them live in similar conditions like ourselves – as minorities in secular, progressive countries and protected by law, bound by the Constitution. This is one area where we can find synergy and work with similar communities. In fact, in the

last ICCOS conference, many of them applauded our initiative to start the conversation going, including religious teachers. Therefore, one of the areas, this is a real concern for others, too, the online space, we certainly would develop that, specifically for Muslim minority communities.

Secondly, on families, as I mentioned in my Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) speech, we want to build fundamentally strong families and, therefore, we have to support the whole journey from the time even before they get married, to the time they have children and the time they grow up. And the Families for Life Council (FFL) is on the ground and going to expand national programmes, and I hope that whatever background we come from – from whatever communities – we tap on these national initiatives. At the same time, we will support those that have special needs, whether it is about family violence or relationship issues, FAM@FSC or Strengthening Families Programme@Family Service Centre, will provide them.

And then at the third layer, we also want and have been engaging Malay/Muslim organisations to provide culturally-nuanced and even religiously effective ways of addressing the issues, in addition to those that are given at the national level.

12.30 pm

**The Chairman:** Ms Nadia Samdin.

**Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin:** Thank you, Chair. Senior Minister of State Zaqq Mohamad earlier mentioned that the #amPowered programme will be progressively rolled out across all the ITEs and M<sup>3</sup>@Towns. May I ask if there are plans to involve companies in the private sector to partner the #amPowered programme to expose our youths to jobs in growth sectors like tech and finance, as well as entrepreneurship and other professional roles, please.

**Mr Zaqq Mohamad:** Sir, I thank the Member for her question. Certainly, we are always on the lookout for partners to help us expand the breadth and width of our programmes, especially to help our young be exposed to what is out there in the market so that they have some sense of what is needed, guided to pursue such careers, as well as being able to see the companies in action.

Last month, we announced our first private sector mentorship collaboration with MSD Pharma, some of you may know them as Merck, under the #amPowered@ITE programme. MSD Pharma is one of the biggest pharmaceutical companies in Singapore and rated one of the best employers in the country since 2020. Through these programmes, our ITE students will receive guidance on how they can prepare themselves and be given a chance at maybe interning or visiting some of their factories or manufacturing plants.

Beyond ITE, last year we also announced the GIC MENDAKI scholarships, for example, even partnership with MiRXES so that we can have meaningful careers in finance and biotech, for example, as areas in which we want our Malay/Muslim kids to also pursue.

Moving forward, we look forward to more partnerships where we can expose our kids through various platforms. If any of you know of anyone who is interested, you can always refer corporates and partners to us, especially entrepreneurs and even SMEs to give our kids a chance to be exposed. So, yes, this is one way in which we want our kids to fulfil their potential.

**The Chairman:** Mr Sharael Taha.

**Mr Sharael Taha:** I would like to thank Senior Minister of State Zaqq Mohamad for sharing on the GIC scholarships. Is MENDAKI looking at more scholarships with the private sector, in order to create more stronger mentorship programmes for our Malay/Muslim youths?

**Mr Zaqq Mohamad:** The short answer is yes, we take what we can get. But I hope that we can certainly garner more who are interested to help uplift members of the community. And especially those that can give them wide range of exposures too, including internships, career guidance. I like the Merck one, because they are also committed to having professionals, up to 100 staff, who will come down and coach our ITE kids.

These are ways in which corporates can give back and I hope that we can get more on board.

We also got entrepreneurs too, like, Ismail Gafoor, who has also put in funds to support our young kids who need additional coaching in Maths, for example. So, there are ways in which corporates, large and small, who are doing their part to help uplift the community.

**The Chairman:** Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap. Did you put up your hand? You do not have a clarification? No? Mr Saktiandi Supaat.

**Mr Saktiandi Supaat:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. I have two clarification questions. One to Minister, with regard to the gedung-gedung ilmu, the repository for information resource for the asatizahs. I think it is a wonderful initiative and programme to step up our asatizahs.

Can Minister share a bit more about how we can extend it even further, beyond the subject matter and also beyond this year into next year? And related to that, what does it mean for the asatizahs' wages going forward? Does it help enhance their professionalism and does it also encourage more young people to go into that area as well, moving forward?

My second question is with regard to what Minister mentioned just now, the example of professionals like Malay/Muslim pilots coming forward to help as a body. Can Minister share a bit more on the efforts to gather more professional groups to help the community? And like he mentioned, helping even SINDA, going forward as well. He shared individuals and those are mostly locals, but the other element is also scouring more for overseas Malay/Muslims who have done very well abroad, brought Singapore's brand name to greater heights and —



**The Chairman:** Mr Saktiandi, could I ask you to ask your clarifications. Thank you, Mr Saktiandi. Minister Masagos.

**Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M:** Thank you, Chairman. The body of knowledge on Muslim communities, or those living as minorities, is very relevant to us, and also for societies that live in similar circumstances. When I broached this idea with the Mufti of Egypt, the scholars from Morocco, the vice dean of al-Qarawiyyin University, which is the oldest university of the Muslim world, as well as the Sheikh of Al-Azhar, they were very supportive and think that this is one area that we must develop more.

There is already a basic foundational knowledge on these issues on how to approach them. However, it has never been formalised and this initiative we now have undertaken is something that they want to support and they want to develop more of and contribute to.

We are starting on our own first, through the ICCOS. We have gathered religious leaders now who have interest to contribute to this body of knowledge, through their research. We now have really interesting books that they have contributed and never found applications for, and they now say, "wow, this is exactly what I wrote these books for".

At the same time, our own religious scholars are now undertaking post-graduate studies as well as contributing to this body of knowledge, through the RPCS.

So, we hope that putting this together as a repository, one day, as soon as possible, to have a body of knowledge which we can reference for future leaders, religious leaders, so that we can contribute meaningfully as a minority Muslim community in nation building.

Secondly, on the pilots. It was not a single person. I mentioned one person, but he was leading a group of pilots who were interested to motivate, mentor ITE students, to inspire them to go beyond whatever they are studying, to be able to fly, even if they are starting with a simulator. This was an initiative that was broached by them, and I never even thought about it and I thought it was a wonderful way of the pilots, dressed in their uniform, motivating our students. I see many of them, eyes really light up when they sit in the cockpit simulator.

Yes, I agree with the Member that there are many more professionals, even entrepreneurs, people who have gone overseas. Please come back. You have great ideas that can motivate and inspire our community, but as I mentioned in my speech, let us also contribute beyond. Let us also use these ideas, the expertise to also contribute to those who need it and they may not necessarily come from our community – like the pilots have done for SINDA.

**The Chairman:** Dr Wan Rizal. Then, I will take a final one or two clarifications on this topic.

**Dr Wan Rizal:** Thank you, Sir, for your indulgence. I have a question for Minister Maliki. I am grateful that we are now expanding to more M<sup>3</sup>@Towns for Project Dian. I have seen the efforts, I think it is fantastic. In my cut, I mentioned some potential challenges in terms of manpower and coordination. Perhaps Minister can share what are the plans to mitigate this.

**Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman:** Chairman, I thank Dr Wan Rizal for his question. Indeed, it is not an easy effort to bring about the coordination to help groups of families which are living in very difficult circumstances.

Let me just recap. Project Dian is to help families living in our rental flats. We wanted to reach out to them. The first thing is we set out to understand the structures and process that need to be put in place. For structures, it is essentially what Dr Wan Rizal is speaking of. We created a steering committee made up of agency representatives. At the central level, we set up the ECO office, the engagement and coordination office of M<sup>3</sup> and we established the steering committee made up of representatives from MSF, SSO, HDB, MOE's UPLIFT programme and the M<sup>3</sup> agencies.

With this coordination effort, we brought it down to all the pilot towns and each pilot town has similar steering committees that has been established. This is so that the staffers at the local level coordinate, understand each other, understand each case that needs to be supported.

Within Project Dian, we have a group of volunteers. Dr Wan Rizal is absolutely right. The challenge is to get as many volunteers as we can because we literally were looking at knocking on every door of our Malay/Muslim households to understand their circumstances and the way they live.

Through the early efforts in the three pilot towns, we have been able to reach out to 70% of our Malay/Muslim residents there. We found three groups of residents.

The older folks who have been there for many years, the children who have moved out and from there, we look at the welfare and well-being of this group. The coordination happens between SSO and MUIS to ensure that they are supported.

The middle group are the ones who are middle aged with young adult children with potential for home ownership. For that we work with agencies like e2i, MENDAKI, to create opportunities for us to upskill and upgrade the adults, so that they can possibly find good jobs, increase their economic potential to be able to be home owners.

The third group is the one that I mentioned earlier, that requires a lot more attention. These are the young families, young families who are married and did not have the means to purchase their homes yet. So, HDB offers them rental housing. Within that space, we also want to make sure that we support the children. These young families have got a number of children, three to five children. That is really where the volunteers, the Dian ambassadors, come in actively, and they have been trained to help these families.



Dr Wan Rizal is right, we need a lot of manpower and that is why in my speech, I spoke about the call for more of Singaporeans out there, regardless whether you are Malay, Muslim or not, if you have the heart to want to help families in rental flats, help the children, uplift them, work together with us and join us.

**The Chairman:** A short clarification. Mr Mohd Fahmi Aliman.

**Mr Mohd Fahmi Aliman:** Thank you, Chair. Still on Dian and my question to Minister Maliki. When I really look at it, it is a great success. We have a very strong network in terms of using KidSTART and MENDAKI assets to help the preschool and children in early education. But in terms of madrasah education, I think there is a gap. Just wondering if there are any plans to get assistance to help our youths or our students in madrasahs to keep up in their own studies.

**Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman:** I think we support all the children in our Project Dian families, regardless of which school they are attending.

The key to it is to access the resources available and through our network of agencies, MENDAKI, MUIS and MESRA, we have a pool of volunteers, so any students in the rental flat families, whether they go to madrasahs or whether they go to our national schools, if they need educational support, if they need socio-emotional support, we will certainly assess the resources available to them and channel resources available to them.

We refer them to MENDAKI's weekend tuition programmes. We also have got volunteers who are prepared to do home-based tutoring and we have done that. We have a group of mentors from the IHLs who have already been recruited. Usually, what we do is when there is a request and we realise that there is a student in one of the rental flat homes, we will assess their need for educational support and we will look for the most suitable way of supporting them, even if it is home-based tuition. That is where we then tap on the pool of volunteers that we have. If it is centre-based weekend support, we then refer them to MENDAKI tuition programmes.

So, this help is available regardless of where they go to school.

Of more concern to us, really, is the very young children, for us to make sure that the resources are spent on them, to be able to enhance their ability for early childhood education so that their cognitive and social emotional development get supported right at a very early age.

**The Chairman:** I do not see any more clarifications. None? Then, we will carry on with the Committee of Supply for Head X. The next cut, Mr Baey Yam Keng.

#### *Citizenship Partnership and Engagement*

**Mr Baey Yam Keng (Tampines):** Chairman, since 2011, I have been holding monthly KopiTalk sessions in a food court in Tampines North. For two hours each time, residents and members of the public can join and participate in the conversation. I would like to thank the venue operator, Koufu, for allowing us to use its space all these years, and even sponsoring coffee, tea and cakes.

The refreshments offered do attract some interest, but I believe that the discussion also gave us a lot of food for thought. Participants can raise any topics on top of their mind, and I will give my take and share what I know. Anyone present can also chip in to add to the discussion. I find it very useful to know what people are thinking of, worried about and concerned with, as well as their views and opinions on estate matters, current topics and national issues.

Last month's session was held a few days after Budget Day. I used the opportunity to share the key parts of the Budget and what residents can look forward to. In fact, when one retired resident was unsure of the benefits he could enjoy, I used the Support for You Calculator and showed him that he could expect \$2,800 this year. He was very pleasantly surprised.

Besides such topical matters, what I found most useful is when we discuss community issues like corridor clutter, cat and bird feeding, noise pollution and so on where the community needs to come together to solve problems.

On a much larger level and wider platform, we have initiatives like Forward Singapore exercise and Singapore Together movement over the past few years. They aim to strengthen Government-citizen bonds and partnerships for citizen participation.

So, I would like to ask MCCY to share the effectiveness of these initiatives and the key outcomes that have emerged from these exercises.

**The Chairman:** Mr Sitoh Yih Pin, please take your two cuts together.

#### *Singapore's Art and Heritage Plans 2.0*

**Mr Sitoh Yih Pin:** Thank you, Chairman. Mr Chairman, I had raised at last year's MCCY COS, about the Arts and Heritage Plans, which identified the priorities for Singapore's arts and heritage development for 2018 to 2022. As 2022 marked the end of the first phase of the plans, I had sought an update from the Ministry on the next iteration of the plans.

Minister of State Low Yen Ling had shared at the time, that the National Arts Council (NAC) was in deep consultation with stakeholders on the Arts Plan 2.0 and that a public consultation will be conducted in the second half of 2022.

She also shared that MCCY's objectives for the Arts Plan 2.0 were three-fold: first, to strengthen the role of arts in the wider local and global creative economy; second, to develop further ways for the arts to contribute to deepening our national identity, social cohesion and inclusivity; and third, to make the arts a distinctive factor that adds to Singapore's attractiveness as a global city.

For MCCY's Heritage Plan 2.0, I recall the direction was to enhance the heritage sector's digital capabilities, showcase Singapore's rich multicultural heritage beyond our shores to grow new audiences and markets for the sector and to work closely with our local communities and heritage enthusiasts and partners in the tech and creative industries to celebrate our unique local histories.

I therefore invite MCCY to update us on its refreshed Arts and Heritage Plans 2.0 for the next lap, show how the public and stakeholder consultations have shaped these plans, and also expand on MCCY's efforts to increase arts access to various demographics in Singapore.

#### *Preserving National Monuments*

Mr Chairman, our National Monuments in Singapore form an indelible and integral part of our built heritage. These are monuments that are of such historic, cultural, traditional, archaeological, architectural, artistic or symbolic significance and national importance that the Preservation of Monuments Act allows the Government to preserve and gazette them as National Monuments. We currently have a total of 75 buildings and structures that have been gazetted as National Monuments.

These National Monuments preserve not only our history but a quick look at the list of National Monuments shows that quite clearly it also represents in many ways the unique social compact that we have built as a society. The Padang, the latest addition to the list needs no introduction as to the historical significance it holds for pre and post independent Singapore. Sultan Mosque, Sri Mariamman Temple, St Andrews Cathedral and Tian Hock Keng (天福宫) represent a short list of the many National Monuments that showcase the collective conscience of our Nation, as a multiracial, multicultural and multireligious society where Singaporeans of diverse cultural backgrounds and beliefs live harmoniously together as fellow citizens.

It is, therefore, imperative that we continue to ensure that we do our utmost to protect and to promote our collective heritage as we build on our social compact. I, therefore, invite the Minister to share more about MCCY's plans to safeguard and preserve our built heritage, particularly our National Monuments.

**The Chairman:** Mr Xie Yao Quan, both cuts, please.

#### *Vision for Arts and Heritage Sector*

**Mr Xie Yao Quan (Jurong):** Sir, as the Arts and Heritage Sector emerges from a very tough three years due to COVID-19, it is an opportune time for the Ministry to work with the sector and looks ahead to the next three to five years and envisage exciting new possibilities for the sector. Is the Ministry co-creating a vision in the medium term with the sector?

#### *A Thriving Arts and Heritage Sector*

Sir, there are exciting plans such as the University of the Arts to strengthen the talent development ecosystem in Singapore for the Arts and Heritage Sector in the years ahead. It is, therefore, critical that the sector also grows and develops new capabilities in order to provide and create exciting new opportunities for our future talent. Can the Ministry share its plans in this regard to support the sector?

#### *SG Arts and Heritage*

**Ms Tin Pei Ling (MacPherson):** *(In Mandarin)* [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Mr Chairman, globally, the ongoing China-US rivalry and the Ukraine war, as well as global economic slowdown and uncertainty will affect Singapore negatively. Even if the Government works out a strategy, we may not be able to turn the tide. Hence, global uncertainty will inevitably have a negative impact on Singapore. What people are most concerned about is: if lives are affected, what will happened to our social harmony and cohesion built over the years under this immense pressure?

Hence, promoting local arts and culture is important in strengthening our sense of belonging and identity, as arts and culture carry our history and shared values, and serve as a bridge across different generations and languages.

During last year's debate, the Government announced that it would actively engage the community to promote arts and culture in Singapore. Today, a year later, what are the new developments in the Government's plans? How does the Government ensure that Singaporeans, young and old, can access and appreciate arts?

#### *Developing Singapore Heritage and Arts*

**Mr Raj Joshua Thomas (Nominated Member):** Sir, heritage and the arts play an important role in our national identity and help build unity and social resilience. We have always had a diverse society and shared heritage provides that common space for all of us, regardless of race, language or religion. For new citizens, heritage, culture and the arts can help to anchor them to Singapore and to adopt our national identity.

Could the Minister elaborate on MCCY's vision and plans over the next five years for the development of Singapore arts and culture? What are MCCY's plans to build on its current arts and culture programmes to develop even more vibrant and inclusive spaces in which people from diverse backgrounds, including new citizens and permanent residents can interact? Could the Minister elaborate on MCCY programmes that leverage on these spaces to, on the one hand, encourage interaction between our diverse communities and new citizens and PRs to build understanding amongst each other and social harmony; and on the other hand, to build a sense of rootedness to Singapore?

#### *Use of Chinese Dialects*

**Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong (Hougang):** Mr Chairman, I use dialects routinely when I communicate with many of my residents every day and many of them are middle-aged to elderly residents. But I have also observed that in many families, most young children do not understand dialects. At best, a small number may understand dialects as they hear their grandparents communicate with them in dialects. But many may not speak or speak competently. I am concerned at this rate there may hardly be some any Singaporeans below 50 who will be conversant in our Chinese dialects in another 20 or 30 years.

The MCCY has previously affirmed that Chinese dialects are part of the Singapore Chinese culture and heritage. As part of the different Chinese migrant groups coming to Singapore in the early years of Singapore, our forefathers come from different parts of Southern China and brought their different dialects to Singapore, together with the dialect group culture. Our dialect group heritage is part of our Singaporean Chinese cultural heritage.

Beyond the speaking of dialect, it is important to preserve knowledge among all Singaporean Chinese of the cultural heritage of our dialect groups, which may include culture, customs and food.

How many of our young Singaporeans have good knowledge of the cultural practices of their dialect group? Recently, I asked a 13-year-old student, what is his dialect group. He shrugged his shoulders and said that he did not know.

With an ageing population and a younger generation who have a limited exposure to dialect, we are reaching a tipping point. Transferring culture and heritage does not happen overnight and the runway to do so is growing ever shorter. Once this culture and heritage dies off, there is no way of re-building it. We should ask ourselves whether we can do more to preserve this intangible heritage.

I applaud the existing efforts of many of our clan associations in the promotion of the use of dialects as well as the customs, practices and culture of our dialect groups despite the modern cultural challenges.

While our clan associations do offer dialect classes, offering dialects as a third language option at the MOE Language Centre and our Institutes of Higher Learning can be an option to instill interest and promote knowledge. NUS saw a great demand when they offered dialect modules in 2020.

Can the Government do more to enhance the learning and speaking of dialects as well as promoting the knowledge of our customs, practices and culture of our various dialect groups among younger Singaporeans?

Will the Government consider lifting the general ban on TV and radio dialect programmes which is in place since 1981 which can signal to many Singaporeans who take the cue from the Government?

**The Chairman:** Mr Darryl David, please take both your cuts together.

*Arts Spaces*

**Mr Darryl David (Ang Mo Kio):** Chairman, over the past years, numerous art spaces have been added to our cityscape. Today, we can see street art at Haji Lane, Far East Square and Joo Chiat. We have also been more experimental with different formats of art presentation, for example, iLight and Night Festival. Various interest groups have also organised their own independent art events. Each of these have added vibrancy and flavour to our cityscape, creating additional opportunities for Singaporeans to come together and enjoy art and culture. Not only that, but they also have given our art practitioners additional spaces and opportunities to explore their diverse talents and be more experimental with their art forms.

Art spaces will continue to grow in importance especially in an increasingly pluralistic society where pursuits of interest can be very diverse and when our fellow Singaporeans seek different ways to express themselves creatively and artistically.

Can MCCY share their intentions to provide more art spaces for our practitioners to experiment with different forms of art and art presentation? And how does the Ministry intend to inject more vibrancy into the cultural landscape by making art more accessible to Singaporeans?

Most art spaces and art presentations today tend to congregate in the downtown area, with relatively fewer art spaces or experimental art presentations in the heartlands. Apart from Passion Art events, are there plans for MCCY to create permanent art spaces in the heartlands or to bring experimental art forms to the neighbourhoods so that Singaporeans can immerse in art closer to where they live?

*Sports Hub*

The Kallang Alive Precinct was first announced in 2019 as part of URA's masterplan to rejuvenate the Kallang River. The precinct has been envisaged as a one-stop destination for Singaporeans to enjoy community sports, as well as world class entertainment and events.

Sports Hub is an important centrepiece in the development of the precinct and has been envisaged to serve as a focal point for international sports and entertainment events, as well as a social sporting venue for Singaporeans. The recent decision by the Government to terminate the public-private partnership with Sports Hub Pte Ltd (SHPL) is driven primarily by the need to integrate the operations of Sports Hub more closely with those of other sporting venues within the precinct so that we can achieve the sports and entertainment vibrancy that we have envisioned. I believe that Minister Edwin Tong had shared this in Parliament last year.

Chairman, Singapore SG has taken over the management of Sports Hub since last year and can MCCY thus share what are the developments that have occurred since last December and also the future plans of Sports Hub, and how it will feature as part of the Kallang Alive Precinct?

There have also been some concerns regarding how Sports Hub will balance the needs of different communities while operating the Sports Hub. Could the Government please share how SportsSG would balance the desire to host international sports and entertainment events at Sports Hub, while ensuring that it is still accessible to Singaporeans for community sports and also for community events as well?

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

1.00 pm

*Unlocking Sports Hub's Full Potential*

**Mr Xie Yao Quan:** Sir, the Government has completed its takeover of the Sports Hub. What are the Ministry's plans for the Sports Hub this year, in the year ahead, in terms of both programming and infrastructural development as part of its roadmap to unlock the Sports Hub's full potential for Singapore and Singaporeans?

*Community Sports Facilities*

Sir, Minister had previously laid out the Government's significant efforts over the years in building up and maintaining community sports facilities and infrastructure. Minister has also affirmed the Government's commitment to continue doing so.

Can the Ministry share what are its plans to build new community sports facilities and to refurbish, upgrade and maintain existing ones so that Singaporeans can look forward to enjoying sports in the community even more conveniently?

**The Chairman:** Mr Mark Chay, please take both your cuts together.

*Kallang Alive*

**Mr Mark Chay (Nominated Member):** Sir, in December 2022, the Government took over the management of the Singapore Sports Hub under a new entity, Kallang Alive Sports Management (KASM).

I will be the first to state that as a tenant of Kallang Wave Mall, there have been visible improvements in some areas. But, overall, I feel that there is a change in the vibrancy and energy of the precinct.

Not long ago, the Sports Hub felt like a ghost town, unless Jay Chou was performing. Today, programmes are organised for participants of all interests every day of the week. The public can access sports and fitness classes, rent equipment and use world-class facilities to pursue their sporting ambitions.

The events calendar looks vibrant, and many community events, local and international sports competitions and concerts are planned in the coming months.

**[Mr Speaker in the Chair]**

KSAM is already delivering on its promise of more opportunities for locals to compete in and use its facilities. Just last month, the Ministry of Education (MOE) announced that the National School Games track and field finals would return to the National Stadium. It has been four years since that has happened.

With so much optimism and potential linked with the Sports Hub and KASM, I would like to raise the following points.

One, many of the facilities are used by the National Sports Associations (NSAs) for national team training. The anticipated increase in events at the Sports Hub will inevitably disrupt national training and national teams could potentially be displaced for several days if the facility is used for an event. Therefore, it would be good to enable more communication between NSAs, SportSG, KASM and event promoters to identify critical dates when national training should be protected, for instance, the period right before a national games or competition.

Two, I would like to encourage event organisers to, as far as possible, organise events after office hours or on the weekends for the very simple reason of making it easy for parents, who are their children's biggest fans, to watch their kids compete and perform. It would go a long way in growing Singapore's sporting culture.

Three, Sir, I spend a lot of time at the Sports Hub. I also spent a lot of time in SportsSG. An observation I would like to share is that people enjoy going to the Sports Hub simply because it is a lovely open venue to play.

However, I feel that the KASM can better beat its chest and let people know what is available. For example, how many members know they can rent a kayak from the water sports centre and go tubing on the Lazy River at Spash-N-Surf? I believe KASM's can and should do more to promote the ease of use of its facilities and it should explore collaboration with private vendors to increase the reach to the public. Instead of trying to deliver all programmes, I would encourage KASM to work with the existing tenants and NSAs to provide community programmes.

*Sports Facilities Masterplan*

As a National Sports Association President, access to facilities for development and high-performance programmes is always at the forefront of my considerations. Therefore, I am encouraged by recent announcements of new sporting projects, such as Punggol Recreational Sports Centre and Toa Payoh Integrated Development that are part of the Singapore Sports Facilities Masterplan.

First, I would like to ask MCCY to provide an update on sports facilities planned for upgrading as part of the Masterplan. Second, as our society matures, can MCCY share how it plans to make these facilities accessible for persons with disabilities (PwDs) and the elderly? And third, can MCCY share its plans to collaborate with NSAs to use the facilities for training and competition during off-peak hours?

#### *Progress and Measure of Success for Unleash The Roar*

**Mr Sharael Taha:** Chairman, currently, we have many pathways for our young football talents, such as ActiveSG Football Academy Development Centre, Unleash The Roar, Singapore Sports School, S-League Youth Teams under 12, under 14, under 16 national development squads and private clubs like Lion City Sailors.

How will all these pathways fit to ensure that we have enough young talents playing together at the right level and standard? What is the progress of the teams from Unleash The Roar? Are they performing well in the national schools game?

To support all the different talent development pipelines, there needs to be sufficient and proficient training, staff and coaches. How are we developing our coaching staff? Do we have the right quantity and quality of training staff and coaches? Are there enough development opportunities for our local coaches, such as training and overseas development?

#### *Singapore Football*

**Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap:** Sir, in the 2021 COS debate, the Unleash The Roar project meant to rejuvenate Singapore football was announced. Since that time, I understand that the initiatives, such as sending youth teams to overseas training, establishment of partnerships with foreign clubs and other measures are being considered and/or pursued.

Since that time, however, the performance of our men's national football team has been inconsistent. They went from winning hearts for their never-say-die performance in 2021 ASEAN Football Federation Championship to crushing disappointment that followed their dismal exit from the 2022 tournament. I appreciate that it will take time to grow the ecosystem that will foster young talents and develop the skills of our local coaches and footballers, more than the two years since Unleash The Roar was announced.

In a recent podcast posted by Berita Harian, a former national player called for greater involvement of former players in developing the programmes for our local football scene. He also called for, amongst other things, a dialogue session among all stakeholders, setting achievable milestones for our youth teams and creating an environment for local coaches so that they can focus on coaching and not need to moonlight.

I believe that these are all sensible recommendations. While I understand the reasons behind recruiting foreign bond players to play for Singapore in the longer term, we need to focus on developing our local players, coaches and clubs. Local players who have dedicated their time playing for Singapore could be employed in various role where their experience could be relevant towards improving our system.

Therefore, I propose that the Football Association of Singapore and other relevant stakeholders engage in an open conversation, maybe a national conversation with our local players and coaches, both current and former.

#### *Enhancing Participation to Sports*

**Mr Mohd Fahmi Aliman:** Sir, regular sports participation is important in achieving positive health outcomes. Notably, in London, Oakland and Singapore, Active Citizens Worldwide (ACW)'s 2018 report indicated that sports and physical activity generate an estimated \$454 million in savings annually and results in 19,800 additional years of healthy life and 575 fewer deaths in Singapore. This implies that a healthy lifestyle driven by the active lifestyle is essential in improving longevity and minimising healthcare causes. The study also noted that although people in Singapore tended to be less active as compared to other groups.

Therefore, can MCCY share its plans to enhance sports participation, especially amongst groups, which may have a lower rate of participation. Would MCCY also elaborate on how it aims to encourage groups, such as seniors and young children who may be less active in sports, to participate regularly in sports?

#### *Community Sports*

**Ms Hany Soh (Marsiling-Yew Tee):** Over the years, Woodlands Sports Complex has become indispensable community spaces where Marsiling and Woodgrove residents who often go to. Its facilities cater to the needs of all age groups, playing an important part in bonding the family and community closer together. We often see parents bringing their little ones to the swimming pool for waterplay. Many friendships have been forged amongst the seniors too in these venues, be it through sports or by participating in the Active Green Harvest at the community garden located right next to the swimming pool.

I must credit ActiveSG for being a strong community partner of Marsiling-Yew Tee GRC with whom we regularly collaborate to organise a series of community events that keep our residents active. Take the Sporting Wednesday at Woodland Stadium, for example, which encourages our Marsiling and Woodgrove residents to visit the stadium every Wednesday, from 7.00 pm to 9.00 pm to participate in a series of sports, such as walking football and so on, along with fitness programmes, such as zumba, entirely free-of-charge.

In recent years, residents have feedback to meet that several of the facilities are often under maintenance and express their desire for the sports complex, stadium and sports centre to be rejuvenated.

How can the Ministry, ensure that community sports are more accessible to all especially for our senior citizens and to create more opportunities for family bonding as well as fostering a shared community spirit? Could SportsSG also work closely with MOE to explore opening up more school sports facilities to the public?

One example is the former Innova JC School site in Woodgrove Champion Way which some residents have expressed their interest in using the running tracks for their evening exercise. This space has great potential to be another community sporting venue, allowing residents to have more options without the need to travel all the way to the Woodlands Sports Complex.

#### *Youth Leadership Development*

**Ms Yeo Wan Ling (Pasir Ris-Punggol):** Our youths are our country's young sprouts who will grow up to be tall oak trees to provide shelter to our communities and nation. Our youths have demonstrated amazing resilience and adaptability, amidst the challenges and pressures of COVID-19. They have demonstrated tenacity and a strong passion to act on issues that they care about.

In Punggol, our youths have used their own pocket money to 3D Print face shields for the community during COVID-19 and our youth networks have gone door-to-door to encourage residents to recycle well. This is not unique! In fact, data from the National Youth Survey shows that 90% of youths view contributing to society as an important life goal.

Let us work together to give our youths opportunities to become leaders who are confident and committed to Singapore and who have the heart to serve. Can MCCY share on the opportunities for youths to further develop their leadership skills, build strong networks and be involved in civic participation?

#### *Youths in Policy Formulation*

**Ms Tin Pei Ling:** Sir, as our society progresses, our youths are also increasingly sophisticated and desirous of participating in Singapore's development. As an integral part of our population, youths should certainly have a say in how Singapore charts our future.

To do so, it is critical that our youths understand the key issues affecting Singapore, how different groups of fellow Singaporeans could have very different but no less important needs, how policies and legislations are formulated and the difficult trade-offs involved in such formulations. Such understanding will enable them to think more critically, be less susceptible to potentially biased opinions perpetuated by how social media algorithms are designed and make informed decisions for themselves.

At present, we have a range of youth dialogues organised by various Government and private entities. These are useful. But I believe that it is important to offer our youths a structured and more hands-on programme that facilitates deeper understanding of how policy makers think, how legislations are formulated, how other countries deal with similar issues, how is Singapore unique or maybe not so unique and what do we need to give up if we choose one priority over the other.

In this vein, would the Government consider reinstating the National Youth Forum or create the likes of it?

**The Chairman:** Mr Abdul Samad, not here. Mr Don Wee.

#### *Engagement with Self-help Groups*

**Mr Don Wee (Chua Chu Kang):** Chairman, the four self-help groups, namely, the Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC), Yayasan Mendaki (MENDAKI), Singapore Indian Association (SINDA) and the Eurasian Association (EA), have been playing an important role in uplifting their respective communities through programmes and services for vulnerable families. Their support for youths and education is especially noteworthy. They also build mutual understanding and strengthen bonds across different ethnic groups while preserving their own cultural practices and traditions which make Singapore's heritage so rich, diverse and interesting.

What are MCCY's plans to engage our self-help groups and deepen collaborative efforts so as to strengthen cohesion among our communities?

1.15 pm

#### *Community Dispute Management Framework*

**Ms Joan Pereira (Tanjong Pagar):** Chairman, most Singaporeans live together in harmony. Neighbours are generally considerate and look out for one another. However, there is an increase in the number of disputes in recent years, with the common causes being noise disruptions, smoking, littering, hoarding, just to name a few.

At our COS debate last year, Minister Tong shared that the Community Dispute Management Framework (CDMF) was in the process of being enhanced. I support this as it is better for neighbours to first discuss their problems in the presence of a trained mediator early instead of allowing the situation to escalate.

At the MinLaw COS debate on 27 February, it was announced that disputes over noise issues, disputes that have resurfaced after mediation at the Community Mediation Centre (CMC), and disputes in which parties want to file a claim with the Community Disputes Resolution Tribunal (CDRT) must first go through mandatory mediation or the parties involved will be penalised.

Under the enhanced CDMF, how will MCCY proceed to assist in the other types of dispute cases not in the above three categories? What about cases involving religious practices that might cause racial or religious tensions, persons with mental health or suspected mental health issues? Some of the disputes have not been resolved for a long time, to the distress of neighbours. Can MCCY try to expedite the processing of these cases?

**Miss Cheng Li Hui (Tampines):** Chairman, harmonious neighbourhoods are what we all hope for and work towards. However, having some disputes is unavoidable. While we work towards minimising such disputes, we must also pay attention to improving the ways we manage disputes such as the CDMF. In the Committee of Supply 2022, MCCY announced that the CDMF was being enhanced. Can

MCCY provide updates on the outcomes and ongoing efforts since then?

In addition to establishing guidance to encourage self-management of the disputes, the availability of legislative levers to the Government is also important, especially for cases where self-management is unsuccessful.

Perhaps to enhance CDMF, we should not only focus on efficacy and efficiency of managing disputes but also be sensitive to the fact that, neighbours in dispute more often than not will remain as neighbours. The mending and improving of relationships post-CDMF should also be one of the framework's key considerations.

Can MCCY shares its plans for managing disputes under the proposed CDMF?

**The Chairman:** Mr Xie Yao Quan, you can take both cuts, please.

#### *Managing Community Disputes*

**Mr Xie Yao Quan:** Sir, the need for a stronger framework to manage community disputes and frictions in neighbourly relationships has grown over the years. We need clear principles to resolve disputes in a fair and balanced way, resolve these as early as possible, and yet preserve the agency and central role of residents themselves to manage the affairs within the community, while also supporting them with processes, resources and rules of the road that are more fit for purpose today.

Under the Ministry of Law (MinLaw) Committee of Supply (COS), announcements have been made about updates to the framework for Community Disputes Resolution Tribunals (CDRT) and the Community Mediation Centre (CMC). Can MCCY update on its work on the Community Dispute Management Framework?

#### *Culture of Care and Active Citizenry*

Sir, we are a democracy of deeds and must continue to be so. Our social compact going forward must be anchored on active citizenry, volunteerism and ever broader and deeper actions to help lift up one another. Can the Ministry update on its progress and plans to rally both individuals and corporates to care and to give through the SG Cares Movement and National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre (NVPC) and other platforms.

#### *Expand Capacity of SG Cares Volunteer Centres*

**Mr Mohd Fahmi Aliman:** Sir, the capabilities of our volunteers and the SG Cares Volunteer Centres are important to ensure effective service delivery. Thus, I would like to ask what MCCY is doing to expand and deepen the capabilities of our SG Cares Community networks.

Since they were set up in 2018, the SG Cares Volunteer Centres in their respective towns have been engaging and coordinating with community partners including schools, businesses and Social Service Agencies (SSAs) to better support beneficiaries in need but harnessing community resources and growing the pool of volunteers.

Therefore, could MCCY share its existing efforts to deeper in the capabilities of our SG Cares community networks to enable greater and lasting impact to be created.

#### *SG Cares*

**Ms Joan Pereira (Tanjong Pagar):** Chairman, SG Cares Volunteer Centres are the coordinating hubs of all volunteers in their respective towns. Many good-hearted people are willing to step forward and offer their time and expertise to help. But it is not enough to just increase the number of volunteers. The challenge is sustaining their interest and engaging them meaningfully. Sometimes, the centres may not have the resources to engage them at the level which they are willing to serve. I would like to focus on an area that has very high need.

I understand from most of the SSAs in my constituency that there is a high demand for medical escorts, especially among the elderly, to help vulnerable patients keep their medical appointments at polyclinics and Government hospitals. Volunteers in this area are few, and in most instances, the staff in the SSAs have to handle this work, on top of their own work. They are stretched and tired.

The other challenge is matching the volunteers and the patients. We need coordinating personnel and a good IT system to draw up the schedules and match with those of the volunteers, including reserve medical escorts, in case a volunteer, who has been assigned to the senior, is suddenly unable to make it. We can imagine the coordination, administrative and IT support that this group needs. Without these resources, the matching process will be less efficient, the volunteers may not be activated as often as they would like to, to sustain their interest. Meanwhile, we have so many patients who need their help.

This is just one of a few examples of how the volunteer centres can be better supported. Different volunteer centres will have varying resource support requirements. How would MCCY work towards understanding the situational requirements and facilitate these volunteer operations? Our volunteers are a huge resource who should be valued and engaged meaningfully.

#### *SG Cares Community Networks*

**Mr Mark Chay:** Chairman, established in 2018, the SG Cares Volunteer Centres has actively connected with local partners, such as schools, businesses and National Sports Associations (NSAs), to support people in need through community resources and volunteers. Therefore, I am asking MCCY to share their policies regarding enhancing our SG Cares Community Networks to create a more powerful and lasting impact.



**The Chairman:** Minister Edwin Tong. And we will take the clarifications at the end, after all the speeches.

**The Minister for Culture, Community and Youth (Mr Edwin Tong Chun Fai):** Good afternoon, Mr Chairperson. First, I want to thank all the Members for their continued support for MCCY's work. Sir, unity lies at the heart of what we do at MCCY. Our work spans many sectors: arts, heritage, sports, youth, our community, volunteerism. And these are all threads which bind us to one another and give us a shared stake in building Singapore together. This unity has enabled us to achieve success as a country and also to be able to bounce back from crises.

As Mr Sitoh Yoh Pin pointed out, Singapore's social compact is based on building a diverse yet cohesive Singapore. Mr Baey Yam Keng also spoke about citizens coming together to solve problems at a community and also at a national level.

It was precisely to strengthen our civic bonds that we launched Singapore Together in 2019. It marked a shift towards deeper partnerships between the Government and Singaporeans and also amongst Singaporeans themselves. We engaged Singaporeans on national issues like women's development and also on our long-term land use plan, and partnered them to develop solutions on complex issues through citizens' panels and Alliances for Action.

Forward Singapore extends this collaborative style of governance to further the shifts needed to strengthen our social compact, because a sustainable social compact requires the investment and also the co-ownership of all of us in society.

Since the launch of the Forward Singapore exercise, over 14,000 Singaporeans from all walks of life have come together to discuss what we want to see for Singapore's future. And perhaps, more importantly, what each of us is willing to do, to get us there.

The contributions of Singaporeans will shape and strengthen the eventual recommendations and the outcomes of Forward Singapore. Under the Unite Pillar, our focus is to deepen our sense of belonging, strengthen our bonds and also entrench our sense of mutual responsibility and care towards each other.

One thing that came through strongly from all these conversations was that unity in Singapore's context entails embracing diversity. It is not about being the same but being able to engage across all our differences. And it is also about being stronger than the sum of our parts.

Participants spoke about deepening our shared culture, heritage and experiences. They spoke of creating opportunities for all of us to interact and connect with one another, and of how the arts and sports are integral in this respect. They spoke of bringing people across racial, religious and generational lines together, to work on issues that matter to them. My colleagues and I will address the various cuts raised by Members speak MCCY's work to strengthen our core identity.

Let me start with our arts and heritage which connect us across communities and across generations. They help us deepen our sense of a shared identity.

Sir, today, we have an established and vibrant arts and heritage scene. Our national cultural institutions, museums, galleries, as well as arts and culture groups offer diverse programmes throughout the year. In fact, recently, the Peranakan Museum and also the Children's Museum in Singapore reopened and opened their doors with refreshed and interactive exhibits to tell of our Singapore story.

We also continue to celebrate Singapore's intangible cultural heritage and traditional art forms. These include activities organised by clan associations or arts practitioners which feature dialects as suggested by Mr Dennis Tan. And as Mr Tan knows, that is already being done.

We have performances such as Nanyin and Teochew Opera by Siong Leng Musical Association and Nam Hwa Opera respectively. This is in recognising that Chinese dialects are part of the Singapore Chinese culture and heritage, even as the Government maintains its existing language policy of promoting the use of Mandarin as one of our four official languages.

The Government is committed to growing the arts and heritage sectors. Government funding has held steady in these sectors. Over the last 10 years or so, MCCY has committed public spending on arts and heritage at about \$450 million every year.

In addition, during COVID-19, we rolled out the \$75 million Arts and Culture and Resilience Package to support our practitioners during the pandemic and injected an additional \$12 million to help ensure that our talent is preserved and support the continued transformation of the arts and heritage sectors.

Our arts spaces have also grown over the years. Just taking arts gross floor area (GFA) managed by the National Arts Council (NAC), this has increased by 35% over the period 2010 to 2020, and this excludes other arts spaces which exists in the private and commercial spaces.

We also continue to support arts and heritage organisations to diversify their income streams via fundraising, with the Cultural Matching Fund and the Sustain the Arts (stART) Fund.

Mr Sitoh Yih Pin, Ms Tin Pei Ling, Mr Raj Joshua Thomas and Mr Xie Yao Quan asked about our plans for the arts and heritage sectors.

Sir, the first edition of Our SG Arts and Heritage plans gave us a strong foundation, gave us a firm footing on which to launch the next chapter of the arts and heritage plans. Even during the pandemic, the sectors responded with resolve and enhanced their capabilities. As we emerge from the pandemic, we do want to consolidate the gains that we have made and unlock new opportunities that have come our way.

It is thus timely to embark on a journey together with the sectors to envision the future.

1.30 pm

Over the past 20 months, NAC and the National Heritage Board (NHB) have consulted over 2,000 stakeholders on the next edition of Our SG Arts and Heritage Plans. Many more provided their feedback online and also during roadshows across the island. These engagements are important, as we want these two plans to be co-created and co-owned with the arts and heritage communities.

Through the process, I met many arts and heritage practitioners. They shared with me how the arts and heritage sectors in Singapore have, indeed, come a long way, as many Members here have appreciated, and how we can take these sectors, building on the strengths that we have, standing on the shoulders of the giants that have come before us, to take us to the next phase. Let me share some of the key shifts that we will be making.

For our SG Arts Plan 2023 to 2027, we will place greater focus on the Creative Economy. Mr Xie Yao Quan spoke about helping the arts sector grow and develop these new capabilities. We agree. We have heard from arts practitioners and observed during the pandemic that increasing collaborations between the arts and adjacent industries present many opportunities for Singapore artists.

They can cultivate new audiences and markets and develop new revenue streams. NAC will, thus, be looking at new focus areas, such as intellectual property rights, new business models and digital adoption. These measures will help artists and arts groups achieve greater growth and success. It will help them to deepen their reach to existing audiences and broaden their exposure to new ones.

In addition, with the upcoming University of the Arts, students will benefit from existing programmes offered by LASALLE and NAFA, as well as new programmes, to meet the needs of the creative economy. Our plans to grow the creative economy through our arts plan will, in turn, create better job prospects and pathways for our future graduates.

In the next bound, there will be greater focus on increasing access to the arts, creating more occasions for people to share meaningful experiences through the arts. And we will do this by adopting a data-driven approach to better understand the needs and preferences of audiences and also by expanding partnerships to increase touchpoints.

We will also leverage technology and innovation to expand the playing field for the arts. My colleague, Minister of State Low Yen Ling, will elaborate further on Our SG Arts Plan when she speaks.

On arts spaces, we agree with Mr Darryl David that spaces for the arts are crucial in the arts ecosystem. The Government has, in fact, been very deliberate in developing spaces for the arts, ensuring that they are used optimally and efficiently; that there is also fair access and inclusive opportunities, especially for new groups and younger practitioners.

We now have a diverse range of arts spaces. Artists can collaborate with one another at multi-tenanted arts housing spaces managed by NAC. MCCY and NAC also facilitate arts groups to take up direct leases on state properties and in commercial developments.

In developing arts spaces, we engage closely with the arts community and also work to co-create spaces and think of ideas on how to use these spaces with members of the community. We have been working closely with the arts community, for example, to develop 45 Armenian Street.

We set up a resource panel, and the resource panel comprises private arts practitioners: an actor, an independent music producer, arts academics and also a former chair of the Substation, to give their views, discuss ideas, think about what the 45 Armenian Street might look like.

Our shared goal, to ensure that the space will remain an inclusive one that supports artistic experimentation and development of young practitioners. We have received the Resource Panel's recommendations, and NAC will build upon these recommendations to guide the development and design for 45 Armenian Street. And this is one example. Another example is Kampong Java, another space that I have spoken about previously.

Sir, let me turn now to Our SG Heritage plan. Mr Sitoh Yih Pin asked about our plans to safeguard our National Monuments. Sir, we regularly restore our National Monuments to preserve the buildings for posterity and for our future generations.

I had announced in 2021 that we will be restoring the Istana main building and the former Istana Kampong Gelam. Restoration works for the main Istana building are expected to commence early next year.

The Istana has featured prominently in Singapore's transition from colony to sovereign state, and the upcoming restoration works will ensure that it will remain well-preserved and functional for its historical importance and as a venue for important state functions and community events.

The former Istana Kampong Gelam, which houses the Malay Heritage Centre (MHC), has also closed for restoration and a gallery revamp, following the MHC Closing Fest last year.

Two other National Monuments housing the National Museum of Singapore, and the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall, are also scheduled for restoration.

In addition to preserving our places, we have enriched the Singapore story also with treasures in our National Collection. Beyond physical objects and buildings, we have safeguarded and showcased our intangible cultural heritage.

We have also deepened our collaboration with Singaporeans through co-created exhibitions and programmes. Mr Hazmi Zin from Rumah Makan Minang, for instance, was one of 45 business owners who participated in the Kampong Gelam Citizen Engagement Project and his participation, along with others, has enriched our understanding of the precinct's cultural heritage.

For the second edition of Our SG Heritage Plan, we will make a bigger push to reflect a more layered understanding of the Singapore identity.

Design, such as fashion, craft and architecture, is an important expression of our cultural identity and a catalyst for creativity and innovation. We have some top-class designers in Singapore among us, and we want Singaporeans to see their works and be proud of their achievements. We will, therefore, expand the National Collection to include designs. We also hope to strengthen the ties between our museums and the design community and industry.

Sir, Singaporeans have shared with us their strong desire to be more involved in heritage. NHB will, therefore, explore new ways for Singaporeans to get involved in presenting and sharing our heritage with others. We will also support the heritage sector by using technology, and Minister of State Low Yen Ling will elaborate on this plan when she speaks.

Sir, like arts and heritage, sport brings people together. And we want to optimise our sporting facilities and spaces to encourage more people to come together, socialise, play together. In this spirit, we took over the ownership and management of the Singapore Sports Hub, to unlock its full potential, to make Sports Hub more accessible to all Singaporeans, and to achieve a deeper integration with the rest of the Kallang Alive Precinct.

We set up Kallang Alive Sport Management Company, or as Mr Mark Chay calls them, in short – and we all love our acronyms – KASM, which operates under the ambit of Sport Singapore. This will ensure a stronger alignment between what the Government aims to achieve and the key performance indicators (KPIs) that KASM will have to aspire towards.

Sir, this project has shown early signs of success. Mr Darryl David and Mr Xie Yao Quan also asked about the developments following the takeover and our plans ahead. Let me share some brief highlights with Members.

Under the new management team, we have had many activities in the past three months alone. And we took over on 9 December last year, so, just about three months. These events and activities include performances by live bands and dance groups as well as community events, such as the FunFam SportFest, a Big Walk event to usher in the New Year, and a Chinese New Year Stadium Waterfront Carnival.

Last weekend, I just at the Sports Hub, and I saw many casual joggers, kids with their families playing football and playing basketball. It rained a lot, but we could use the promenade – an area around the 100Plus track – to great effect.

Student-athletes have also been participating in the National School Games at the Sports Hub, competing hard, both at the National Stadium, as well as at the covered courts in the Sports Hub. In the coming months, members of the public can look forward to more of such activities, including some National School Games finals, the National Stadium Open Houses, as well as grassroots events.

Let me assure Mr Mark Chay that KASM is, indeed, working closely with all its partners, and that include the NSAs, to deliver more community programmes, but also to ensure that there is more synergy across the board. I thank Mr Chay for his efforts to market the Sports Hub's programmes. I want to assure him that we will also be stepping up on our communication efforts by leveraging social media, word-of-mouth, engaging our partners, work with more broadcasters to bring more Singaporeans to the Sports Hub, by raising awareness of the events and activities that we will have at the Sports Hub.

At the same time, concerts and marquee sports events have also experienced an upswing also in the same period of time. A few weeks ago, we hosted Westlife, which sold out for three consecutive nights. This was notwithstanding that, on one of the nights, the Red Hot Chili Peppers' were competing for eyeballs just across the road at the National Stadium. Both were sold out, both happened on a weekday night, no less. The two concerts welcomed more than 50,000 people to the Sports Hub.

In the coming months, Singaporeans can also look forward to world-renowned entertainment events, such as for those Members who are interested, Harry Styles, Blackpink as well as marquee sports events, such as the World Table Tennis Singapore Smash, happening this week and next, and the HSBC Singapore Rugby Sevens, happening next month. We also have FIBA, which is the International Basketball Association, which will be having its Intercontinental Cup in Singapore for the very first time.

Sir, there is a whole suite of activities for everyone, from community and sporting events for children, youths, families and seniors, to international marquee events. And we, certainly, hope that Mr Mark Chay would not find that it will remain a ghost town for much longer.

The developments in the larger Kallang Alive Precinct, in other words, the areas outside of Sports Hub that can be used to synergise with Sports Hub is also on track, with the Kallang Football Hub, with four sheltered and three unsheltered pitches, and the Kallang Tennis Centre, comprising seven indoor and twelve outdoor courts, due to be completed later this year.

With these developments, we will move towards using more of the whole Kallang Alive Precinct in synergy, to offer a greater array of international sporting events, alongside local programming. For instance, we can combine the facilities at the OCBC Arena, Singapore Indoor Stadium and the new Kallang Tennis Centre, and be able to confidently bring in marquee sporting events, such as, for example, an ATP1000 sporting event.

In parallel, Singaporeans in the community can try out the sport at the community level, at community tennis sessions, for example, or tennis clinics for social competitive players and aspiring athletes, youth competitions and so on, activating the entire precinct, not just the Sports Hub, but the broader precinct that is Kallang Alive. So we will have a whole ecosystem of sports across a diverse range of sporting levels, all integrated with the other upcoming lifestyle and entertainment offerings.

For our national teams, let me assure Mr Mark Chay that the NSAs continue to be prioritised in the booking of Sports Hub and ActiveSG facilities for national team trainings. In fact, with the Government now taking charge of the Sports Hub facilities, we can better optimise the use of these facilities across various uses.

So, to give Mr Mark Chay one example, SportSG worked with Singapore Gymnastics to ensure that our gymnasts could train at Sengkang Sports Hall, while their usual training venue at OCBC Arena Hall was activated to host the Singapore International Rhythmic Gymnastics Cup. So, we have one international gymnastics event at the usual training centre but, at the same time, we could use other spaces within our facilities across the island to continue the tempo of national training unabated.

Our plans for the Sports Hub and Kallang Alive Precinct are part of a larger Sports Facilities Master Plan (SFMP) to develop and refresh National Training Centres (NTCs) for elite athlete training and sports facilities across Singapore for all Singaporeans to enjoy.

Sir, Mr Mohd Fahmi Aliman asked about our plans to enhance sports participation, Ms Hany Soh asked how we can ensure accessibility of community sports. Sir, we have seen more people participating in sports and exercise regularly. Let me just give Members a sense, based on our numbers. Based on our National Sport Participation Survey, residents who participate in sports and exercise regularly at least once a week has risen from 54% in 2015 to 66% in 2019.

Even during, or perhaps, in particular, during the COVID-19 pandemic period, this continued to rise to 74% in 2022, which are all very encouraging signs. These indicators show that more Singaporeans are keen to get more active.

1.45 pm

In addition to the sport events at the Sports Hub that I shared earlier, the public also enjoy sporting activities across Singapore.

In 2022, 148 community leagues and competitions were organised across 19 ActiveSG Sport Centres and bear in mind that for 2022, or part of that period at least, we were not able to come out and do these events. But once we were able to, we had more than a hundred of such events and leagues going on at the 19 ActiveSG Centres across Singapore. This involved more than 13,000 participants, including young children and seniors.

Last year, we introduced the ActiveSG Cup which saw more than 1,300 participants across two sports – Basketball and Football. This year, we plan to introduce two more – Floorball and Volleyball.

Sir, we see the value in life-long learning, even in sports and active participation and exercise, and we want to cultivate this interest and this good habit from when we are much younger. Therefore, all Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents aged four to 12 years old will receive a top-up of \$100 worth of ActiveSG credits. This will apply to all who are ActiveSG members or sign up as new members between 1 May and 31 October this year.

Parents may use these credits to offset the cost of their children's ActiveSG programmes and cover their entry fees into ActiveSG facilities, such as our swimming pools. This, I hope, will encourage more children to play together with their peers, with their neighbours and their families outside of structured school sport participation.

We are working hard to build more and better sporting facilities throughout Singapore. We will enhance access and also step up on having a greater variety of programming at these facilities. Our hope is that every Singaporean will have ample opportunity to enjoy, engage and excel in sports.

To Mr Sharael Taha and Mr Muhamad Faisal Abdul Manap's questions on developing Singapore football, and I get this every year at every Committee of Supply, we launched Unleash the Roar! (UTR) in 2021 to develop a strong local pipeline of football talents.

This was intended to be and it is a long-term plan that we have put in place to grow the base of participation, to identify talented players from a young age and provide these talented players with rigorous training and structured opportunities to be coached well, to compete regularly and to have a clear pathway to the national team.

Let me elaborate on the next few steps that we have for our young talents.

Since 2021, we established 12 School Football Academies (SFAs), of which two, have dedicated programmes for girls. We will expand the number of SFAs and also increase the programme intake over the year.

These SFAs, together with the Singapore Sports School, the ActiveSG Football Academy as well as all private clubs and academies in Singapore, provide a broad base of participation for us to identify suitable talents. And this will be our foundational base.

We will put in place a national framework to systematically select and develop the best players from this broad base.

We will take the following steps. First, we will set up a national football development centre as the main training centre for all our national youth squads. Our best young footballers aged 13 to 17 will be drawn from all our available pipelines that I described earlier to these squads. This centre will be our primary pathway for selection to our national team. One central, cohesive path. Within this centre, players will be selected into core and also reserve teams, and we will review them periodically. Why? Because we do not want anyone to be too comfortable or too complacent and we want to ensure that throughout the squads, across the different age groups, there will be competitive tension.

These boys and girls will train and compete regularly as a team. We are looking at setting up a youth league that will give our players regular opportunities to be competing at high levels. They will also, from time to time, come together, to train as a squad, so that they can get to know each other, train and play together, and on occasion, also compete overseas for even further exposure.

These players will also be supported with a comprehensive suite of sport science, nutrition and sports medicine.

Second, I think Mr Faisal Manap and Mr Sharael Taha, raised these points on talent identification and scouting. They are important to us. We have a small population with a small base and we need to ensure that we have our eyes on all available talent all the time.

We will progressively roll out training on talent identification for coaches and strengthen our scouts' capabilities in identifying the best of our young footballers. We also want to tap on the experience of our ex-national players, our ex-national coaches, who already have an eye for talent, having taken part at the highest level of the game. We will invite them to be trained and to be part of our scouting network.

Third, on coaching. To ensure consistency in our training and development ecosystem, a common coaching syllabus is already being used, across all the SFAs and the national youth squads. More than 500 coaches and teachers have already been trained with this curriculum to date.

We will also introduce coaching licensing and renewal after coaches have acquired the necessary Continuing Coach Education hours. We will also find suitable opportunities for our coaches to learn from the best, to be immersed in the environment, so that they can have an experience of what it is like to be coaching at the highest levels.

For example, our partnership with Spanish LaLiga has allowed us to bring in experienced youth coaches from Spain to augment our local coaches, as well as provide overseas learning opportunities for them.

Last but certainly not least, we will launch the inaugural UTR scholarship later this year. Our best young footballers will be sent to overseas academies that offer good quality education alongside the best football training and competitive environment.

Sir, we know that receiving a good quality education is important for our young boys and girls. Therefore, through this stint, they will come back with academic qualifications that will allow them to continue future studies at the tertiary level in Singapore or overseas, even as they train and compete with the best amongst the overseas talents. We will start this programme later this year and we are considering a good academy in Europe to kick off this programme with.

At the same time, similar local scholarships will also be available for suitable footballers who choose to enrol in the Singapore Sports School. Through this, we hope to prepare them for future overseas scholarship programmes and opportunities, and also spur more footballers to be enrolled in a full-time programme for their football development. More details of the scholarship will be shared when ready.

For footballers with NS obligations, in other words, after they return, after they finish their stint, early enlistment is a possibility and one we have explored, quite successfully with several other footballers, for example, with Irfan Fandi. Eligible footballers can tap on existing support avenues to continue training and competing, whilst at the same time, fulfilling NS obligations.

Developing talent takes time and our focus is really on laying a strong foundation for long-term growth and learning. We are putting in place a systematic infrastructure to expand, to nurture and to develop this pool of young players at the base level, starting from when they are 13. The best will be identified and put into a national development centre, as I have outlined. They will play and compete and train regularly, both locally as well as overseas. Over time, this initiative will provide us with a steady pipeline of players to choose from. It will take time, and much as I know, all of us are invested in the outcome of Singapore football and I have heard the emotional, passionate speeches made by Members earlier. I would ask for our continued and all your continued support for this system to ensure that our younger players have a chance to progress and become the pool for future national team selection.

Sir, let me turn now to the management of community disputes. Many Members have spoken about this. The strength of our cohesive society, in my view, is not found only in what we have in common but also manifests in how we negotiate our differences and deal with conflicts that inevitably arise. Ms Joan Pereira, Miss Cheng Li Hui and Mr Xie Yao Quan asked about enhancements to the Community Dispute Management Framework (CDMF).

An inter-agency workgroup, led by MCCY, together with MinLaw and the Ministry of National Development (MND), have been conducting a review of the CDMF. Senior Minister of State Sim Ann and I have already spoken about the enhancements in different areas relevant to MND and MinLaw's COS debates respectively.

To pull it all together, let me reiterate how we are enhancing this framework. First, we want to promote community norms as our first line of defence. I think Senior Minister of State Sim Ann made that very clear and I too, reiterated that when I spoke in my MinLaw capacity.

Clearer social norms encourage the self-management of behaviours. As Senior Minister of State Sim Ann said, Municipal Services Office (MSO) has been working with partners to promote community norms for noise management recommended by the Community Advisory Panel on Neighbourhood Noise.

Second, we are looking at allowing dedicated personnel to leverage stronger laws and help these neighbours resolve their issues upstream. In other words, before it gets to the stage where it becomes intransigent or intractable, and they have to go to the Community Disputes Resolution Tribunals (CDRT) or other adjudicatory tribunals to resolve their differences. For instance, this team will be able to conduct investigations, or direct residents to attend mandatory mediation or to stop the actions that are causing the nuisance pending the mediation or the adjudication.

As Senior Minister of State Sim Ann shared last week, MSO will be piloting this with disputes arising from serious noise disturbances between neighbours. We will also explore consequences for recalcitrant offenders who fail to stop the actions as required.

Third, we will increase access to community mediation and mandate mediation for certain types of disputes between neighbours.

Let me explain why we start with noise and we also pilot this project with noise. In 2022, noise-related disputes made up about 65% of all neighbour-related disputes registered for mediation at MinLaw's Community Mediation Centre. This trend, by and large, has been consistently the case over the past few years. In other words, they form the bulk of all cases registered for mediation.

In many cases, clear expectations on acceptable community behaviours as well as a mutual appreciation of what the parties are facing would go a long way towards improving the situation. Hence, we want to encourage disputing neighbours to find an amicable, mediated settlement of their disputes as far as possible. To support mediation services, we will expand the pool of mediators as well as forward deploy them as far as possible, into the community so, it is not just all centralised at the CMC.

We will also be giving mediation settlement agreements more teeth and standing, to encourage greater compliance with the mediated outcomes.

Finally, we will also enhance the processes and the powers of the Community Disputes Resolution Tribunals (CDRT), as an avenue of last resort, to give affected residents faster and more effective relief. This we have to do, because with all these steps that we take, by the time a case ends up at the CDRT, there would have been numerous attempts at mediation, at reconciliation, and these probably represent the most intractable and intransigent of cases. We want an effective and efficient, speedy framework to deal with these problems. Those steps are what I had elaborated upon when I spoke at the MinLaw Committee of Supply.

Sir, we have a comprehensive set of enhancements but they do not operate in silos, they work together to drive the right behaviour, and also actively facilitate the resolution of disputes at an early stage in a way that best preserves the relations between neighbours. Even strengthen the teeth on mediation and CDRT, and we mandate mediation, let me emphasise: even as we are looking at leveraging stronger laws, these should not be used as a first recourse.

We interact with our neighbours on a daily basis. Most of us want to live peacefully side by side with our neighbours. When disputes arise and intervention is needed, we encourage disputing neighbours to go through mediation as far as possible, allowing parties to talk to each other about the issues that vex them and through the assistance of trained and oftentimes, very effective mediators, find a common path. It helps to preserve, and in some cases, even mend and make better the relations between neighbours.

We will invite residents to share their views on this when we conduct the public consultation on the proposed CDMF enhancements later this year.

2.00 pm

Sir, our diversity, which I have spoken about, and many Members of this House have spoken about on various occasions, must be harnessed for the common good. We need the diverse strengths and talents from the community to tackle the challenges we face as a nation and build Singapore's future together.

Our youths play a crucial role in this regard. Youths today are well informed, more prepared, more ready and they want to engage with us to discuss policies.

Ms Tin Pei Ling spoke about engaging youths. MCCY and the National Youth Council (NYC) have continued to engage and partner with youths on national issues in different ways. Let me elaborate.

These include policy co-creation platforms such as the Youth Circles and programmes such as the Youth Action Challenge that supports them, not just in talking about these ideas or listening to the suggestions, but in working with them actively to turn their ideas into action.

From our ForwardSG engagements, we continue to see a very healthy, sustained youth interest in policy-making and want to create more opportunities to meet these aspirations.

So, MCCY and NYC, are exploring ways to create more policy space, and also work on how to institutionalise involvement of more youths in policy-making and elevate their proposals for consideration onto a national platform. We will share more details when this is ready.

Ms Yeo Wan Ling asked about our plans to expand our youth leadership programmes to provide younger student leaders the opportunity to engage on national issues and build strong networks. NYC and the National Community Leadership Institute (NACLI), in partnership with MOE, piloted the inaugural Our Singapore Leadership Programme (OSLP) last year. This was a programme, as a pilot, for about 50 Secondary 4 students from MOE schools and madrasahs. It took place in December 2022. All the student leaders who participated in the inaugural OSLP came from different schools. In other words, we had about 53 students from 53 different schools.

"Leader" is defined broadly. Some were head of student councils; some were participants in their dance groups, and others, captains of their sports teams or members of the uniformed groups.

We brought them together. They came together to reflect on and discuss issues which confront Singapore. They talked about and grappled with trade-offs and the complexities of policy-designs; and they expanded their network of friends, people they can talk to, connections that they can make and forge new friendships.

We found this programme very successful, and we want to give more youths an opportunity to take part in this programme. From 2023, we will expand the programme to nominated Secondary 4 students from all MOE schools and madrasahs in Singapore.

For students from the institutes of higher learning, NYC will develop a new leadership programme. More details will be shared when ready.

Mr Xie Yao Quan has pointed out, and I agree with him, that there is value in having and promoting active citizenry, volunteerism and collaboration. And these traits must continue to underpin our society and our social compact.

Beyond youths, we are encouraging individuals and corporates to play an even more active role to come together, work for the social good, leverage on corporate purpose and uplift our communities.

We will therefore expand and deepen the capabilities of our SG Cares Volunteer Centres. We will resource them better, so that they in turn can support the various social service agencies that are under their watch and they are working with, so they can better channel volunteers and donations-in-kind to meet unmet needs.

We will also support businesses in their efforts to be a force for good for society as they design their business practices and operations in ways that benefit their employees, their stakeholders, and, of course, the wider community that they serve. Minister of State Alvin Tan will share more details when he speaks.

Mr Don Wee asked how our Self-help Groups (SHGs) are collaborating to enhance outcomes across ethnic communities. While the SHGs were set up to provide customised support for their respective ethnic communities, they also work together and strengthen mutual support across the different ethnic communities.

For example, the SHGs will launch a series of inter-SHG Youth Dialogues centring around themes emerging from the ongoing Forward Singapore exercise. This will happen in mid-2023. These dialogues will bring together young people from different backgrounds and different ethnicities and empower them to develop and lead ground-up solutions.

The SHGs will also create more opportunities for volunteers to interact, to serve with one another across the different SHGs. We do not have volunteers from an SHG that come from only a particular group that the SHG serves. It is open and we encourage all volunteers to come, from a broad spectrum of different ethnic groups to serve the broader spectrum of society through the SHGs.

These efforts by our SHGs embody the Singapore Together spirit – Singaporeans, diverse as we may be, stepping forward, working together and building a better nation.

Mr Chairman, to conclude, I have spoken about our various MCCY initiatives – and my colleagues that follow will elaborate on many of these and speak of various other measures as well.

But our principal focus is to deepen our roots and expand the reach of our arts and heritage. We do not do that just as an end in itself, but as a means to an end, to promote arts, culture and heritage, sporting participation and excellence, both at the community and at a professional level. We do this to foster neighbourliness, care and active citizenry, as part of the unique our Singaporean DNA.

These efforts speak to what it means to call Singapore our home. Our home is not just a physical space. It is also how we see ourselves, all of us, as connected and bound to others in Singapore through arts, heritage, culture, sports and religion.

It is about who we are as a people, our shared experiences, what we do to care for each other and look out for one another and the values we hold dear and live by.

These are the threads that bind us and hold our social compact together. These are the threads that run through each of us as Singaporeans.

Growing these aspects of Singapore is delicate work, but it is important and it requires the commitment of all of us, regardless of language, race, religion and social-economic background. On our part, MCCY will continue to work with all Singaporeans, join our strengths and inspire a collective action to build an enduring social compact where we stand and act as one united people, and we are proud to call Singapore our home. *[Applause.]*



**The Chairman:** Minister, I would like to extend my condolences. I know it is not easy after last night's development to talk about football. But you have been calm and uplifting. We very much appreciate that. Ms Hany Soh.

*Arts and Heritage through Learn and Play*

**Ms Hany Soh:** The Children's Museum Singapore, being the first ever Museum dedicated to children in Singapore was opened last year, aspiring to be a place of Wonder and joy for our little ones.

Last month, I joined 80 of our will Woodgrove residents and their children to visit the museum where we spent an enjoyable afternoon together partaking in activities, such as travelling back in time to the olden Singapore to experience life as our forefathers had and learning how various communities in Singapore celebrate birthdays.

Apart from Children's Museum, what other initiatives is MCCY looking into, to create additional opportunities for our young ones to understand our arts and heritage through play and learning experience.

Is MCCY working with MOE and PMO's Made for Families to explore more collaborations with a view to inspire more of our children to pursue arts as their passion, as well as deepen their knowledge of Singapore's tradition, traditional heritage and culture, and at the same time, encourage more family-bonding opportunities?

*Sector Capability Building in Arts*

**Ms Tin Pei Ling:** *(In Mandarin)* [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Mr Chairman, to promote local arts and culture, arts and cultural practitioners are indispensable. During the pandemic, they have faced severe challenges. Most of them are self-employed, without the support of an organisation. They would inevitably be hit hard by the economic downturn. In addition, technologies have been advancing fast. If we can better use technologies, we will be able to expand our reach and grasp new opportunities.

Hence, I would like to ask how the Government has helped arts and cultural practitioners continue to make a living or even make breakthroughs in the past year. How would the Government revitalise and develop the local arts and culture ecosystem, and empower our arts and cultural practitioners?

*Art Spaces and Sector Capability Building*

**Mr Sitoh Yih Pin:** In addition to our plans to build a thriving arts and heritage sector in Singapore, there are essentially two ingredients that will go a long way to help achieve the objectives set out in the plans.

First, it is to ensure that there is adequate infrastructure or arts spaces which will not only add much vibrancy to the sector, but more importantly, support both our arts and heritage practitioners and create opportunities for Singaporeans to come together.

Sir, the Minister shared at last year's MCCY COS debate that one of the focus areas for the sector is to "develop vibrant and inclusive arts and culture spaces to keep up with the emerging trends and better meet practitioners' needs". The Minister gave the example of 45 Armenian Street. Minister of State Low Yen Ling also shared about the Singapore Art Museum at Tanjong Pagar Distripark and the developing arts and culture sandboxes at Kampong Java.

Such art spaces are important as they are key enablers in the overall ecosystem and support a diverse set of multi-disciplinary practitioners in their respective areas of practice.

I therefore invite the Minister to share more about MCCY's plans to add, update and diversify our arts spaces in order to support the arts and heritage sector.

Next, investments in the arts and heritage sector's capabilities are crucial in developing a globally relevant and resilient ecosystem and workforce, which will drive our creative economy.

At the last MCCY COS debate, it was shared that there will be a strong drive towards digitalisation and the harnessing of digital technologies in order to create new opportunities for the sector. The Arts and Culture Digital Roadmap was launched early last year to support arts and culture stakeholders and practitioners in assessing their own digital readiness and learn of possible solutions and opportunities available to support their work.

Self-employed persons (SEPs) form a core segment of the talent in our arts and culture landscape. However, in order for them to thrive in and contribute to the sector, there is a need to ensure that they have adequate support in order to continually build on their skills and also improve their working conditions.

Minister of State Low Yen Ling announced at the COS debate last year that the National Arts Council (NAC) would increase opportunities for capacity development of SEPs, work with industry partners to better ensure protection and working conditions for SEPs and pilot new ways for SEPs to create new value in the arts sector and beyond.

I therefore invite the Minister to share MCCY's plans to build on the capabilities of our arts and heritage practitioners, as well as its efforts to strengthen the entire ecosystem; and further, to also share what kind of further assistance will be offered to SEPs to support employability and help them build a sustainable career in the arts.

**The Chairman:** Minister of State Low Yen Ling.

**The Minister of State for Culture, Community and Youth (Ms Low Yen Ling):** Mr Chairman, our arts and heritage are central to our Singapore identity and bring us together as one people.

The resumption of various physical events and large-scale gatherings will allow MCCY to make further strides towards shaping a bold and resilient arts and culture sector. We seek to achieve this in close partnership with the arts community and fellow Singaporeans.

In the past year, I have engaged with our practitioners and fellow Singaporeans to hear and learn more about their aspirations for Singapore's arts and heritage scene. One of the common themes to emerge is the wish for an inclusive and forward-looking landscape where our arts and culture can continue to grow and flourish.

Mr Sitoh Yih Pin, Mr Xie Yao Quan, Ms Tin Pei Ling and Mr Raj Joshua Thomas – they have all asked about our plans for the arts and heritage sector moving forward. Let me begin by sharing about the next iteration of Our SG Arts Plan and Our SG Heritage Plan.

2.15 pm

Our SG Arts Plan, which was first launched in year 2018, has since inspired Singaporeans from all walks of life, connected communities and reflected our unique Singapore identity to the rest of the world.

We launched the Sustain the Arts Fund, in short called stART, to encourage giving to small arts organisations. The fund has benefited 22 small art organisations just in the last financial year, including Reverberance, which is a Chinese wind-percussion ensemble that seeks to inspire the community through traditional arts. The stART Fund also supported Legend: The Beginnings (传说之 人之初), which brought the art of Chinese orchestra to our audiences by retelling Chinese folklore through an immersive experience that combines music with story narration and animation.

To grow our audiences, we supported and delivered a range of programmes like Arts in Your Neighbourhood and Silver Arts, which brought arts experience to neighbourhoods and older Singaporeans, as mentioned passionately by many Members earlier during their speeches.

We also launched initiatives like the Arts x Tech Lab in 2021. This has fostered, especially during COVID-19, vibrant collaboration between the arts and tech sectors for innovative experimentation, and also deepened the arts industry's digital capabilities in art-making and presentation of arts.

Five years on, our arts master plan is being refreshed to respond to the challenges of a post-COVID-19 environment. We will better leverage technology and the use of data to catalyse new possibilities for our practitioners, for our arts organisations and fellow Singaporeans. We will widen our base of partners as MCCY works closely with the arts and culture sector to shape a bright and exciting arts and culture scene. Let me elaborate on what the updated master plan will seek to do.

Firstly, NAC will aim to develop a connected society through the arts. We envision the arts linking our society across all key aspects of our life. Mr Raj Joshua Thomas asked about our plans to develop spaces for communities to connect with one another. I want to assure him we will expand touchpoints for the arts by offering more arts activities in parks, in community and lifestyle spaces which are readily accessible. To complement this, NAC will support research efforts to grow evidence on the social impact of the arts.

Ms Hany Soh spoke about the importance of creating opportunities for our young to learn and pursue their passion for the arts, and we agree with her. NAC, National Heritage Board (NHB) and our cultural institutions currently offer a wide range of arts and heritage events and programmes for families with young children. These include National Gallery Singapore (NGS)'s Children's Biennale, NHB's Children's Season, as well as initiatives via NAC's arts and culture nodes.

NAC's funding towards major art companies also supports outreach efforts to children, such as the Singapore Repertory Theatre's division called The Little Company.

We encourage parents to enrich their family life by supporting and by participating in all these initiatives. We will also deepen our collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MOE) on the Museum-Based Learning and Arts Education Programme, to provide our students with hands-on experiences as they learn about Singapore's arts and heritage.

Secondly, we will further enhance access to the arts. We aim to develop Singapore into a distinctive city with accessible spaces and precincts for our people to enjoy the arts where they live, work and play.

To this end, NAC has embarked on a study to map out existing arts infrastructure in Singapore. This ongoing effort will bring Government agencies and private stakeholders together to grow vibrant precincts.

NAC, too, will aim to grow a flourishing and globally-connected creative economy for the arts, as mentioned by Minister Edwin Tong, through new business models, development pathways and internationalisation opportunities. It will also continue to support local arts practitioners so that they can reach international audiences and gain recognition overseas. I will elaborate on some of these initiatives later in my speech.

Mr Chairman, our Singapore heritage is a unique one that we are proud of. We will launch Our SG Heritage Plan 2.0 this year and build upon the progress we have achieved so far. Let me recap the key milestones.

Today, our Hawker Culture is inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the ICH of Humanity. We have established The Stewards of ICH Awards to recognise excellent practitioners.

Besides three new community galleries, we also piloted the Street Corner Heritage Galleries in Balestier, Kampong Gelam, Little India and Chinatown. In recent years, the Padang, Fort Siloso and three Singapore River bridges were gazetted as National Monuments to preserve locations of significant history.

Looking ahead, I am happy to announce that our Heritage Plan for year 2023 to 2027 will focus on enhancing our Singapore legacy in four key areas – identity, community, industry and innovation.

Under identity, we will find new ways to reflect the many layers of our Singapore story and its connections with the rest of the world. Apart from efforts, in the area of archaeology, we will encourage content-based and object contributions from the public and offer more opportunities for Singaporeans to co-create exhibitions. In addition, we will expand the National Collection to cover the realm of design, as mentioned by Minister Edwin Tong.

Moving forward, NHB will work with other agencies, including Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and National Library Board (NLB), to collect works of contemporary Singaporean designers and architects and, potentially, from the region. We can all look forward to an upcoming exhibition on the works of Andrew Gn. He is one of Singapore's most prolific fashion designers – at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) later this year.

At the community level, we will work with Singaporeans from all walks of life to co-create more heritage touchpoints, like holding festivals and organising cultural programmes. In particular, we hope to have more youths join us, like volunteer Mr Ng Wee Liang, who helped to document heritage businesses as part of NHB's Kampong Gelam Citizen Engagement Project.

To grow our heritage industry, we will share our rich Singapore story with a wider regional and global audience through a range of initiatives, like forming new platforms to showcase our traditional crafts and highlighting our culture and heritage overseas. We will also continue to strengthen the sustainability of our heritage sector through the ongoing Organisation Transformation Grant (OTG), which encourages heritage businesses to adopt innovative projects.

As part of Our SG Arts and Heritage Plans, we will continue to bring arts and heritage closer to fellow Singaporeans and in our everyday environment. We will work with citizens and agencies to introduce public artworks and co-develop heritage programmes.

Mr Sitoh Yih Pin and Mr Darryl David had asked about our plans to update our arts spaces to better support our practitioners. We remain committed to developing user-centric and inclusive arts spaces, particularly for emerging arts groups and practitioners.

Last year I shared about NAC and Singapore Land Authority (SLA)'s plans to refurbish and pilot arts and culture sandboxes at Kampong Java. After NAC's focus group discussions with key stakeholders, it was agreed that Kampong Java should be a sandbox and multidisciplinary venue for artists to experience and incubate works of different art forms. It should also remain an accessible and affordable space for artists. I am happy to share that renovations of the five double-storied units will start soon with the target for completion by year 2024 – that is, next year.

Let me now turn to innovation efforts to transform our heritage platforms and services.

The pandemic has spurred digital innovations which have brought new opportunities and wider audiences to the sector. As part of Our SG Arts and Heritage Plans, NAC and NHB will introduce various digital initiatives to transform the way we enjoy and learn about our arts and heritage.

Later this month, NAC will launch a beta version of a one-stop digital platform for audiences to discover, to share and to book arts and culture events. This platform will also help cultivate and deepen interest in the arts amongst Singaporeans. As a start, it will feature arts and culture events in the museums under NHB, the National Gallery Singapore and Esplanade, and offer users personalised recommendations. More features will be rolled out progressively over the year.

Further, we will work closely with our practitioners as well as private stakeholders to further drive the adoption of digital technologies and solutions across the arts and heritage sector. For example, NAC will work with UOB on the UOBNAC Acceleration Programme for the Arts, which seeks to help artists and organisations build on their business and financial competencies. NAC will continue to organise the next edition of "Arts Matters" this year, which aims to facilitate interdisciplinary and cross-sector learning with technology and commercial partners, such as Branded.

As technology continues to permeate our lives and artistic expressions, the rise of the metaverse will open up new doors of opportunities for our arts and culture sector. I am glad to announce that NAC will establish the Alliance for Action for Project Arts Metaverse this year to partner and co-create digital solutions with our stakeholders for this new world of possibilities. NAC will leverage the Metaverse to showcase Singapore as a distinctive city for the arts. As more opportunities in the metaverse are unlocked, there is new potential for audience development, for monetisation and for the growth of innovative technologies for the arts.

In addition, NHB will partner the private sector to explore the development of new digital strategies for the heritage sector. This will include ways to digitally preserve and document our heritage assets, and how to augment visitor experiences at the museums through Virtual Reality experiences, 3D displays and artificial intelligence. We are looking forward to harnessing technology to create new experiences and enhance our appreciation of arts and culture.

Apart from leveraging new platforms, MCCY will deepen investments in our people. I agree with Ms Tin Pei Ling and Mr Sitoh Yih Pin that we must develop the capabilities of our workforce and the resources needed for a thriving creative economy. Allow me to quickly outline our strategy.

Firstly, we will not let up on our efforts to professionalise the arts sector and support the growth and development of our practitioners in their career pathways. Since last year, NAC has been working closely with the sector on the competencies needed for the arts practitioners to grow in their career. I am glad to share that NAC is developing Competency Frameworks to help practitioners hone their skills, starting with one for those in arts education, technical theatre and production. This framework, which will be launched later this year, will be accompanied by roadshows to guide practitioners on the recommended skillsets.

NAC will also be collaborating with our Institutes of Higher Learning and continuing education and training centres to strengthen career pathways in the arts and culture sector. This includes embedding digital skills as part of the students' Pre-Employment Training (PET), and curating resources to support the organisational processes and transformation of our arts groups.

Secondly, we will boost our support for arts SEPs, many of whom were affected by the pandemic. The Arts Resource Hub (ARH), which was formed in 2019 to support the SEP community, has since gained over 2,500 subscribers and held close to 76 talks and workshops. It currently oversees three co-working and performance spaces.

NAC is currently reviewing the ARH to better support the needs of SEPs. It will embark on a series of deep dive sessions with various arts SEPs to gain insights and their feedback on the development of the ARH and aim to enhance the hub progressively this year. This follows my meeting last month with a group of more than 30 arts SEPs during which we discussed how we can better support them and co-create solutions together.

Chairman, I would like to extend my gratitude to every one who came forward to share their hopes for our arts and culture.

Together, we have carved a vision of an inclusive, accessible and vibrant arts and heritage sector that will anchor and inspire Singaporeans for years to come. MCCY is committed to partner our practitioners and Singaporeans to realise this collective vision for a distinctive, connected and creative Singapore.

**The Chairman:** Mr Baey Yam Keng.

*Refreshing our Youth Spaces*

**Mr Baey Yam Keng:** Sir, the plan to develop Somerset Belt was first announced in May 2020. It aims to be a vibrant youth precinct to build youth identity and to support their aspirations. I had the privilege to co-lead the Somerset Belt Working Panel and the team worked with various stakeholders and held many engagement sessions to put up a Somerset Belt Masterplan in 2020. I, and I am sure that other Singapore youth as well, will be very interested to hear from the Ministry on what are the upcoming developments of Somerset Belt and the programmes that we can look forward to.

2.30 pm

**The Chairman:** Xie Yao Quan, you can take both cuts together. Not here. Ms Hany Soh.

**Ms Hany Soh:** Mr Chairman, he is back.

**The Chairman:** You can proceed. I will call him again.

*Racial and Religious Harmony Circles*

**Ms Hany Soh:** Okay. During the COVID-19 period, we saw many religious organisations come together and partnering with the local community with a common purpose of serve the helpless and the vulnerable in the neighbourhood.

Post-COVID, this community spirit continues to strengthen. Take, for example, the Church of St Anthony (CSA) in Woodgrove. For the past two years, CSA has been partnering with Woodgrove Division through the People's Association (PA) to organise Harvest of Love events at least twice a year where the parishers and our grassroots volunteers would distribute care packs to low-income residents. Recently, the Harvest of Love initiative took place within the Church where low-income families of all races and religions were invited to have lunch at the Church with choir performances and presented with festive rations, care packs thereafter.

Since the Racial and Religious Harmony was renamed in 2022, with the vision to create networks of trust that unite people regardless of race or religion, what has been the progress thus far in establishing cooperation, harmony, respect and trust in the community? What role can the Harmony Circle play to encourage more of such ground-up initiatives —

**The Chairman:** You can wrap up, please.

**Ms Hany Soh:** — within each local Division across Singapore.

**The Chairman:** Mr Xie Yao Quan, both cuts.

*Outward Bound School*

**Mr Xie Yao Quan:** Apologies, Chairman. Chairman, Outward Bound School (OBS) has been a significant and memorable experience for many Singaporeans growing up. It teaches great resilience and courage to step out of one's comfort zone and it brings students from different schools together. I am glad that OBS programmes have resumed, post-COVID-19. Can the Ministry share its plans for OBS programming, going forward, as well as plans for the new OBS campus on Coney Island?

#### *Harmony Circles*

Sir, MCCY has refreshed the Inter-racial and Religious Confidence Circles or IRCCs for short, into Racial and Religious Harmony Circles to strengthen racial and religious harmony in every community. Can the Ministry provide an update on its progress and share its plans for how many circles in the year ahead?

**The Chairman:** Miss Cheng Li Hui, you can take both cuts together, please.

#### *Harmony Circle*

**Miss Cheng Li Hui:** Thank you. Chairman, Singapore is a multi-racial and multi-religious society. Our unity in such diversity is something we have worked hard to achieve and have been working hard to improve. Racial and religious harmony is the lynchpin of our vibrant and rich Singapore culture.

Last year, MCCY announced that the IRCC would be renamed as the Racial and Religious Harmony Circles. The new Harmony Circles will serve as a platform to promote racial and religious harmony here, with presence in every Constituency. Can MCCY provide an update on its plans for the Harmony Circles and how it would ensure that it would be able to expand its outreach to reach more communities?

#### *Mental Health Network*

Mental health conditions at times manifest themselves less than physical ones. For this reason, they are harder to detect and can be difficult to treat. Mental health patients have traditionally also suffered more stigma.

While we have seen increasing support for mental health, we should also strive towards its equability. We have all known, seen or heard of people hard labouring under mental health conditions. However, there perhaps remains some whose conditions are not known to themselves or others.

Chairman, no one should ever have to suffer alone. Can MCCY share what initiatives there have been and will be rolled out the SG Mental Well-Being Network?

#### *Support SG Well-being – Company of Good*

**Mr Edward Chia Bing Hui (Holland-Bukit Timah):** Mr Chairman, the Budget has provided assurance, especially to lower-income Singaporeans who are already living close to the edge of their financial capabilities.

While we ensure that Singaporeans' physical well-being is taken care of, we must not neglect their mental well-being. As physical and mental health are intertwined, there can still be targeted support measures and platforms to prioritise mental well-being.

As such, there are three questions I would like to raise to MCCY.

First, the launch of SG Mental Well-Being Network in July 2022 is a testament of ongoing efforts in increasing mental health literacy, awareness and serves as a platform for others seeking appropriate resources. Could MCCY provide an update on the progress of the SG Mental Well-Being Network? On the focus of community and peer support, what are the programmes that have been consistently run to cater to the needs of the community?

Second, in the recent update of National Voluntary and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC)'s framework with an emphasis now on corporate purpose instead of corporate giving, what are MCCY's priorities and resourcing of this programme? Also, with greater complexity in our business environment today, there is an impetus for companies to contribute more actively in doing good and this begins with the employees. Is well-being of employees a key developmental factor in a Company of Good programme?

Lastly, EnterpriseSG Scale-up SG scheme has been promising in supporting local companies with high-growth potential. As these companies grow, is NVPC also working closely with EnterpriseSG to help ensure that the Scale-up SG scheme does not only assist companies in profit-making potential but also their triple "P" bottom line?

#### *Encouraging Businesses to Give Back*

**Mr Mark Chay:** Mr Chairman, as a business owner and entrepreneur, I believe in giving back to the community.

In many sport-forward countries, businesses adopt sports organisations or teams. In return, the companies increase their brand awareness and get access to athletes and coaches for their organisation and staff development.

The Business and Institution of a Public Character Partnership Scheme (BIPS) was introduced in 2016 to encourage tax deductions on qualifying expenditures for businesses that give back through volunteerism and service provision. Therefore, I request that MCCY provide information on how it motivates enterprises to participate in charitable causes, such as volunteering or donating to our community and charities.

**Ms Yeo Wan Ling:** Sir, can I take my two cuts together?

**The Chairman:** Yes, please.

*Extension of Business and IPC Partnership Scheme*

**Ms Yeo Wan Ling:** Caring for our vulnerable is a whole-of-society effort and I am encouraged to see many corporates do their part in this area. In 2016, BIPS was introduced to further encourage employee volunteerism and to foster a culture where businesses and employees support social needs and build a caring and cohesive society.

Majority of the towkays and SMEs I speak with, are unfamiliar with the programme, even though they have extensive corporate responsibility programmes. In addition, those who know of the programme, shared that the application process can be tedious, causing both the SSA and the company to give up on the application halfway. Another towkay shared that given the manpower crunch faced by many SMEs now, volunteering time could be something that is challenging.

Can the Ministry provide an update on how the BIPS uptake has been and how the Ministry may promote and share the programme better. Can the scheme also be expanded to include other forms of support that a corporation can make?

*Alliance for Action on Corporate Purpose for Business*

The Alliance for Action (Afa) on Corporate Purpose rallies Singapore's business leaders and corporations to combine their resources and to serve community needs and realise our vision of a caring and inclusive society.

The corporate sector is a critical force for good. It can uplift the communities that they operate in, protect employee well-being, promote ethical supplier partnerships and ensure environmental sustainability. For example, in Punggol, our local supermarkets sell at cost, organic vegetables from our volunteer farms, work with the NTUC on fair workplaces practices, promote plastic recycling with our cleaning vendors and contribute essentials to our vulnerable families.

Indeed, we need more purpose-driven businesses in our communities. They can anchor much goodness in our neighbourhoods. I ask the Ministry to give an update to the Afa. What are the Ministry's plans to encourage the growth of purpose driven business entities and how will the Ministry support our businesses to better give back to the communities they serve?

**The Chairman:** Minister of State Mr Alvin Tan.

**The Minister of State for Culture, Community and Youth (Mr Alvin Tan):** Chairman, we are building ecosystems for impact together with our community, our corporates and our youths. Please let me start with mental health and mental well-being.

We launched our Singapore (SG) Mental Well-being Network in July, to destigmatise, raise awareness of and drive partnerships on mental health and mental well-being. It is doing so in the following ways.

First, it is helping remove the stigma for individuals to seek help. Last year, some members of this House and I shared our past struggles in a YouTube video called "99 Singaporeans sharing their darkest moments". This was one of the Network's contributions to a series of initiatives for World Mental Health Day 2022, which aimed to rally people to build a caring society for everyone, particularly those who are struggling.

Second, the Network has started regular Partners' Networking Sessions to share ideas and aspirations.

Third, the Network is working with our Health Promotion Board (HPB) and National Youth Council (NYC) to fund and mentor 20 youth teams to tackle mental health issues in Season 4 of our NYC's Youth Action Challenge.

Fourth, the Network has set up six Mental Well-being Circles across Singapore. These Circles strengthen community and peer support by equipping volunteers with the skills to care for themselves and also for others.

Last week, I met Mr Kenny Sng, who is leading efforts to ensure grassroot volunteers can recognise and support those with mental health conditions in Bukit Batok East. He shared that his Well-being Circle is a key platform for his volunteers and leaders to collaborate with partners, such as the Singapore Anglican Community Services, Club Heal and the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC).

Over the next year, Kenny, along with 400 other trained volunteers and around 30 partners from other Mental Well-Being Circles, will continue to serve their communities. We will learn from these Circles and then scale up our efforts in other locations.

Similarly, our Racial and Religious Harmony Circles, previously known as IRCCs, have strengthened ties and built trust among our ethnic and religious communities.

Miss Cheng Li Hui, Ms Hany Soh and Mr Xie Yao Quan asked about the progress and plans of our Harmony Circles.

We are just getting started. A key part of our refresh is to help Harmony Circles digitalise and diversify their composition, so they continue to be relevant and effective at fostering harmony within our communities and we have a few encouraging examples.

Encik Fazlur Rahman leads Kembangan-Chai Chee's Harmony Circle. He was actively involved in our IRCC Refresh Workgroup last year and he is working to make his Harmony Circle more digital and more diverse.

Eunos Harmony Circle leaders, Nazath Faheema and Benjamin Tan, are recruiting youths and equipping digital skills into their Harmony Circle. They recently used social media to urge their communities and the public to stay united following reports that several youths had been radicalised online. We hope more Harmony Circles will follow in their footsteps.

Next month, more youths, females and representatives from other religious and community organisations will start their new term as Harmony Circle leaders. They will receive training on mediation, interfaith and digital media. If you are a religious organisation or an individual passionate about interfaith and inter-racial work, please join our Harmony Circles.

We will also dedicate July as our Racial and Religious Harmony Month from this year. Apart from celebrating Racial Harmony Day on 21 July, our Harmony Circles and other community partners will organise activities throughout July to celebrate and promote racial and religious harmony.

Community initiatives, like our Mental Well-Being and Harmony Circles, need volunteers and coordination. Mr Mark Chay, Ms Joan Pereira, Mr Mohamad Fahmi and Mr Xie Yao Quan asked how our SG Cares movement can make volunteering more sustainable and effective.

SG Cares Volunteer Centres coordinate efforts to channel volunteers and donations-in-kind to unmet local needs. In the past year, the total number of volunteers and beneficiaries grew by 67% and 50% respectively. This means our Volunteer Centres have engaged 45,000 volunteers and served 340,000 beneficiaries in the past year.

We are working with the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) and Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) to strengthen our Volunteer Centres, to help them better equip their community partners with capabilities in volunteer management, training, partnerships, digitalisation and communications.

We are also encouraging more professionals to contribute their skills and expertise, by engaging SG Cares National Intermediaries, across the legal, accounting, engineering and chartered secretaries sectors.

Individuals, schools, and corporates who wish to volunteer your time and talents, please find out more at nearest Volunteer Centre on our SG Cares website.

Just as our communities are coming together for impact, our corporates are also stepping up. Corporate volunteering is on the rise. The median percentage of employee volunteering has increased from 25% in 2017 to 50% in 2021. Ms Yeo Wan Ling asked about the take-up and plans of the Corporate Volunteer Scheme. From 2016 to 2021, businesses made 164 claims and took up about 4,700 volunteering opportunities under this scheme.

2.45 pm

When I met Q&M Dental CEO Dr Ng Chin Siau two weeks ago, he shared how his Cares Committee has launched multiple community projects, including working closely with People's Association to set up free dental clinics for the underprivileged. And he plans to do more.

Mr Edward Chia, Mr Mark Chay, Mr Xie Yao Quan and Ms Yeo Wan Ling asked how we are encouraging more businesses to get involved. This January, National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC) and the Singapore Business Federation Foundation launched the Corporate Purpose Framework and Blueprint.

This blueprint serves as a common guide for businesses to implement and track their progress in becoming a force for good in society. Thus far, 47 organisations have committed to our blueprint. In line with this blueprint, NVPC has also refreshed its Company of Good programme for companies. Mr Edward Chia will be pleased to know that the programme will include aspects of employee well-being and that we are exploring how more businesses can adopt our blueprint's goals with partners such as Enterprise Singapore and the Singapore Business Federation.

We have also enhanced the Corporate Volunteer Scheme, including expanding the scope of the scheme's qualifying volunteering activities. We hope that this improves adoption of the scheme and strengthens partnerships between corporates and Institutions of a Public Character.

Businesses can also contribute through mentoring. Last December, Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong and I launched the Mentoring SG movement, which builds upon our Mentoring Alliance for Action (AfA). Mentoring SG has gathered more than 1,000 mentors and 13 corporate partners, like Micron and DBS, to create over 4,000 mentoring opportunities.

We are setting up the Mentoring SG Office to drive this work by growing expertise, resources, and mentoring opportunities at the national level. If you are a company leader, you can one, offer job tasters through the National Youth Council; encourage your employees to sign up as mentors on [mentoring.sg](https://mentoring.sg), and partner our Mentoring SG Office to contribute to our mentoring community, offer your venue spaces, amplification channels, and also other expertise. Chairman, in Mandarin, please.

*(In Mandarin): [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).]* As the saying goes, what is taken from the community is given back to the society. While pursuing business interests, businesses should also proactively undertake social responsibility to co-create a harmonious sustainable society.

Businesses can benefit from adopting more purpose-driven models and establishing the culture of mentoring.



For example, more consumers are choosing to support businesses that generate value for the wider community, including their suppliers and workers. Staff, on the other hand, become more motivated, productive and stay longer with their companies when they know that their company is making an impact on society and investing in their growth. This is especially when senior staff care and look out for their younger colleagues as part of the company's mentoring culture.

We recognise that it is not always easy to shift existing business practices. But we have seen how many different businesses have risen to the occasion to become purpose-driven and contribute back to society.

More importantly, businesses do not have to do it alone. We encourage more companies, including SMEs, to convene, to discuss how to contribute more, collaborate with the Mentoring SG Office or work with the trade and clan associations in developing your initiatives.

*(In English):* In addition to efforts by our community and corporates, our youths are also playing their part. Please let me elaborate how we are helping them to do so, in Malay.

*(In Malay):* [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Throughout the pandemic, our youths were confined to their homes during key life stages such as their schooling years, or when they first joined the workforce. It also caused many to lose opportunities to gather in person and experience the outdoors.

As such, we will renew our urban and natural spaces such as Somerset Belt and OBS@Coney to provide youths with more opportunities to gain important experiences, grow their networks and take on leadership roles.

This also complements our youth leadership programmes organised by NYC, such as the Our Singapore Leadership Programme which has been expanded to include younger youth leaders from MOE schools and Madrasahs, that Minister Edwin Tong spoke about.

*(In English):* Our youths need space and programmes to do their thing. At last year's COS, I shared how we have been gathering ideas from youths to transform our Somerset Belt to support their ground-up initiatives.

Through our Realise Your Somerset Project (RYSP), we have supported 24 projects and reached out to more than 18,000 youths across different causes in 2022. Recently, I caught up with Arthur Choo, whose RYSP project, Green Arena, promotes sustainable arts by building drums with repurposed materials. Green Arena has held virtual sessions and physical art installations and workshops at the Somerset Belt. Participants from Season 1 of the RYSP also returned as facilitators and co-creators at the workshops, sharing their experiences with latter cohorts.

Mr Baey Yam Keng asked for an update on the physical development of our Somerset Belt. This year, our youths will take greater ownership of the precinct and get to decide how it would look like, operate and also develop future programmes. Youths keen to shape this space and programmes, at our Somerset Belt can check out our Youth Action Plan website for more details soon.

Moving beyond urban spaces, we are also creating opportunities for our youths to experience the outdoors together again.

Many of us have been through an Outward Bound Singapore (OBS) programme many, many years ago. These outdoor adventure education, OAE programmes, build confidence and resilience. It also brings people of diverse backgrounds together, forging friendships while overcoming challenging outdoor activities.

Mr Xie Yao Quan asked about our plans for OBS. We have resumed the five-day residential format of the MOE-OBS Challenge (MOC) programme for Secondary 3 students since January this year.

Last month, I visited our OBS campus and joined students from Dunearn Secondary School, School of the Arts and Westwood Secondary School in their land and sea activities. The students were tanned, sunburned, exhausted but had great attitude! They enjoyed making new friends and overcoming challenges together as a team.

We expect current construction works for our new OBS campus on Coney Island to be completed by 2024. This new eco-friendly campus will provide enhanced outdoor activities for our youths, particularly through the MOC programme, which aims to serve our entire cohort of 40,000 Secondary 3 students annually.

As we resume OAE for our youths in their formative years, these spaces must provide a safe and enabling environment. That is why we set up the Outdoor Adventure Education Council in September. This Council will strengthen our OAE sector and support the development of safe outdoor activities.

Since its inception, the Council has started work in three key areas: Standards and Certification, Professional Development, and Safety and Compliance. This year, it will start developing a national OAE standards and certification scheme. It will also institute a risk assessment and management system to strengthen safety culture across the sector.

Mr Chairman, during my recent visit to OBS, I climbed the 20 meter Inverse Tower. It is taller than the 20 meters suggests. While I appeared confident on the outside, in fact, I was, very nervous! Fortunately, I had two impressive youths. My climbing buddy and belayers, Xara and Nadia. Their support and encouragement enabled me to climb the tower.

Leaving Pulau Ubin inspired by our youths, I hope our community partners and purpose-driven businesses will also inspire our youths to become community and corporate leaders and make their mark in our renewed youth spaces. Like how Xara, Nadia and I conquered the Inverse Tower as a team, I believe that when different groups of our society join our unique strengths together, we can play our part to move Singapore forward, and upward together.

**The Chairman:** Mr Mark Chay, you can take your four cuts together.

#### *Onward to Paris 2024*

**Mr Mark Chay:** Singapore is gearing up for the 2024 Paris Olympics and Paralympics, but what plans has MCCY made to ensure that our athletes are well-prepared for qualifying events or other events such as the Southeast Asian Games, ASEAN Para Games, Asian Games and Asian Para Games this year?

Additionally, mental health and resilience are essential factors in success in sports. What provisions have been made to ensure that aspiring national athletes have been given adequate emotional and psychological support?

Lastly, we must recognise the critical role of National Sports Associations and Sports Scientists in continuing to nurture future generations of Olympic hopefuls. What resources is MCCY providing to these groups to allow them to do their best work?

#### *TeamSG Gives Back*

It cannot be gainsaid that sports can bring about positive change. It unites, empowers and motivate us. The Olympic spirit has long been associated with camaraderie, excellence and altruism. And many athletes have used their privilege and status as a platform for lasting social change.

Our athletes strive to be the best on the field, on the court, in the pool, and use their platforms to do good in society.

Last year at the COS, TeamSG Cares was unveiled – a project which allows present and former athletes to give back to those in need or start charitable initiatives for causes close to their hearts. I would like to ask MCCY for an assessment of how successful this initiative has been and what further initiatives MCCY is taking to promote philanthropy within our sports culture.

#### *Disability Sports Masterplan*

Accessing sports facilities is vital in advancing the health and well-being of society and providing an avenue for social interaction through team sports. Therefore, I am requesting MCCY to give updates on how PwDs and the elderly feature in considerations pertaining to the construction of new sports centres and plans to restore existing ones. I am also asking MCCY to share how coaches and trainers can be better prepared to coach individuals with disabilities.

#### *Singapore Sports Hall of Fame*

The Singapore Sports Hall of Fame was set up to recognise and honour outstanding sports personalities who have succeeded in their respective disciplines. These sports icons are celebrated for their dedication, determination and passion for excelling and reaching the pinnacle of competitive sports. In addition, they serve as beacons of inspiration for current and future generations of athletes in Singapore.

Many Hall of Famers reached the pinnacle of sports with scarce resources. Today, our athletes are better funded and resourced, and the expectations have shifted. It may be time to consider a revision of admission criteria. In addition, Singapore has also produced its fair share of sports administrators and world-class coaches and judges who have contributed globally. Would MCCY consider including coaches and administrators in the Hall of Fame? Can MCCY share its plans for the Sports Hall of Fame and how it intends to activate its inductees?

In conclusion, I would like to thank MCCY, its statutory boards and agencies for inspiring Singaporeans through the arts and sports, building a confident and resilient society and making Singapore the best home for everyone.

**The Chairman:** Mr Darryl David. Take both cuts together.

#### *Sports Hall of Fame*

**Mr Darryl David:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. The Singapore Sports Hall of Fame was set up in 1985 with 24 inductees to honour our top sportsmen and sportswomen. The first Hall of Fame ceremony was held in 1999, and by 2003, 50 athletes have been inducted into the Hall of Fame.

A review of the induction criteria was conducted in 2003 and a critical change was made – except for Olympics and Paralympics medallists, all other athletes must have served another eight years in any sporting capacity on a national level from the time of them winning a qualifying medal to the time of their induction.

The change in induction criterion resulted in a 12-year gap between the last inductee in 2003 and the next inductee in 2015. To date, based on the data provided by teamsingapore.sg, there are 57 inductees in the Singapore Sports Hall of Fame.

While one could argue that a Hall of Fame inductee must be an exemplary individual, who has not only demonstrated outstanding sporting performance but also a track record of service, imposing eight years is somewhat arbitrary and rather excessive. With this criterion, an outstanding athlete, who for whatever reason, is unable to complete eight years of service will not be given the recognition he or she deserves in the Hall of Fame. Not being able to complete the mandatory eight years of service does not reduce the fact that the athlete has contributed to the local sporting scene, or the international sporting scene, for that matter.

Would MCCY consider a review of the induction criteria given that the last review was almost 20 years ago?

3.00 pm

#### *Greater Inclusivity through Sport*

Access to sports for Persons with Disability (PwDs) has always been an important feature in Singapore. Back in 1973, several Ministries and eight other organisations came together to jointly found the Singapore Disability Sports Council (SDSC) to encourage PwDs to take up sports as a form of rehabilitative therapy and as a means to realise their potential. Since then, various initiatives have been implemented to further encourage PwDs' access to sports and to encourage PwDs to take up sports at a competitive level.

In 2016, in conjunction with Enabling Masterplan 2, the Disability Sports Masterplan (DSMP) was launched by the Committee of Disability Sports to promote an inclusive society through sports. The DSMP had three thrusts: (a) to expand access and opportunities for participation; (b) to develop organisational and professional capabilities and (c) to build awareness and strengthen affinity. Each of these thrusts, in turn, has specific recommendations that underpin them.

It has been some years since DSMP has been introduced. Can MCCY share with us the progress of these initiatives under these thrusts and the take-up rate of the various programmes? What are MCCY's plans to further these initiatives? Are there gaps that exist in the current programmes and how does the Ministry intend to plug these gaps?

Finally, one of the sub-committees of the Committee of Disability Sports is chaired by Ministry of Education (MOE). The sub-committee's mandate is to explore how to increase participation opportunities in sports amongst students with disabilities in mainstream schools and in special education (SPED) schools. Can MCCY share perhaps how it has been working with MOE to integrate these programmes into schools, especially mainstream schools, when the needs of students are more diverse?

**Miss Cheng Li Hui:** Chairman, in 2016, the Disability Sports Master Plan (DSMP) was launched to further improve Persons with Disabilities' access to sports. PwDs deserve the same level of access to the sports that they wish to pursue as non-PwDs. This is regardless of whether the objective is for leisure or to compete at national, regional or international level. What is MCCY doing to support and provide more opportunities for aspiring para-athletes, especially for those who wish to pursue sports at a competitive level?

Can MCCY also elaborate on its strategies to provide more inclusive opportunities through sports in the next phase of the Master Plan?

**The Chairman:** Mr Xie Yao Quan, you can take both cuts together.

#### *Inclusive Sports*

**Mr Xie Yao Quan (Jurong):** Thank you, Chairman. Chairman, we must work at keeping our sports landscape ever more inclusive. Can the Ministry provide an update on its progress and plans for disability sports as part of the Enabling Master Plan 3.0, both in terms of the uptake and participation in community sports by Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) as well as the growth of and support for high-performance disability sports?

#### *Sports and Fitness Professionals*

Sir, sports and fitness professionals, including coaches, instructors and personal trainers, are a vital part of our community sports and fitness ecosystem in Singapore and will play an even more significant role under the Healthier SG movement. What are the Ministry's plans to help these professionals refresh and update their skills and build new capabilities?

**The Chairman:** Senior Parliamentary Secretary Eric Chua.

**The Senior Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Culture, Community and Youth (Mr Eric Chua):** Sir, sports help us unwind and stay healthy. It helps us keep fit physically and mentally and encourages social interactions. This is why sport should continue to be a part of our Singaporean way of life.

Ms Hany Soh, Mr Xie Yao Quan and Mr Mark Chay asked about sports facilities that will be constructed and upgraded, as well as plans to make these facilities accessible to Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and seniors.

Easy access to sporting facilities will help us adopt sports as our way of life and we have been pursuing this through the Sports Facilities Master Plan (SFMP). The master plan is a multi-year effort to refresh infrastructure, increase residents' accessibility to sports facilities and encourage social mixing.

We will ensure that our rejuvenated and new facilities cater to seniors and Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). To date, SportSG has retrofitted swimming pools in six ActiveSG centres with ramps for wheelchairs and has set up eight inclusive ActiveSG gyms. We are on track to make all 27 gyms inclusive by 2026.

Through SFMP, residents in Jurong will have greater access to sporting facilities when the ActiveSG Sport Village @ Jurong Town opens in the first half of 2023. Residents in Sembawang and Punggol East will also enjoy Sport-in-Precinct (SIP) facilities, with further projects expected to open in Nee Soon Central, Woodlands and Gek Poh in the coming months.

The rejuvenation works at Delta and Choa Chu Kang Sport Centres are also in their final stages. Both centres are due to open in the first half of this year. We will also bring more integrated sport and community hubs to residents. One such example launched last year is Bukit Canberra, which will feature facilities, such as an indoor sports hall, swimming pools, gym, fitness studios, a hawker centre and a polyclinic.

We also launched the roadshow for the Toa Payoh Integrated Development last month. This would be an exciting lifestyle destination comprising event spaces, sporting facilities, such as a gymnasium, badminton courts, a revamped swimming complex as well as a new library. These will be ready by 2030.

Sport Singapore has also been working closely with MOE to expand the Dual-Use Scheme (DUS) to provide Singaporeans with convenient access to schools' sports facilities. To date, these include around 230 school fields and indoor sports halls.

Mr Xie Yao Quan asked what the Ministry's plans are to help exercise professionals refresh and update their skills. Indeed, certified exercise professionals with relevant accreditations play an important role, especially as more Singaporeans adopt sport as a way of life. To help professionalise the sector, we will launch the National Registry of Exercise Professionals (NREP) in three phases.

From April this year to March next year, we will support our exercise professionals to upskill by providing free membership to the National Instructors and Coaches Association (NICA). This provides them with access to training support and grants, amongst other benefits.

To register, exercise professionals need to produce the following: (a) Standard First Aid with AED and CPR certification; (b) code of ethics acknowledgment; and (c) relevant fitness or exercise accreditations, such as personal trainer, yoga, zumba or general ones like group fitness instructors.

From April next year, Government agencies which hire a sizeable number of exercise professionals, including Sport Singapore (SportSG), People's Association (PA), Health Promotion Board (HPB) and Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), will only hire exercise professionals registered under NREP. This will ensure a certain level and consistency of qualifications amongst all exercise professionals who conduct programmes that are run by Government agencies for the public.

A later phase will see NREP strengthening the accreditation framework. Further details of the requirement for a Basic Exercise Science certification and continuous education framework will be released by SportSG in due course. Through NREP, we hope that exercise professionals will be equipped with the relevant accreditations to raise the overall quality and safety standards of the fitness industry.

Sir, sport ignites national pride. Mr Mark Chay asked about our plans to ensure that our athletes are well-supported in 2023; a packed year where our athletes will represent Singapore at the Cambodia 2023 SEA Games and ASEAN Para Games, as well as the deferred Hangzhou 2022 Asian and Asian Para Games. Behind the scenes, our preparations for the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris 2024 are also in full swing.

Grooming a champion is a multi-year effort and journey that requires holistic support as the athlete progresses. We work closely with the National Sports Associations (NSAs) and design this support on a multi-year basis so that we can continually identify, develop youths and prepare a pipeline of athletes who can excel at the major Games.

With this in mind, we will send around 570 athletes to the 2023 SEA Games. For many sports, we are sending more athletes than in previous overseas SEA Games. This speaks to our aspirations to provide more opportunities to our athletes, especially our young ones, to achieve their full potential.

A lot is asked of our athletes. In terms of psychological support, Singapore Sport Institute (SSI) and National Youth Sports Institute (NYSI) proactively monitor our athletes' mental health. Ahead of major competitions, dedicated teams of sport psychologists and Athlete Life personnel provide one-on-one consults and impart skills to athletes so that they can cope with the mental and emotional issues that they may face. I call upon all Singaporeans to rally together and give TeamSG athletes our fullest support.

Today's sporting heroes are often legends of tomorrow. Mr Darryl David and Mr Mark Chay asked whether MCCY intends to review the criteria for athletes to be inducted into the Singapore Sports Hall of Fame and whether MCCY would consider the inclusion of coaches and administrators.

Chairman, the Singapore Sport Hall of Fame was set up in 1985 to honour our top sportsmen and sportswomen, instill a sense of pride among Singaporeans and inspire our budding athletes to emulate the outstanding performances of its inductees.

However, it is not only strong medal performances that we wish to recognise. First, several of our top athletes make sustained contributions to their sport and the community after they retire from active competition. We appreciate and recognise these contributions on top of their achievements as active athletes.

Second, the success of our athletes and the overall development of Singapore sports owe much also to the contributions of sports administrators, coaches and scientists, amongst others. To honour such individuals who have made extraordinary contributions over a significant period of time, we will include a new category for Sport Leaders in the Singapore Sport Hall of Fame. And to elevate the Singapore Sport Hall of Fame as the sporting-equivalent of our Cultural Medallion, I am also pleased to announce that our President will give out the awards starting from this year.

Finally, Chairman, sport can be a force for good. As Singapore evolves to be an even more inclusive society, sport must continue to play a key role in our community and our way of life.

Mr Mark Chay asked how MCCY promotes philanthropy within our sports culture, including through TeamSG Cares that was set up in April last year. Through TeamSG Cares, former and present athletes can participate in various giving initiatives or start their own charity or social pursuit for causes close to their hearts.

Since the launch of TeamSG Cares, our athletes have been involved in weekly initiatives. These include sport clinics, such as boxing, bowling and football, weekly food distribution activities, school engagements, talks to underprivileged youths and fund-raising activities for the President's Challenge.

SportSG's SportCares initiative also uplifts underserved and underprivileged communities, and I would now like to share how the programme has helped this young man, Abdul Thaslim.

Thaslim is the eldest of three siblings. His parents are both blue-collar workers and he has a younger sister with disabilities. Thaslim started out in SportCares in 2013 with the Saturday Night Lights football programme and later moved to the SportCares' CareRunners Programme when he discovered his passion for running.

Growing up, finances often weighed on Thaslim's family. At one point, Thaslim even contemplated discontinuing his studies so that he can help support the family financially. With encouragement from his mentors in the SportCares programme, Thaslim pressed on. He, subsequently, enrolled into the Youth Coaching Development Programme to fulfil his aspirations of becoming a coach. Inspired by those who had modelled the values of volunteering to him, Thaslim is now an active youth coach at SportCares and even volunteers with his local Youth Network. I am extremely proud of Thaslim and wanted to share this story with every one to showcase how sport can actually be a force for good.

Miss Cheng Li Hui, Mr Darryl David, Mr Mark Chay and Mr Xie Yao Quan asked about efforts to improve accessibility and inclusion in sports and how the Disability Sport Master Plan (DSMP) can spur greater sport participation amongst persons with disabilities (PwDs).

Launched in 2016, DSMP has contributed to increased sport participation rate among Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), with the participation rate rising from 28% in 2015 to 50% in 2019.

3.15 pm

Together with partners such as the Singapore Disability Sports Council (SDSC), Singapore National Paralympic Council (SNPC) and Special Olympics Singapore, SportSG has done so by introducing a whole range of programmes, including learn to-play programmes and the annual Play Inclusive campaign, reaching out to more than 18,000 PwDs to date.

The Play Inclusive Campaign, supported by the Ministry of Education (MOE), promotes inclusion through shared sporting experiences. Through Play Inclusive, both persons with and without disabilities from the Special Education and mainstream schools train together before participating in unified sports such as goalball.

To better prepare coaches and trainers to coach individuals with disabilities, the DSMP has further developed professional coaching and technical expertise in disability sports. In partnership with the International Paralympic Committee, SportSG has facilitated training in coaching and technical courses and grown the pool of disability sports coaches in Singapore. CoachSG has incorporated modules on disability sports, such as inclusive coaching practices, in its Community Coaching curriculum. Sport Singapore has also worked with the Republic Polytechnic on Continuing Education and Training courses to upskill more than 200 coaches in disability sports coaching since June 2020.

Sir, I spoke about our young Boccia athlete Aloysius Gan's indomitable human spirit in my MSF speech last week. Today, I would like to talk about this young man again, but this time from a sporting perspective.

Aloysius was introduced to Boccia when he was just seven years old, when his teacher noticed his cognitive abilities and recommended that he take up Boccia as his CCA, even though Primary 1 students typically could not join.

In 2021, Aloysius made his international debut at the Asian Youth Para Games.

Aloysius went up against the top ranked South Korean player – who was actually selected out of a few hundred under-21 players – in the pool stage and lost to him. But they had a rematch in the finals and Aloysius managed to beat him and grabbed his first gold medal in an international competition.

During the Boccia World Cup in November last year, Aloysius also beat more experienced players who were ranked fifth and eighth in the world to advance to the quarter finals. So, merely over a year after his international debut, Aloysius ranks 18 in the world now. And that is a 16-year-old we are talking about. Truly an extraordinary achievement, truly inspiring.

With the recent launch of the Enabling Masterplan 2030, it is timely that we review the outcomes of our DSMP initiatives and update our strategies to better support PwDs in sports participation.

This year, we will hold focus group discussions with partners and stakeholders to harvest more ideas of how we can do so.

By updating the DSMP and with the support of all our stakeholders, we will work towards our 70% target for sport participation amongst PwDs under the Enabling Masterplan 2030.

Sir, last weekend I was at the National Para Swimming Championships held at the OCBC Aquatics Centre. World class venues. World beating para swimmers. And I met many of them, both current and retired: Sophie Soon, her brother Colin, Paralympic bronze medallist, Theresa Goh, Darren Chan, Wong Zhi Wei and many proud parents, and family members who were all there, rooting for the para swimmers.

But in an ideal world that I envision, there would be many, many more spectating and cheering on our para swimmers. Allies of the disability community, whether or not they have a person with disability in their families or otherwise.

In an ideal world, we should see persons with and without disabilities, enjoying a game of basketball together, able-bodied individuals enjoying goalball with visually impaired players, without curious stares, without the awkward moments of being overly polite.

In fact, in an ideal world, a "para-athlete" should perhaps simply be called an "athlete"! Sir, in Mandarin, please.

*(In Mandarin):* [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Sports can raise the fitness level of our citizens and bring people from different races, ages, occupations and family backgrounds together as they exercise or participate in sports together. Every Singaporean including people with disabilities (PwDs) can live fulfilling lives through sports.

The Disabilities Sports Master Plan (DSMP) launched in 2016 has given many PwDs more opportunities to participate in sports and cultivate an active lifestyle.

In the past few years, we have also achieved some success in promoting sports for PwDs. The proportion of sports in which people with and without disabilities participating together has gradually increased, promoting mutual understanding and social inclusion. However, there is much more we can do.

The Para Sports Academy will continue to cooperate with partners to create more opportunities for PwDs to participate in sports events, develop ways for them to participate in competitive sports to comprehensively showcase their competitive abilities, and nurture more athletes with disabilities.

We will continue to hold focus group discussions to gather feedback, promote barrier-free environment to support the needs of different PwD groups and provide them with more opportunities to participate in sports.

Last Saturday, I was at the National Para Swimming Championships held at the OCBC Aquatics Centre. World-class venue, world-class swimmers. I met many great para swimmers, both current and retired athletes as well as parents and family members who were there to cheer on our para swimmers.

Participating in this activity has moved me a lot. In an ideal world I envision, there would be more spectators cheering on our PwD swimmers. Even though they may not have a PwD in the family, they could still be allies of the PwDs.

In an ideal world, we should see people with and without disabilities enjoying sports together without curious stares or awkward moments of being overly polite.

In an ideal world, a para-athlete should simply be called an athlete!

*(In English):* Sir, to conclude, there is a saying that goes "staying active starts with me". However, if you allow me to be grammatically incorrect, I would like to say that sport being a Singaporean way of life starts with "I", three "I"s for that matter. "I" for Invigorating – where sport can help us to unwind and stay healthy; "I" for Inspiring – where sport can inspire a nation; and "I" for Inclusive – where sport can truly be a force for good.

**The Chairman:** Clarifications. Ms Joan Pereira.

**Ms Joan Pereira:** Thank you, Chairman. I have a clarification for Minister of State Tan. He shared about how our SG Volunteer Centres (VCs) coordinate efforts to match the volunteers and the beneficiaries, and this has grown.

On the medical escort initiative that I spoke about just now in my speech, can Minister of State share how the VCs are working to match the patients with the volunteers and how is MCCY strengthening the VCs to help them in this job to do well?

**Mr Alvin Tan:** Sir, volunteers are the core of the SG Cares Volunteer Networks and also the SG Cares Volunteer Centre (VC).

So, in this regard, the SG Cares VCs, I mentioned earlier on, they work very closely with a multitude of partners, including the social service agencies, social service officers, Agency for Integrated Care (AIC), nursing homes and so on to help to match volunteers with patients, for example.

What the SG Volunteer Centres do then is to coordinate both the training and deployment of relevant volunteers with the requisite skillsets and then match them with the beneficiaries that are also registered with the SG Cares Volunteer Centres.

I also wanted to say that we will then provide the SG Cares Volunteer Centres with digital tools, such as the Volunteer Management System so that they can better match volunteers as well as beneficiaries. There is an upcoming SG Cares Digital Kampong to help to improve the deployment of volunteers through ground needs.



This Digital Kampong will filter volunteer opportunities and better match the needs and interests or preferences of beneficiaries and volunteers, and also provide voluntary welfare organisations, non-profit organisations with the tools to better manage their volunteers, including on medical escorts.

**The Chairman:** Ms Tin Pei Ling.

**Ms Tin Pei Ling:** *(In Mandarin)* [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] I thank the Ministers for the replies earlier. I would like to ask, first, arts and culture can carry our history and values, and serve as a bridge across different generations and languages. I would like to ask what communities the Government has engagement and collaboration with to promote the development of local arts and culture, and ensure that Singaporeans, young and old, can access and appreciate arts.

Second, to some arts practitioners, new technologies such as metaverse are rather new concepts. How can the Government help them master these new skills and grasp new opportunities? How can the Government revitalise and develop our diverse local arts and culture, and empower our arts practitioners and the entire ecosystem?

**Ms Low Yen Ling:** Mr Chairman, in Mandarin.

*(In Mandarin):* [Please refer to [Vernacular Speech](#).] Chairman, I would like to thank Ms Tin Pei Ling for her two questions. I agree with her that arts and culture are a valuable asset that can bring people together. All of us would remember that during the COVID-19 pandemic, various creative artistic expressions form a positive energy that supports us as we unite to overcome the pandemic.

Building on this foundation, MCCY will partner Singaporeans and arts and cultural practitioners based on the upgraded Our SG Arts Plan and Our SG Heritage Plan 2.0 to shape a more resilient, inclusive and forward looking future.

Her second question is about digitalisation. MCCY will continue to invest in our arts and cultural practitioners in two ways as they are important in developing our creative economy. Firstly, we will ramp up efforts to professionalise the arts sector. Secondly, we will look to strengthening support for arts self-employed practitioners.

I agree with Ms Tin Pei Ling's two speeches just now. Arts come from life. We hope that arts can be closer to everyday life. Hence, we will cooperate with different institutions to provide arts practitioners more space for artistic creation, so that arts can be showcased in everyday life. Preserving our heritage and innovation in arts requires continuous efforts of the individual, society and the Government.

**The Chairman:** Mr Sharael Taha.

**Mr Sharael Taha:** Thank you, Chairman. I would like to thank Minister Edwin Tong for clarifying the players from the SFAs, Sports School, Active SG, FA Football Academy and private clubs would be scouted and channelled to the National Development Centre and this would be the national framework to choose the best players for the national development centre.

I have a few clarifications for Minister Tong.

Are the scouted talents then taken out of their current academy or schools and placed into the National Development Centre or would they concurrently train in their current clubs and also the development centre?

And given that the National Football Development Centre would comprise of youths aged between 13 to 17, will this cannablise the talent for Singapore Sports School and will they be playing in the National School Games (NSGs)? If not, will it dilute them, the quality of football in our National School Games? And when will we launch this development centre?

**Mr Edwin Tong Chun Fai:** I thank the Member Mr Sharael Taha. We intend to have a broad number of pipelines, all feeding into the National Development Centre (NDC). The intention is for the players to play with their clubs, so if you are with the JSSL, one of the private clubs, or ActiveSG Football Academy (AFA), you continue playing predominantly with the clubs.

3.30 pm

But on occasion, we bring the squads together, I mentioned that earlier, so that they get to know one another, their playing styles, how they work together as a team, be further developed and enhanced, play competitive matches during the international FIFA seasons, so that they can have the ability to experience competitive matches as a cohort.

And over time, this will become our national age group international teams – so under 13, under 15 and so on.

To answer Mr Sharael Taha's question, they remain with the clubs where there will be primary training, or they remain with the SFA at which they compete on a regular basis. And I mentioned earlier also in my speech that we intend to set up the youth leagues, perhaps in the coming year or two, so that on a regular basis, the clubs will have a regular active competition at a high level so that they can play at that level, week in, week out, then on occasion, come together with the NDC.

In terms of the cannibalisation, the intention is ultimately as I said, to have multiple pathways, so you can stay with the clubs, you can stay with the academies, but you have to converge. And the best chance of succeeding to build a strong pipeline for the national team is to have this convergence, because we are too small as a country and too small as a pool to have different district pipelines and pools which do not converge.



So, the structure and the framework that we have in mind is one where all these clubs and academies converge. It is not just if you play in the SFA that you will be recognised. If you are in a private club, you could also be scouted and picked up and put into the NDC. But the idea is to have a full convergence of this into one structure, one framework, one cohesive path and for that team to come together on a regular basis to play.

I also mentioned just now in my speech that this is not something that will be static. If you make it in one season or one year, it does not mean that you make it in the subsequent years. You have got to continually earn your place. There has to be competitive tension so that you can come in, you can be dropped out from year to year.

**The Chairman:** Mr Sitoh Yih Pin.

**Mr Sitoh Yih Pin:** Thank you, Chairman. I have one question for Minister of State Low Yen Ling, because she spoke about the arts masterplan. Can the Minister of State share how our SG Arts Plan for 2023 to 2027, differs from the previous one?

**Ms Low Yen Ling:** Mr Chairman, I want to thank the Member, Mr Sitoh Yih Pin, for his clarification. Minister Edwin Tong had earlier briefly outlines some key differences in the next iteration of our SG Plan, the difference between the 2023 vis a vis the 2018. Broadly speaking: number one, there is greater focus on a creative economy; two, greater audience centricity; and the third is the emphasis on technology and innovation.

Very quickly, allow me to elaborate to Members. Firstly, in the area of creative economy, we will over the next five years, work very closely with the sector and the adjacent sector to encourage cross-pollination between the arts sector and the adjacent creative sectors like media, design and so on, to drive more employment and also career progression opportunities for our artists and practitioners. We will also work closely with the arts community to help develop competencies needed to tap on all these opportunities, such as IP management skills, thT was briefly touched on by Minister Edwin Tong earlier as well.

The next one, audience centricity, is very important because in the last three years, we have seen how technology really helped the works of our arts and culture scene to travel beyond Singapore. Other than enjoying a musical performance now, if it is also curated like a production, the audience in other areas in the regional countries and global market can also enjoy it.

That is why, in the next five years, we will also focus on greater audience centricity, helping our artists and practitioners and arts organisations to reach audiences in a wider scope. So, we will support the arts sector in developing that area, for example, in order to do so, NAC will look at training and capability development for marketing and data analytics, because it is important for us to know our audience and to also know what our audience want to read and enjoy and view. This can be also organised in collaboration with training providers and industry partners. NAC will also cultivate partnerships with other creatives in the adjacent sectors that I talked about earlier, to create new arts experiences in a hybrid form and even through gamification.

The third one is technology and innovation. Earlier on in my speech, I talked about the beta version of the one-stop portal for us and I hope all the Members and your residents will try this portal when we roll this out.

We will expand possibilities to create and present art through technology. And again, that is helping our practitioners reach more audiences. These include one, art making using digital tools, online art businesses, audience development through the metaverse that I talked about, and place-making. We will also encourage the use of digital spaces to expand possibilities for presentation and incorporating arts into the everyday lives of Singaporeans so that we can enjoy arts and for arts to remain accessible in our space and precincts where we live, work and play.

**The Chairman:** Mr Mark Chay.

**Mr Mark Chay:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. I would like to thank Minister Edwin Tong, Minister of State Low Yen Ling and Minister of State Alvin Tan and Senior Parliamentary Secretary Eric Chua for their responses. I have the following clarifications.

What will be the focus for the disability sports landscape?

Second, with the upgrading of Toa Payoh Sports Development and Queenstown, are we able to capture some of the heritage that are a part of these precincts in the upgrading of these facilities?

Third, with respect to the registration of fitness professionals, are private gyms and enterprises also impacted? With respect to this registration, how will SafeSport be part of this?

The last point is on Unleash the Roar! It is great to see that some of the coaches will be going away to see some of the best practices. So, maybe some of the other sports that will also be part of this going overseas to find best practices. But also, as we look outward, we should also look inward. Perhaps some of our best sports or NSAs that have been world beaters, like in table tennis, sailing and aquatics, could also lend its part to Unleash the Roar! and help to share some of these best practices with soccer academies.

**Mr Eric Chua:** Chairman, I thank the Member for his clarifications. I think I will take the first three clarifications that he has made.

Regarding focus, the Member was also himself a para coach, so I am certain he would know that, in the landscape now, what is probably the utmost priority is to make sure that what is available in the mainstream or able-bodied space of talent ID is popularised in the disability space. By that, I mean the concept of sport matching. Disability occurs on a very wide spectrum and across different disability types. So,

what you want the person with disability to realise is that there is a sports that suits me, not just in terms of my temperament and also abilities, but also one that suits my condition. We want to make that concept availed to all persons with disabilities and their caregivers. And from there, we can then see how we can look at who are the talents, who is showing promise, and then pick up the next generation of para-athletes from there. That is the first clarification.

On heritage, definitely, because the locations we are talking about are Toa Payoh, Queenstown. Queenstown is the first satellite HDB town in Singapore. As the local Member of Parliament in Queenstown, when I was having conversations with Sports Singapore, I was also making requests on how we can weave in some of these heritage components into the new make-up of the stadium. Things like for instance, activities or events that were held in the 1960s and 1970s that were really high point events, that marked what Queenstown really was. For instance, water polo. It was very much a part of Queenstown Swimming Complex in its earlier days. So, I think these will be considered for sure.

On the professionalisation of exercise professionals, I think our intent is to make sure that there is a broad standardisation and there is a broad sense of accreditation across all exercise professionals in the industry. So, yes, some of the private gyms might be impacted. But I think the intent, if you stick to our original mission, it is really to make sure that there is some quality assurance, some basic standards that are being enforced in this industry.

**The Chairman:** Minister Edwin Tong; I think he wants to respond as well.

**Mr Edwin Tong Chun Fai:** I was going to respond to Mr Mark Chay's last question. Yes, the intention is to make this available. In fact, it is already in place. Mr Chay, as an ex-professional athlete and also top notch coach, would know that we regularly send our coaches, players, athletes, overseas to gain best practices, learn and to be immersed in an environment at the very highest levels and bring back that learning back to Singapore.

We will have that and we will continue to do that. Certainly, the learning and thinking behind how we professionalise sport, which is common across all different sports, whether it is in football, aquatics or sailing as you mentioned, we will harness that learning. That is why Singapore Sport Institute (SSI) is there, that is why Sport SG is there, to centralise that learning and to deploy as far as possible to other sports so that other sports can also gain from this know-how and the learning.

I did not manage to answer one of Mr Sharael Taha's questions, which was when the NDCs would commence. We intend to start the NDCs by this year and the indicative date is July this year. So, all the different strands and pieces that I spoke about earlier in my speech, the scholarship, sending players overseas on foreign scholarships, local scholarships, sports school, centralising the training with the SFAs, the coaching syllabus, pushing everyone through a centralised, cohesive pipeline, which is the NDC, all of these pieces will commence this year.

**The Chairman:** Ms Hany Soh.

**Ms Hany Soh:** Thank you, Minister, Ministers of State and the Senior Parliamentary Secretary for through your sharing, very heartening to hear that there are many wonderful initiative that are being rolled out, especially creating more opportunities for our little ones to embrace sports, arts and culture.

This question is posed to Minister of State Alvin Tan, it is with relation to OBS. So, in our effort to promote SG Made for Families as a nationwide movement, I wonder if OBS can explore expanding its programmes to also include family adventure camps to strengthen bonding amongst family members, reignite the quality family time together especially between the youths, their parents and their younger siblings.

**Mr Alvin Tan:** The focus of OBS currently is on the MOE Outdoor Adventure Programme, which is targeted at the 40,000 annual cohort of secondary 3 students. So, we try to leave the parents out of it, even though I think many parents want to be there with their 15-year-olds, but I think the point is really to get them to be out there on their own to experience the outdoors, the challenges.

That said, there are also many other kinds of activities by private and other providers that are available. Last week, while wearing my MTI hat, I talked about Lazarus Island, today I talked about Pulau Ubin and Coney Island. Lazarus Island, of course, we are going to do a light touch activation there as well, so there are many different activities for families to enjoy the great outdoors together and bond.

**The Chairman:** Mr Darryl David.

**Mr Darryl David:** Thank you, Chair. Two clarifications for Minister Edwin Tong. First clarification is on the Sports Hub. I think Minister, you talked about how we are going to have a lot more community events at the Sports Hub. I would like to ask if the Government will consider having perhaps the biggest community event of the year there, which is the National Day Parade. It was held there before. And now that the Government has taken it back, I would hope that the Government could consider holding it there on a more regular basis, perhaps, Minister.

The second question has to do with the plans for the growth and development of our young footballers. It is really heartening to hear the plans that the Minister has shared. Minister, you spoke earlier about the possibility of early enlistment for some of these players. I would like to ask for consideration of going to the other end of the spectrum, which is delayed enlistment for National Service. Let me be clear, I believe very strongly that every eligible Singapore male should serve National Service, what I am suggesting, however, is, if there are talented boys in this squad and I know we have done delayed enlistment for swimmers before, whereas swimming uses an absolute

standard, the question is, if we have boys who are good enough, if let us say for example, Liverpool Youth would like to sign one of our players or two of our players, and they have the chance to go on and play in the Premier League, would this be a consideration for us to allow them to pursue that path, that career, put Singapore on the map as it were? But of course, never forgetting that they have to serve their National Service liabilities, eventually in the future.

I believe South Korea does this for some of their players. They let them play first, then they always have to come back. Would Minister shed some light if that is an option for some of our talented boys to go out there and carve a name for themselves and for the country as well?

**Mr Edwin Tong Chun Fai:** I think I answered the first question when I delivered the Ministerial Statement on the Sports Hub. So, the answer is yes, it will be considered. But you also have to bear in mind that when the National Day Parade goes to the Sports Hub, or indeed, any venue, there is a long lead time and there is also a long time in which you need to then spend to remove the staging area, the performance area, holding areas and so on. And that in turn then leads to an amount of time that is lost before as well as after the event. In a situation where we are trying to activate the Sports Hub with events like what I have mentioned, then this downtime will be a problem.

Bearing these questions in mind and also balancing the different needs, we will, of course, welcome the National Day Parade at the Sports Hub. But we need to think of how best to deploy the asset.

3.45 pm

On the Member's second question, this is again not new. You can consider early enlistment. That is within our control and within most of the athletes' control. In terms of deferring National Service or going in later, these are broader questions that need to also engage other considerations.

The fact of the matter is that National Service is for everyone who is eligible and obliged to serve. That is a paramount obligation and we have to ensure that we work within this framework to ensure that, at the same time, we look at the National Service as a framework but how do we navigate within that system.

We have found actually, in our own experience and we have collected several data points, it is not just for footballers but athletes as a whole, that typically, an early enlistment where available, is preferable to the athletes' development. If you enlist early, sometimes at the age of seventeen-and-a-half, close to 18, about 21 months. By the time someone is 19 plus, before 20, he would likely be out there competing and the runway can then be uninterrupted.

We had many athletes, in table tennis, Loh Kean Yew was one example as well. He did it early and then he put his energies into training, competing overseas, getting qualification for Olympics which he was successfully doing.

So, obviously, you got to look at the different athletes in the sport they are in and also whether you are taking part in a sport that is individual or one which requires the whole team to be present. Because if you are talking about a team event, then it may make less sense for just one or two individuals to enlist at a different time as opposed to the rest of the team. All these are factors that we take into consideration.

**The Chairman:** Mr Sitoh Yih Pin, would you like to withdraw your amendment, please.

**Mr Sitoh Yih Pin:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. I cannot help but notice the broad smile on your face when Liverpool was being mentioned. But on a more serious note, Sir, I like to thank all Members who contributed their cuts and the MCCY team for their responses and speeches. Mr Chairman, with that, I beg leave to withdraw my amendment.

**The Chairman:** Is the hon Member given leave to withdraw his amendment?

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

The sum of \$1,924,977,500 for Head X ordered to stand part of the Main Estimates.

The sum of \$440,834,500 for Head X ordered to stand part of the Development Estimates.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY – HEAD F (PARLIAMENT)**

**(A united and caring society)**

**The Chairman:** Head F, Parliament. Mr Cheng Hsing Yao.

3.48 pm

*Effective Parliament*

**Mr Cheng Hsing Yao (Nominated Member):** Chairman, I beg to move, "That the total sum to be allocated for Head F of the Estimates be reduced by \$100."

Chairman, my cut is about how to ensure that our Parliament will always be an effective and respected political arena. This is important because our Parliament is where laws are passed and the country's future is charted.

Looking around the world, we can find many examples of parliaments, or equivalent legislatures, degenerating into dysfunction. Many of them are of older and purportedly exemplary democracies that the rest of the world should aspire towards.

We should be careful who we emulate. Proceedings at many of these legislatures or parliaments sometimes look like "reality TV". Legislators or parliamentarians shout, interrupt, fight or do whatever they can to prevent a genuine debate.

What is more concerning is the amount of half-truth rhetoric that can be promulgated inside and outside of the parliaments. Some of these ideas even garnered enough support from their people to change the course of their country, often for the worse.

The parliament is a reflection of the society, but it also sets the tone for the society. A dysfunctional parliament tends to go hand-in-hand with a society that is highly cynical and distrusting of their politicians and public institutions.

Singapore's heterogeneous society is still relatively cohesive. There is a small number of people who are cynical of everything and extreme in the way they see the world. However, the vast majority of our people are reasonable, rational and still exhibit a high level of trust. This majority is precious, they are the ones who will decide on the fate of the country.

In Singapore, we will have to continue to deal with all sorts of divisive issues, such as on wealth, foreigners, as well as race and religion. We need to be careful with the kind of ideas we promulgate. We may unwittingly cause fissures, as well as erode trust and cohesion in our society.

Having rigorous debates on policies and issues in the parliament is important. Bringing up alternative viewpoints is critical to preventing us from groupthink. However, there is a constructive way to do it. We can promote critical thinking among our populace, but not cynicism.

I would thus like to propose four principles to guide how issues should be brought up and debated within our Parliament: one, being factually accurate; two, highlight both benefits and trade-offs; three, being constructive; and four, avoid creating polarisation.

I hope that the Singapore Parliament will always remain functional and respected by our people. I hope our parliamentarians can be an inspiration for Singaporeans on how to engage with each other on difficult subjects. *[Applause.]*

**The Chairman:** Leader.

**The Leader of the House (Ms Indranee Rajah):** Mr Chairman, I thank the Nominated Member for his very pertinent speech, which was both thoughtful and incisive. It serves as a timely reminder of the importance of an effective Parliament in service of the nation and an opportunity to reflect on what being an effective Parliament really means.

Parliament is where the Government is held to account, where issues of national importance are debated and matters of public interest are explained. It is where our laws are made and also where the direction of the country is set and the future of our people is determined, through the Bills and the Motions that Members of Parliament vote on.

Parliament is also the place where our national identity and the character and soul of our society, is shaped through the values we espouse, words we say and the decisions we make.

Thus, what we say and do in Parliament has a profound impact on the lives of Singaporeans and the future of Singapore. This is a privilege that must be exercised responsibly and in the best interest of our people and our country.

We have seen what has happened in other countries, where their Parliaments are gridlocked, hamstrung or so hopelessly at loggerheads that the country cannot move forward. It is their people who pay the price. We must avoid going down that path.

So, what makes for an effective Parliament?

Certainly, there must be robust debate, so that policies and recommendations can be scrutinised and assumptions tested. But the quality and integrity of the debate also matters greatly. Mr Cheng suggested four principles to guide how issues should be brought up and debated. I agree with these and would add one more. But let me first address the four principles he raised.

First, factual accuracy. This is important because decisions are made and opinions are influenced based on our deliberations. That is why Members are expected to be able to substantiate any statements made by them, if challenged. But beyond factual accuracy is the deeper underlying principle of honesty and integrity, because people must be able to trust what we say. Lying in Parliament, or to any Committee of Parliament, erodes trust and debilitates our democracy. What is less obvious, but equally dangerous and which we must also guard against, are half-truths, misleading statements and innuendos which suggest false things without actually saying so.

Second, highlighting benefits and trade-offs. While some things are straightforward, a good deal of the issues confronting Singapore today are manifold and complex. Oversimplifying them does not give our people a true picture. Given our small size and limited resources, there are always trade-offs. Advocating a position, without at the same time highlighting relevant downsides, does our people a disservice. Advancing generous policies, without telling people how they will be paid for or where the money to pay for it ultimately comes from, creates false hopes which will ultimately end in disappointment. Seeking easy options, such as using up the reserves without good justification rather than creating sustainable revenue streams, undercuts our resilience and chips away at fundamental principles of prudence and responsibility.

Third, being constructive. It is par for the course that matters brought before the House should be vigorously debated, questioned and scrutinised. However, at the end of the day, irrespective of our political stripes, we must have the same overriding objective, which is to improve the lives of Singaporeans and help Singapore prosper.

Fourth, avoiding polarisation. We have seen the effect of this in other Parliaments and the outcomes are not pretty. Perhaps, the most shocking example of this was the US Capitol attack on 6 January 2021. Those were scenes we never expected to see in America, the bastion of democracy. But they happened and they happened as a result of deep polarisation. We can have different political philosophies. But what we must avoid in our Parliament is the politics of division. There is a difference between reflecting genuine ground concerns, which is our duty and the deliberate stoking of anger and creating or intensifying of divides, which is not only wrong, but dangerous. We must always strive to bring people forward in unity, even with diversity.

I would add one more point to Mr Cheng's four principles, which is that we should consistently endeavour to do what is right and avoid a descent into populism.

As Members of Parliament, we not only have to reflect the concerns of the people and give voice to the aspirations of Singaporeans, but also exercise our judgement on issues and speak up for what we believe in, even if it is contrary to the prevailing or most popular view, to persuade our fellow Members and the public at large as to what is the best solution to a difficult problem, or what is the most important issue before the country.

Parliament's deliberations should shape the public discourse and set the direction for the country. We have to think not only about the here and now, but also for the future. We must think not only for one group, but for all Singaporeans. Singapore is unique and special and we have come this far because our Parliaments before us did what was right for us. That task is now ours and we must discharge it to the best of our abilities.

**The Chairman:** Any clarifications? Mr Cheng, would you like to withdraw your amendment.

**Mr Cheng Hsing Yao:** Thank you, Leader of the House for the response to my cut. Chairman, I beg leave to withdraw my amendment.

**The Chairman:** Is the hon Member given leave to withdraw his amendment?

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

The sum of \$48,528,000 for Head F ordered to stand part of the Main Estimates.

The sum of \$2,883,200 for Head F ordered to stand part of the Development Estimates.

### COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY – HEADS B, C, D, G AND Z

3.59 pm

**The Chairman:** I shall now deal with the remaining Heads of Expenditure in respect of which no amendment stands on the Order Paper Supplement. In respect of the Main Estimates, they are Heads B, C, D, G and Z. I propose to take those Heads of Expenditure en bloc.

Question, "That the sums stated for Heads B, C, D, G and Z which appear in the last column of the schedule of estimated expenditure under the Main Estimates on page 6 of Paper Cmd 20 of 2023 stand part of the Main Estimates," put and agreed to.

**The Chairman:** In respect of the Development Estimates, they are Heads B and C.

Question, "That the sums stated for Heads B and C which appear in the last column of the schedule of estimated expenditure under the Development Estimates on page 7 of Paper Cmd 20 of 2023 stand part of the Development Estimates," put and agreed to.

### COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY – TOTAL SUMS FOR MAIN ESTIMATES, DEVELOPMENT ESTIMATES AND RESOLUTIONS

Question, "That the sum of \$116,137,508,800 shall be supplied to the Government under the Heads of Expenditure for the Public Services shown in the Main Estimates for the financial year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, contained in Paper Cmd 20 of 2023," put and agreed to.

Question, "That the sum of \$34,117,474,300 shall be supplied to the Government under the Heads of Expenditure for the Public Services shown in the Development Estimates for the financial year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, contained in Paper Cmd 20 of 2023," put and agreed to.

**The Chairman:** Resolutions to be reported.

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

**Mr Speaker:** Mr Speaker: Second Minister for Finance.

**The Second Minister for Finance (Ms Indranee Rajah):** Mr Speaker, I beg to report that the Committee of Supply has come to certain resolutions.

First Resolution reported –

That the sum of \$116,137,508,800 shall be supplied to the Government under the Heads of Expenditure for the Public Services shown in the Main Estimates for the financial year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, contained in Paper Cmd 20 of 2023.

Second Resolution reported –

That the sum of \$34,117,474,300 shall be supplied to the Government under the Heads of Expenditure for the Public Services shown in the Development Estimates for the financial year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, contained in Paper Cmd 20 of 2023.

**Mr Speaker:** Minister.

**Ms Indranee Rajah:** Mr Speaker, I beg to move, "That Parliament doth agree with the Committee on the said resolutions."

Question put, and agreed to.

Resolutions accordingly agreed to.

## SECOND READING BILLS SUPPLY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

4.04 pm

**The Second Minister for Finance (Ms Indranee Rajah):** Mr Speaker, I beg to move, "That the Bill be now read a Second time."

In accordance with Article 148(1) of the Constitution, Heads of Expenditure to be met from the consolidated fund and development fund, other than statutory expenditure have to be included in the Bill to be known as the Supply Bill. The purpose of the Supply Bill before Members, is to give legislative approval for the appropriations from the consolidated fund and development fund to meet the expenditure for the Financial Year, 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

The Heads of Expenditure and the sums that may be incurred in respect of each Head, are shown in the Schedule to the Bill. These have been approved by the House in the Main and Development Estimates of Expenditure for the Financial Year, 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, as contained in Paper Cmd No 20 of 2023.

The Supply Bill, when approved, will empower the Minister to issue warrants, authorising Expenditure up to the amount of each Head as shown in the Bill to be paid out from the Consolidated Fund and Development Fund. Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

**Ms Indranee Rajah:** Mr Speaker, I beg to move, "That the Bill be now read a Third time."

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Third time and passed.

## SUPPLEMENTARY SUPPLY (FY2022) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

4.06 pm

**The Second Minister for Finance (Ms Indranee Rajah):** Mr Speaker, I beg to move, "That the Bill be now read a Second time."

The purpose of this Bill is to make additional provision in accordance with Articles 148(2) and 148C(2) of the Constitution for expenditure in excess of the sums authorised by the Supply Act 2022. The additional sums have been approved by the House in the Supplementary Estimates of Expenditure for the Financial Year, 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, as contained in Paper Cmd No 21 of 2023. Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

**Ms Indranee Rajah:** Mr Speaker, I beg to move, "That the Bill be now read a Third time."

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Third time and passed.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO THE CHAIR

4.07 pm

**The Second Minister for Finance (Ms Indranee Rajah):** Mr Speaker, we have come to the end of the Committee of Supply (COS) debate. It is customary for the Leader to do a wrap-up before we have a break. Soon, we hope.

Mr Speaker, it has been a long two weeks for Members, not least for yourself, having somewhat less liberty than Members to move in and out of the Chamber.

Over the last two weeks, we had close to 70 hours of debate, 58 Members spoke over the two-and-a-half days of the Budget debate and we have covered 661 cuts over seven days of the COS debate.

With the approval of the Government's fiscal policy for FY2023 and the estimates of expenditure in the COS and the passing of the Supply Bills a few minutes ago, this Parliament has taken an important step forward in positioning Singapore well for the post-pandemic future. The policies and strategies that we have debated and approved will help us navigate a world that is vastly different to the one we knew before the pandemic – a world that is much more complicated and unpredictable, characterised by slower growth, higher inflation, greater geopolitical contestations, fragmentation in the global economy and a looming climate crisis.

Budget 2023 will enable us to adapt more nimbly to this changed world and to secure our future, anchored by a fair, sound and sustainable fiscal plan.

Let me do a quick recap.

Against the backdrop of geopolitical tensions and an evolving world order, we reaffirmed the need to uphold international law and a rules-based multilateralism, whilst maintaining a strong defence to safeguard of sovereignty and security. Russia's invasion of Ukraine serves as a continuing reminder that Singapore's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, must never be taken for granted.

In the face of a looming climate crisis, this Budget builds on previous Budgets and reinforces our commitment to sustainability and strengthens Singapore's climate resilience. In Budget 2021, we unveiled the Singapore Green Plan 2030. In Budget 2022, we took bold steps to raise our national climate ambitions at a time when many countries were struggling to stay the course, including our move to increase the carbon tax. Budget 2023 continues our efforts to work with our businesses, communities and individuals, with a view to achieving net zero by 2050.

Apart from climate resilience, we also discussed food resilience and how to diversify food imports, produce our own food and keep food affordable in the HDB heartlands. Members also spoke about the need for companies and workers to adjust to major structural shifts, including an accelerated green transition, digitalisation, greater economic nationalism and protectionism, and this brings about both opportunities and challenges.

This Budget focuses our efforts on helping businesses and workers ride the winds of change while helping them tide through this period of weaker growth and higher inflation.

On the economic front, we endorsed our approach of attracting high-quality investments and developing new growth sectors, such as sustainability in the tourism and transport sectors, strengthening global and regional cooperation by forging new cross-border agreements with like-minded partners in overlapping areas of interest, such as the digital economy and sustainability, to enhance market access and create new opportunities for our businesses and encouraging economy-wide innovation and extending the necessary bespoke support to help our SMEs grow into globally leading companies through various measures, including the Enterprise Innovation Scheme, SME Co-investment Fund and the Singapore Global Enterprises initiative.

Recognising that economic transformation must go hand in hand with digitalisation, we reiterated the need to build an inclusive Smart Nation. We agreed to empower our people and businesses, especially the less digitally savvy to go digital with confidence in safe and secure online areas or spaces and to build stronger defences against scams, online harm and cybersecurity threats.

We recognise, as we always have, that the end goal of economic growth is to provide Singaporeans with good employment opportunities and wages. To that end, we supported the appointment of Jobs-Skills Integrators to better translate skills training into employment outcomes. To ensure no workers are left behind, we supported the Uplifting Employment Credit, the Enhanced Enabling Employment Credit and the Progressive Wage Credit Scheme, and we agreed to protect all our workers by keeping the workplaces safe and inclusive and to safeguard their future by enhancing retirement adequacy.

In this Budget, we also rightly acknowledged the cooperation, hard work and sacrifices of everyone in our long fight against COVID-19, especially our healthcare workers who soldiered at the frontline of our pandemic response.

We considered how to protect and better support our healthcare workers in their careers. We will apply the valuable lessons learned to transform the Public Service and our healthcare system to serve Singaporeans better.

We approved additional support measures under the Assurance Package and Enhanced Permanent GST Vouchers Scheme with most support extended to the lower-income families. We also topped up the ComCare Endowment Fund to provide additional support to the lower-income families.



Through our endorsement of these moves, we signalled to Singaporeans that they can be assured that we will see them through this challenging period of rising inflation and cost-of-living pressures.

Families, marriage and parenthood took centre stage in this Budget and aptly so, given that the Budget Statement was delivered on Valentine's Day.

We increased the financial support for the early years of raising a child. We doubled unpaid infant-care leave and Government-paid paternity leave, sending a strong signal to fathers of the need for paternal involvement when a child is born and to encourage greater shared parenting responsibilities.

We will also better support parents in balancing their work and family commitments, through flexible work arrangements.

As Minister in the Prime Minister's office, helping oversee marriage and parenthood measures, I also want to add that these measures are just the beginning of an important shift, where the whole-of-society moves to become one that values family well-being and supports caregiving, both for the young and the old and acts accordingly.

We reaffirmed the critical role that early childhood education plays in a child's holistic development and agreed to close the gap in preschool enrollment rates. KidSTART will be scaled up nationwide, and Government-supported preschools will be expanded. We will strengthen the multiple progression pathways in our education system and in our society.

From babies and children, we looked to the other end of the age spectrum and committed to refresh our approach to aged care, anchored on preventive care, to help our seniors age gracefully by staying healthy, active and engaged in their communities. We also topped up the Elder Care Fund and MediFund to provide targeted assistance for seniors with long-term care and healthcare needs.

Every year, there will be one Ministry that receives intense interest and the highest number of cuts. This year was no exception and this year the distinction went to the Ministry of National Development, not surprising with the high interest in housing issues.

The Minister for National Development assured Singaporeans that we will continue to make public housing affordable and accessible, and that we will redouble efforts to deliver keys to those who have been waiting for their Build-To-Order (BTO) flats. We will increase the supply of BTO flats and give additional priority to younger married couples and families who are trying to buy their first home.

Being a nature-loving nation, no animal was left behind either. From flats, we moved on to animated debate on rats, cats and cockerels. This year did not see the appearance of otters or wild boars, but no doubt, they will find their way into future Budgets.

Mr Speaker, as you can see, we have covered much ground in the last two weeks. Now, it remains put all our plans into action. On this note, I would like to thank Members for their active participation and strong support over the past two weeks.

And Mr Speaker, on behalf of this House, I would also like to express our appreciation to you and your deputies for presiding over the proceedings in a fair and even-handed manner, and ensuring the standing orders were observed. We are extremely grateful to the Clerk of Parliament, Deputy Clerk and the other Clerks of Parliament, the Parliament Secretariat and staff, interpreters and translators, all of whom have been working long hours, and tirelessly over the past fortnight to ensure that the proceedings went smoothly. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. *[Applause.]*

4.18 pm

**Mr Speaker:** Due to recent developments, I have seven goals to achieve today, or rather, seven points to make in the wrap-up speech. Firstly, thank you to Leader for her comments and her thanks, I really cannot agree more.

What we do here will not be possible without the quiet work of so many behind the scenes, whether in big or small ways, it matters. Similarly, as we set forth and translate these policies into action, the work of so many on the ground ensure that they are not just words, but deeds.

I had lunch yesterday with our KidSTART team, their families, the children under their Healthy with KidSTART "What's For Lunch?" series. It was sponsored by Prudential. I was hugely encouraged by every parent I spoke to who found the programme so very useful to their parenting journey. We are grateful to our KidSTART practitioners, like Ms Pearl Goh whom I met, who visit them at home to work with them.

And we have partners, like Prudential, who sponsor important programmes like that, are providing food and nutrition for the families. We have folks like Huda Ali, who come onboard as host for cooking programmes, along with Chef Mazlan, to help families learn how to cook in nutritious and delicious ways, because families often think that healthy food equals expensive food.

But they actually go the extra mile too. Huda, for example, brings her son to demonstrate how parents can involve their children when cooking at home, how to put into practice the techniques that are taught by KidSTART on conversing with their children during such activities. We almost never see these actions and they go beyond the policies that we launch here. And these folks play such critical roles to make sure that we are not just going through motions.

This is a significant strength of ours here in Singapore that we must never take for granted. In many places, many of you who have lived and worked abroad, you will know that things do not always get realised. So, thank you to all who play an important role.

Secondly, for all the sound and fury, which I have to admit this year was relatively genteel and civilised – so please keep it that way – there is actually more agreement and alignment than not, and to be honest, there is no way and in all our respective organisations, we know that there is no way that every single person would agree with every single thing, not within Government, nor the Opposition, nor society at large. And this is natural and is to be expected. We all have different views, needs and wants.

We do need to articulate them as clearly as we can, forcefully, passionately, in Parliament. But when the dust has settled, I think it is important for us to agree to disagree in areas that we do not find agreement on, but also come together, unite and support a shared agenda, so that we can move forward decisively together. If you cast your eyes back to not just this Budget, but the Budgets preceding this – and certainly all the Budgets that I have presided over – there is really a lot more alignment than disagreement. And I thank you for that.

Thirdly, I am struck by what Nominate Member of Parliament Mr Cheng Hsing Yao had just shared, and I believe there is a resonance with many, and his speech best listening to again, and to be read as well and with Leader's response.

There are some valuable thoughts for all of us to ponder, what kind of Parliamentarians and leaders do we want to be here in this Chamber? What kind of leaders do we want as citizens, because how we respond and signal will shape the type of people we choose, and how they, in turn, choose to behave. But notwithstanding that, I think we all here have choices to make too. Mr Cheng shared a few principles to guide us, I will work on that, and offer perhaps, three themes, related in some ways to think about.

So, my fourth point is really about what are our thoughts on the issue of form versus substance. We live in a very visual world, fueled by social media. Attention span can be frightfully short. Policies are "tl;dr" – too long; did not read. And if the form and style appeal, does that trump substance? If a person is deemed "cool", so does that mean that what he or she says must be right? We see how this phenomenon manifests itself all around the world.

It is not meant as a criticism. It is an observation that I think we all note and see, but is this happening here as well? Does it worry us? Should it worry us? And are we, as citizens, concerned enough to do something about it? And if you need so, what exactly should we do?

Fifth, what are our thoughts on facts versus perceptions and emotions? I shared last year, now I will say that again. We live in a world where there is far more information than there has ever been in history. And this will increase exponentially, but we are not necessarily better informed.

Are we evidence based? Are we facts driven? And truth be told, most of us do not often read everything. And because we have such a high level of education. We are educated, we think we know, we scan, and we form opinions very quickly. And if you touch your hearts, I think many of us could be guilty of that, too.

So, storytelling is important, and we know it is an important tool and we use that quite regularly in Parliament. But we also know it is powerful because it stirs emotions. We have seen stories that are being shared that are, well, sometimes not quite true or half-true or presented without the proper context.

In Brexit, and I think has been clearly documented without dispute, how various parties on both ends, or on multiple ends, made campaign statements that are clearly false. And they are real-life outcomes that result from this environment. So, again, we need to ask ourselves, should we be concerned? Is this already happening here? How do we respond?

Sixth, I often run leadership and related workshops in SAF, Civil Service, social and private sectors, our universities and among the various questions I often would ask of our leaders or would-be leaders is that: do we aim to do what is right, or to do what is popular? Do we do the hard right, or the easy wrong?

I believe that all of us know what the correct answer is and should be, but given the earlier few points that I mentioned and what we see happening around the world, what do we, as leaders in the political environment, what should we do? Do we pander to popular sentiments, knowing that it actually does work?

Or do we try to make what we believe would be right, but perhaps, a less popular decision? Do we promised dreams that cannot be fulfilled, because we know that we do not have to actually do it for real? And the truth is, this is probably the norm in most societies. So, the question again is, what do we want for our own society here in Singapore?

For the seventh and last point, I think I will just want to end and say that I really do feel that our best days are ahead of us. Yes, we are, like every country, buffeted by the same pressures similar to many other societies and parliaments, and it can seem overwhelming. When we look at the disruptions, we seem to be recovering from COVID-19, and then there is a war and high inflation, and so on.

And we also know that we are not perfect, because if we really want to nitpick, there are lots of things that we can criticise, either we do it publicly or we do it privately. There are many areas where we can improve, there are things that we can do better, and certainly, all of us can lead better.

But to be fair to ourselves, we are in not bad spot, we are in a decent place. In fact, more than a decent place. We are not falling apart as a nation or as a society. When I work with foreign counterparts, as many of you do, when we meet Singaporeans living abroad, it is clear that we have a strong reputation and standing. If anything, it has grown stronger after the whole COVID-19 situation. This did not happen by

chance, and where we are, our standing, our reputation, the way we are valued and respected, all these have been achieved despite the limitations that we sometimes see in ourselves.

So, the question is, can you imagine how much further we can go? How much better we can be, if we begin to iron out the kinks, if we begin to actively seek to improve and to develop better leaders at all levels, there are far greater heights that we can climb, and we can all do even better for our people and our nation.

And that is what is before us here in Chamber. Yes, we cannot and should not take it for granted, but we have an incredible base to build on. This year's Budget is yet another foundational piece to stage us for the better years ahead.

And we are all part of this journey together. Every Singaporean who plays their part, big or small, makes that difference. Like those involved in the KidSTART programme, and it is completely evidence based, the impact on our families and their children will last a lifetime.

So, let us all do what we can. Let us all just try our very best. Thank you very much. *[Applause.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We do have some time savings. So, I will do what is popular and raid the time reserves. I propose to take a break now. I suspend the Sitting and will generously take the Chair at 5.00 pm. Order. Order.

*Sitting accordingly suspended*

*at 4.29 pm until 5.00 pm.*

*Sitting resumed at 5.00 pm.*

**[Mr Speaker in the Chair]**  
**SECOND READING BILLS**  
**PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL**

Order for Second Reading read.

**Mr Speaker:** Minister Chan Chun Sing.

5.01 pm

**The Minister for Education (Mr Chan Chun Sing) (for the Prime Minister):** Mr Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Prime Minister, I beg to move "That the Bill be read a Second time."

As the proposed amendments are largely similar, this Bill is associated with the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Bill, which is the next Bill on the Order Paper. Sir, may I propose, with your permission, that the substantive debate on both Bills take place now. I welcome Members' comments or questions on both Bills after my speech. This allows the substantive points to be covered in a single debate. We will still have the formal Second Reading of the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Bill later in adherence to procedural requirements.

**Mr Speaker:** Please proceed.

**Mr Chan Chun Sing:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the amendments being proposed to the Parliamentary Elections Act, or PEA, and the Presidential Elections Act, or PrEA, are in line with the Elections Department's, or ELD's, continuous efforts to enhance our electoral processes and election administration. The amendments can be grouped into five categories.

The first category seeks to improve voter access for overseas Singaporeans and Singaporeans residing in nursing homes. The second category updates the election advertising laws to support informed voting. The third category seeks to streamline the administration, as well as enhance accountability and transparency, of the election expenses regime. The fourth category seeks to clarify and improve election processes. The fifth category focuses on the amendments that apply specifically to streamlining administrative processes for Presidential Elections.

Mr Speaker, let me begin with the key amendments under the first category, to enhance voter access for overseas Singaporeans and voters residing in nursing homes.

General Election 2020, or GE 2020, held during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighted two key issues in our electoral landscape. First, the electorate is ageing rapidly – 21% of voters for GE 2020 were aged 65 and above, compared to 14% in GE 2011. Second, how travel restrictions can make it difficult for some overseas Singaporeans to travel to overseas polling stations or back to Singapore to vote.

In May and June last year, ELD sought feedback from various stakeholders, including political parties, nursing home operators and overseas Singaporeans, on special arrangements for voters residing at some nursing homes and postal voting for overseas Singaporeans.

Taking into account the feedback, clause 19 of the PEA Bill and clause 18 of the PrEA Bill empower the Returning Officer to make special polling arrangements in nursing homes, so that it is more convenient for voters who are in-patients or residents of nursing home to cast their votes there. These include setting up a special polling station within the premises of the nursing homes, and deploying mobile polling teams to collect ballot papers from bedbound voters in the nursing homes.

The selection of nursing homes for special polling arrangements would consider factors such as the number of voters in the nursing home and the practicality of deploying the mobile polling teams, taking into account the resources required.

For a start, ELD plans to pilot the special polling arrangements in nursing homes with more than 50 voters. This will involve 25 to 30 nursing homes and reach out to over 2,000 voters, about two-thirds of registered voters currently residing in nursing homes. The outcome of the pilot will help scope the provision of special polling arrangements at nursing homes for subsequent elections. The list of nursing homes selected for the pilot will be made public on Nomination Day, if the election is contested. Polling agents will be allowed to witness the conduct of polls at the nursing homes, to give candidates assurance on the integrity and secrecy of voting.

Next, the Bills provide eligible Singaporeans residing overseas the option to vote by postal ballot.

While there were suggestions to introduce postal voting in the past, we have not implemented this given the challenges associated with postal voting which is, after all, a form of remote voting.

Members may ask if the Government has changed our position.

To be clear, the Government maintains the position that voting in-person at polling stations remains the most transparent and secure method of voting that best ensures that each person wanting to vote can be accurately identified as an eligible voter and only votes once. However, we recognise that it may not be possible, for various reasons, for overseas Singapore Citizens to travel to one of the overseas polling stations or to return to Singapore to vote. With the introduction of postal voting, eligible Singapore citizens living, studying or working overseas will be able to mail in their votes even if there are travel disruptions or restrictions.

As set out in clause 28 of the PEA Bill and clause 25 of the PrEA Bill, ELD intends to implement processes supported by technology to provide assurance on the integrity and secrecy of postal voting. Let me elaborate.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, to help Members navigate the postal voting process, may I ask the Clerks to distribute a handout. Members may also access the handout through the MP@SG Parl mobile app.

**Mr Speaker:** Please proceed. [*A handout was distributed to hon Members.*]

**Mr Chan Chun Sing:** Step one is to register to vote overseas by applying online via ELD Voter Services. During registration, the overseas Singapore Citizen has to make a deliberate choice to either vote by post or at one of the overseas polling stations. Application to vote by post or at one of the overseas polling stations by an eligible overseas Singapore Citizen can be done anytime except during the period from the third day after the Writ of Election is issued until the end of the election. If he or she has chosen to vote by post, he or she will need to provide his or her wet-ink signature during the registration.

Step two, an overseas Singapore Citizen who has opted to be a postal voter can log in to ELD Voter Services using his Singpass after Nomination Day to download and print his postal ballot paper and the prepaid return envelope.

Step three, the postal voter will mark his vote on the postal ballot paper, fold and insert it in the return envelope, and seal and sign on the return envelope.

Step four, the postal voter should then post the sealed return envelope without delay. This has to be done during the postal voting period, which starts on the day immediately after Nomination Day and ends on the eve of Polling Day in Singapore.

In order to be accepted for counting, the return envelope must be postmarked before Polling Day and reach the Returning Officer in Singapore within 10 days after Polling Day.

The requirement for the postmark to be before Polling Day is to ensure that all votes are cast before the close of poll in Singapore so that voters residing in a time zone that is behind Singapore, such as the United States of America, do not cast their votes after knowing the results of the local poll.

To ensure that only bona fide postal ballot papers are counted, there will be a pre-count process in Singapore to sieve out the return envelopes which do not meet the criteria for counting. The process is set out in the lower row of the handout on counting of postal votes. For example, the return envelope must bear the signature of the voter furnished during registration and an official QR code which is unique for each voter. The QR code enables the wet-ink signature on the return envelope to be matched against the specimen signature furnished during registration.

To ensure voting secrecy, the postal ballot papers from the return envelopes will be removed and mixed with other overseas ballot papers before the start of counting. Candidates and counting agents will be able to observe this entire process.

Ahead of the upcoming Presidential Election, ELD will demonstrate the process and the system to be used to the media and political parties.

Next, let me touch on postal voting offences.

Clauses 26 and 28 of the PEA Bill and clauses 25 and 26 of the PrEA Bill deal with offences pertaining to postal voting. These include forging or fraudulently defacing any return envelope, supplying any return envelope without due authority to any person, or unauthorised possession of a return envelope. The present offences on improper handling of ballot papers will be extended to include postal ballot papers. These provisions seek to address the concerns surfaced during ELD's engagements with political parties and overseas Singaporeans.

Mr Speaker, Sir, now, I move on to the second category of amendments to update the law on election advertising. These amendments aim to support informed voting at elections, which is essential to Singapore's system of representative government.

Currently, the rules for online and non-online election advertising are set out in subsidiary legislation. Clause 30 of the PEA Bill and clause 28 of the PrEA Bill elevate these provisions on online and non-online election advertising to the respective main Acts. These amendments are needed to enhance transparency, so that voters know who is communicating the election advertising, and accountability, by making persons publishing election advertising responsible for their communications.

Let me begin with the amendments for online election advertising, which will be referred to as OEA in short.

The laws for OEA are largely unchanged by the Bills. The amendments are intended to provide greater clarity on the rules for online election campaigning and to address unique features and functionalities of online communication activities, especially since political discussions and campaigning are increasingly taking place online.

At the same time, space is preserved for Singapore Citizens to participate in political discourse online. For example, during the election period, barring Cooling-off Day and Polling Day, a Singapore Citizen can continue to publish OEA without adhering to published-by requirements, as long as the content is published in his individual capacity, he is not directed by others to do so and is not paid or did not pay to publish.

Clause 2 of the PEA Bill and PrEA Bill each contains updated definitions on the scope of OEA. First, the meaning of publishing OEA is extended to include amplifying access, such as boosting, reposting, sharing or resharing of existing OEA. Amplifying access increases the reach of the original content to more users and has a similar effect to publishing fresh content. Hence, it should be held to the same requirements.

Second, OEA content is considered to be published in Singapore, if the content is accessible from Singapore, or if it originates in Singapore.

To enhance transparency and accountability, clause 30 of the PEA Bill sets out the updated published-by requirements in a new section 61B. For the PrEA Bill, this is in clause 28 and a new section 42B.

Currently, OEA is required to display the particulars of the person who is responsible for publishing the OEA, and the particulars of the person who directed the OEA to be published. If the OEA is paid for, it should also show the particulars of the person who paid for it. With the amendments, the particulars of the person who approved the content of the OEA must be shown as well.

In the virtual world, it is easy to hide behind aliases and third parties to put out election advertising. This amendment strengthens transparency, so that voters can better discern the persons responsible for the election advertising.

From the start of the campaign period, election activity can only be conducted by political parties or candidates, or third party campaigners authorised by a candidate or their election agent. As paid election advertising constitutes election activity, clause 30 of the PEA Bill sets out the offence for unauthorised third parties to publish paid OEA. The equivalent provision in the PrEA Bill is in clause 28.

The same clauses restate the ban on publishing or displaying election advertising on Cooling-off Day and Polling Day. These will replace current section 78B of the PEA and section 60A of the PrEA respectively. In line with the updated scope of OEA, amplifying access to OEA which was published before the cooling-off period will also be subject to the ban to ensure space for voters to reflect on the issues at stake before casting their votes.

The exceptions to the cooling-off period ban will be retained, including for private and domestic communications, such as individuals sharing election-related content within a private chat or closed group with family or a small group of friends.

Currently, the Returning Officer, or RO, has powers to issue directions to candidates or their election agents to address certain breaches of the OEA regulations. Clause 30 of the PEA Bill and clause 28 of the PrEA Bill will provide expanded powers for the RO to address OEA-related breaches, by issuing corrective directions to any content publisher, including social media companies, to remove or disable access in Singapore to the OEA, or to stop or reduce electronic communication activity involving the OEA. The RO can also specify that the corrective actions must be taken within a certain period of time, so that breaches are addressed promptly during the short campaigning period.

These powers are intended to address the concern that online content that breaches the elections laws can potentially spread rapidly and, hence, tip the playing field and impact electoral outcomes. The RO will look at the specifics of each case, to determine the appropriate course of action. If necessary, the RO can exercise these powers expeditiously, to uphold the integrity of our elections.

We have witnessed how the threat of foreign interference in elections has intensified around the world, especially in the online space. Having OEA laws, and keeping them up-to-date, helps safeguard our electoral processes from external influence and ensure that Singapore's future is only to be decided by Singaporeans. Besides having these laws, all political parties and candidates participating in elections have a vital role to abide by these rules to protect the integrity of our elections.

Now, let me elaborate on the amendments relating to non-online election advertising or "NOEA". Clause 2 of both Bills defines NOEA which covers a wide range of non-online advertising, from electronic advertising by way of short messaging service or SMS, and telephone calls, to traditional advertising, such as a banner, flag or poster. To maintain coherence in the treatment of OEA and NOEA, the published-by requirements continue to apply to NOEA. Of the five published-by requirements, two are new, namely, to disclose the person or entity who approved the election advertising content, and to disclose the person or entity who paid for the election advertising. The two new requirements will better enable voters to assess the credibility of the information presented when forming their views on their preferred candidate.

Clause 30 of the PEA Bill and clause 28 of the PrEA Bill stipulate that the public display of traditional election advertising should only commence during the campaign period under the authority of a permit granted by the RO, as per the current regulations. To ensure a level playing field at parliamentary elections, clause 30 of the PEA Bill introduces a new offence of publicly displaying, between the issuance of the Writ of Election, and before the start of the campaign period, any traditional election advertising that contains political party symbols or party-affiliated symbols. There are exceptions, for example, flags that contain only the name and/or symbol of a political party, for the sole purpose of indicating that the office of the political party is located at or within a building.

Clause 30 of the PEA Bill and clause 28 of the PrEA Bill also provide that the display of posters and banners must be at a place stated in a list of permissible locations in the regulations, and not within the 50-metre zone around any polling station. For example, posters and banners may be hung on street lamp posts along public roads outside the 50-metre zone around any polling station.

Finally, clause 30 of the PEA Bill and clause 28 of the PrEA Bill set out the ban on foreigners knowingly publishing or publicly displaying election advertising, and extend the ban to cover foreign entities. These amendments serve to strengthen the well-established principle that Singapore politics are for Singaporeans alone to decide.

Sir, the third category of amendments seeks to streamline the administration, as well as enhance the accountability and transparency, of the election expenses regime.

Clause 30 of both Bills will allow candidates to make technical corrections to their election expenses returns by submitting fresh returns to the RO, instead of having to apply to the Election Judge to do so. Examples of technical corrections include blank entry due to inadvertent omission, miscalculation during tallying, correction made but no signature initialed against it. Such corrections must, however, be made before the deadline for the submission of the election expenses returns, which is, 31 days after the election result is published in the Government Gazette.

To facilitate public inspection of election expenses returns, clause 36 of both Bills will allow for the publication of all election expenses online for greater transparency. This will allow voters and other stakeholders to inspect the returns filed by candidates free of charge without having to make a trip to ELD.

To further enhance the accountability and transparency of our election processes, clause 37 of the PEA Bill provides powers to the RO to audit any election expenses returns submitted for parliamentary elections. Allowing the election authorities to audit a candidate's election expenses returns is not a new concept. Countries, such as Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, require some form of audited election expenses returns from the candidates or from the political party that fielded the candidates.

Sir, the fourth category of amendments seeks to improve the election processes. Let me highlight the key amendments.

Under the current law, a polling station for an electoral division can only be situated within the electoral division boundary. To provide greater convenience to voters who are residing near the electoral boundary, clause 14 of the PEA Bill and clause 13 of the PrEA Bill will allow the RO to set up polling stations in the adjacent electoral division if it will benefit a large number of such voters.

Currently, to ensure that children are protected from exploitation during elections, a person attending a primary or secondary school as a student is prohibited from taking part in election activities. The amendment of clause 42 of the PEA Bill and clause 41 of the PrEA Bill will change this to an age-based restriction to prohibit individuals below 16 years old from taking part in election activities. This is a more consistent approach.

To ensure that Singapore politics is only for Singaporeans to decide, foreign individuals and foreign entities should not be allowed to participate in election activities. The current PEA and PrEA prohibit foreign individuals from participating in election activities but are silent on foreign entities, such as foreign companies. Clause 41 of the PEA Bill and clause 42 of the PrEA Bill seek to make clear that foreign entities are also prohibited from participating in election activities.

I will now cover the amendments relating to events that disrupt the election process. Currently, the provisions to deal with disruptive events are in the PEA and PrEA, which mean that any amendment that needs to be made to respond to contingencies will need to be passed in Parliament. From the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a real need to provide greater flexibility in addressing disruptive



events, to enable contingency arrangements to be put in place quickly, should they be required, to enable an election to be conducted while meeting the needs of the situation.

Clause 44 of the PEA Bill and clause 43 of the PrEA Bill allow the Minister to make regulations so that contingency arrangements can be put in place in a more timely and effective manner. The definition of disruptive events is also expanded to include transport accident, unplanned or prolonged outage of any telecommunication or electricity service, or an information and communications system, which is essential for the proper conduct of an election. Any regulation made under the Act to implement such contingency arrangements must be presented to Parliament as soon as possible after publication in the Government Gazette.

Sir, I will now cover the amendments that apply to presidential elections in clauses 3 and 4 of the PrEA Bill. These amendments are administrative in nature to streamline the presidential election processes.

First, the Presidential Elections Committee, or “PEC” in short, is responsible for ensuring that candidates for the office of the President have the required qualifications prescribed in the Constitution. For example, the applicant must be a person of integrity, good character and reputation and has met either the public or private sector service requirement. Clause 3 of the PrEA Bill streamlines the processes to remove the requirement for the PEC to consider applications from applicants who do not meet the minimum age of 45 years on Nomination Day to qualify as a Presidential candidate. Clause 4 of the PrEA Bill allows the PEC to reject an application from an applicant who does not state in his community declaration that he considers himself to be a member of the community that the election is reserved for.

The next amendment relates to the Community Committee, or “CC” in short. The function of the CC is to decide whether a person who has submitted a community declaration belongs to the Chinese community, the Malay community or the Indian or other minority communities. Currently, the CC is required to notify every declarant that their community declarations have been accepted for consideration. With the proposed amendments under clauses 5 and 6 of the PrEA Bill, the CC will only be required to notify declarants in the following cases.

First, to notify a declarant in an open election, who had declared that he did not belong to any of the prescribed communities, that his declaration has been accepted.

Second, to notify a declarant that his community declaration has been rejected as it is incomplete, or, in the case of a reserved election, not made for the relevant community the election is reserved for.

In all other situations, the community declaration will be accepted for consideration without the need for explicit notification.

The PrEA Bill also replicates relevant changes made to the PEA in 2018 through the amendments in clauses 8, 10, 11, 14, 16, 25, 32, 34, 36 and 41. These amendments relate to allowing electronic payment of election deposits, streamlining of processes involving nomination, polling, recounting of overseas votes and election expenses returns, and updating of the definition of election activity. All these changes were elaborated during the amendments to the PEA that year and I will not repeat them today.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the amendments described above are part of ELD’s regular efforts to update and refine our electoral rules and processes. These proposals will help enhance voter accessibility and engender greater trust and confidence in our election administration and electoral processes. Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

5.26 pm

**Ms Sylvia Lim (Aljunied):** Mr Speaker, I wish to speak on the Parliamentary Elections Amendment Bill. I will cover three aspects: first, enabling more Singaporeans to vote; second, on the counting of votes; and third, on election advertising. My party colleague Gerald Giam will speak later on voting by persons with disability and seek some other clarifications.

First, enabling more Singaporeans to vote. The Workers’ Party is in support of enabling more Singaporeans to exercise their right to vote at national elections. In principle, we welcome the changes to enable more Singaporeans overseas and those in nursing homes to cast their votes.

As far as overseas voters are concerned, the Workers’ Party supports the implementation of postal voting to enable more Singaporeans abroad to vote. The current scheme of requiring overseas voters to physically turn up at only 10 polling stations in six countries severely limits the ability of overseas Singaporeans to vote. Under the Bill, overseas Singaporeans can vote from presumably any country with postal connections with Singapore. This is a positive development. It has the potential of empowering many more overseas Singaporeans to have their say in our national elections.

As far as nursing homes are concerned, this will enable those who need residential nursing care to participate in elections. The Bill provides for special polling stations and for mobile teams to be deployed at nursing home premises to facilitate this. It is envisaged that the mobile teams may issue and collect ballot papers “by the bed”. I am aware that this is implemented elsewhere, such as in the United States.

I have a few clarifications concerning the proposed arrangements at nursing homes. Under the proposed section 47A, the Returning Officer (RO) will decide whether to include a particular nursing home for special polling arrangements, depending on the likelihood of “a significant number of electors” who are residing there and who are unable to travel out to the ordinary polling stations, but are able to vote within the nursing home. Earlier, the Minister clarified that, for a start, nursing homes with more than 50 residents will be considered to pilot, if you

like, this nursing home voting at the coming Presidential Election. My question here is how will ELD determine whether voters in the nursing homes have the necessary mental capacity to cast their votes? Will ELD, for example, start gathering data from these nursing homes well ahead of the elections, including categorising the residents to determine who are mentally well enough to exercise their vote independently? Will the nursing home pre-screen those who have dementia or Alzheimer's, or will it be left to the mobile teams to do this assessment at the point of voting?

Sir, we should also ask how the integrity of the voting process "by the bed" will be ensured. There is a need for assurance to nursing home residents that their vote is secret and should be freely exercised. This is particularly important as, unlike other seniors, residents of nursing homes are more frail and dependent on the care they receive, often at subsidised rates. Some residents may worry about the consequences of their vote. These fears may be irrational, but I believe assurances to them about the secrecy and freeness of their vote are critical. What measures will be taken in this regard?

On a related note, it is stated by the proposed section 47A(4) that voting at such special polling stations should be conducted, as far as possible, in the same manner as that in an ordinary polling station. I note, for instance, that at an ordinary polling station, there is some randomness in the allocation of the ballot paper, and also privacy at the time the vote is marked and cast. How will this be assured at the nursing homes, especially when mobile teams go to the voters' bedsides? I would also like the Minister's confirmation that polling agents from political parties will be admitted to these nursing homes to safeguard the voting process, similar to ordinary polling stations.

Next, on the counting of votes. Clause 21 expands the methods of vote counting. The proposed section 49(4A) states that counting may be done manually or by mechanical or electronic means. What is meant by "electronic means"? Clause 2 will define electronic means as using an electronic service, and electronic service is, in turn, defined to mean services that allow end-users to access content or receive content, including a social media service. Potentially, this is a grave and far-reaching amendment, as it contemplates votes being counted using electronic services which are online. In ELD's media release on this Bill issued on 6 February 2023, there is nothing mentioned about this change at all.

There is some concern that the use of online services to count votes potentially exposes the vote counting process to hacking and glitches. According to the Explanatory Statement to the Bill, the intention of clause 21 is to simply enable the use of counting machines as part of the counting process. During the last General Election in 2020, standalone machines were used for vote counting. At that time, ELD was at pains to emphasise that the counting machines were not connected to the Internet and that there were also other safeguards, such as repeating the counting process using different machines.

Clause 21 appears to contemplate that the counting machines would be connected to the Internet. If so, this raises concerns about the security and integrity of the counting process. How will counting agents be able to audit the counting process? Sir, as vote counting determines the outcome of elections, the transparency and auditability of counting should not be compromised.

Finally, on election advertising. I move on to the amendments relating to Election Advertising. By clause 30, this Bill introduces numerous provisions which ELD says is to increase the transparency and accountability to voters and to enhance traceability of communications of election advertising. This will impose additional requirements on candidates and political parties.

Currently, section 61(1)(c) of the Act simply requires election advertising to include the names of the publisher and printer. This Bill significantly enhances those obligations on election advertising to include the identities of various other persons. To appreciate what these new requirements will entail, I will refer to the examples given in the Explanatory Statement to the Bill. For instance, for printed handbills containing a slogan, candidates and parties will be further required to include the identity particulars of the election agent of the candidate and the candidate's senior campaign staff who approved the content of the slogan. In another example, if a party engages a marketing firm to run its election campaign, the identity of the marketing firm will have to be stated in various situations.

Sir, I would like the Minister to clarify why the identities of campaign staff and the marketing firms will be required to be published. In the case of campaign staff working on campaign slogans, it is useful to take a typical scenario for clarification. If staff brainstorm on a slogan, and the final approval of the slogan is given by the candidate or the party, I would assume that there would be no need to name the staff involved. After all, campaign staff helping political parties ultimately take instructions from the party leadership. As for marketing firms, they are commercial entities who take on briefs for reward. Such firms can have multiple clients from different political parties over time.

Sir, for all election advertising, I believe the buck stops at the candidate and the political party. They are responsible for the content put out, and will be held liable for its contents. Is this not sufficient for accountability?

In relation to traditional election advertising, the new section 61G will require that banners, flags and posters will only be allowed to be displayed in permissible locations. It is stated in the Explanatory Statement to the Bill that there will be a "positive list of permissible locations". Could the Minister clarify what practical difference this will make, compared to past elections? What assurance will candidates and parties have that there will be adequate space in prime locations for all participants?

Sir, before I end, I wish to make an observation about the process leading up to this Bill. Last year, ELD reached out to political parties on the proposal to expand voting to include postal voting and voting at nursing homes. This was a welcome and useful process. However, there was no consultation or prior information about the changes to election advertising, which are the provisions that impact the work of political parties most directly. Looking at the Bill, these changes to election advertising are very detailed and must have been under consideration for quite some time. Yet, the changes were announced just a month ago, just before the Budget Statement and the

Committee of Supply debates, which just concluded a few moments ago after 70 hours. The timing of the Second Reading debate on this important Bill may account for the few speakers we see listed today, just two of us from the Workers' Party and, of course, Member Louis Ng. Is this ideal?

Sir, all in all, the provisions of this Bill have the potential to enhance our election process, especially those that enable more Singaporeans to cast their votes either in nursing homes or overseas via postal voting. However, I would like further elaboration on the changes to the counting of votes and election advertising requirements.

Finally, for the avoidance of doubt, I should clarify the Workers' Party's position on the Presidential Elections (Amendment) Bill. The Workers' Party maintains its position on being opposed to the office of the Elected President. The reasons for this position have been canvassed over the decades since the 1980s, and I do not intend to repeat them. As such, we are not speaking on that Bill, and will vote to abstain then.

5.37 pm

**Mr Gerald Giam Yean Song (Aljunied):** Mr Speaker, the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Bill takes steps to make elections more accessible for people with disabilities (PwDs) through the introduction of polling stations and mobile polling teams in nursing homes. In my speech today, I would like to make a proposal that could help PwDs more fully participate in the election process.

Article 29(a)(iii) of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which Singapore has ratified, calls for political participation by disabled people by "Guaranteeing the free expression of the will of persons with disabilities as electors and to this end, where necessary, at their request, allowing assistance in voting by a person of their own choice."

However, the Government has placed a reservation on Article 29(a)(iii), stating that to keep voting secret and to safeguard the integrity of voting, PwDs can only be assisted by an election official. According to the Government, the election official is obliged to mark the ballot paper in the manner directed by the voter and is under oath to keep the vote secret.

Has the Government considered the possibility that some PwDs would prefer to have someone they know and trust to help them to vote? This is a concern also expressed by the Disabled People's Association (DPA). Other countries, such as Canada and Germany, allow friends and family to assist a PwD with voting. In Canada, the provision is made under section 243.01 of the Canada Elections Act, which allows either a friend or a relative to accompany a voter who "requires assistance to vote."

In Germany, this is provided under section 14 of the Federal Elections Act, which states that: "Persons eligible to vote who are illiterate or prevented by a disability from casting their vote may avail themselves of another person's assistance for that purpose."

If the concern is that the person assisting the PwD will not keep the vote secret, they can be required to take an oath of secrecy, just like all the candidates' polling agents and counting agents currently do. Incorporating this measure will better ensure that PwDs can exercise their right to vote in a smooth and comfortable manner, while upholding the secrecy of their vote and election integrity.

Next, the Bill allows for votes to be counted by electronic means. This adds to previous amendments to the Act where electronic voting was permitted. When votes are counted by manual or mechanical means, counting agents appointed by the candidates and the candidates themselves are able to personally witness the counting of all the votes. They can physically ensure there is no mis-count of votes for each candidate.

The existing Act sets out the details on the inspection and testing of electronic voting machines in the presence of the candidates, their election agents or polling agents before and during elections. However, the Bill before us today does not appear to mention the inspection and testing of the electronic counting machines or system. Can the Minister clarify how the candidates and their counting agents will be able to audit the votes counted by electronic means?

Finally, I would like to seek more clarity from the Minister about what kind of election activities are allowed in the period from the day the Writ of Election is issued to Nomination Day. The rest of the questions in this speech relate to this period.

Parliament is dissolved when the Writ of Election is issued. When this happens, every Member of Parliament ceases to be a Member of Parliament, according to Article 46(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore, and their allowances cease to be paid.

After Parliament is dissolved, are the former Members of Parliament allowed to hold Meet-the-People sessions (MPS) in their constituencies, interact with residents and provide assistance to them? Can they write appeal letters to Government agencies or other organisations on behalf of their constituents and, if they do, are agencies obliged to respond to them?

It should be noted that many residents will not be aware that Members of Parliament stand down after Parliament is dissolved and will continue contacting their Members of Parliament for assistance, sometimes on urgent personal matters or municipal matters that have safety implications.

Next, do grassroots adviser (GRA) appointments cease when the Writ is issued? If not, can GRAs continue operating as per normal after the Writ is issued, including writing appeal letters to Government agencies on behalf of residents?

Given that the People's Association almost always appoints individuals who are PAP members as GRAs, would allowing GRAs to operate as per normal during this period circumvent the restrictions that are otherwise placed on election candidates and create an unlevel playing field for the opposition?

Is "campaigning" allowed from the day the Writ is issued to Nomination Day? Are potential candidates allowed to conduct house-to-house visits or visit markets and coffee shops, to either check on residents' well-being or explicitly canvass for votes, while wearing their party uniforms and badges?

Just before previous elections, some incumbent Members of Parliament and potential candidates conducted some of these activities. For example, a Yahoo News article entitled "GE2020: Josephine Teo to leave Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC to contest in Jalan Besar" reported that Mrs Teo was "seen during a People's Action Party (PAP) walkabout at Beo Crescent on Monday morning (29 June), together with Jalan Besar incumbent Members of Parliament Denise Phua and Heng Chee How, as well as new candidate Wan Rizal Wan Zakariah. They were introduced to the residents as candidates contesting the GRC." That year, Parliament was dissolved on 23 June and Nomination Day was 30 June. This constituency walkabout took place within that period.

In another article in The Straits Times, it was reported that the then-National Development Minister Lawrence Wong announced the PAP's slate in Marsiling-Yew Tee GRC at a walkabout in the Marsiling ward of the GRC on 28 June – again, within this period. There was even a video of the team, consisting of Mr Lawrence Wong, Mr Zaqy Mohamad, Mr Alex Yam and Ms Hany Soh, together with Mr Ong Teng Koon, the former MP of the ward, at a coffee shop wearing their PAP all-white uniforms. At least two members of the group were wearing a PAP badge.

In the Candidate Handbook for General Election 2020 published by the Elections Department, under section 2.4 titled "Activities from Writ of Election to Nomination Day", it is stated that "After the Writ of Election is issued and before the campaign period starts, activities, such as walkabouts, house-to-house visits, distributing election pamphlets, handouts and newsletters, and publishing of party manifestos and candidates' biographical details will be subject to the applicable election advertising requirements." This implies that such activities are allowed subject to advertising requirements.

The next paragraph in that same section states more explicitly that "Political parties and candidates may conduct campaigning activities, such as walkabouts, house-to-house visits and the distribution of collaterals."

Based on section 2.4 of the Candidate Handbook, it appears that some types of campaigning, including walkabouts, house-to-house visits and the distribution of collaterals from the day the Writ of Election issued to Nomination Day, are allowed. However, the same language is not reflected in the Parliamentary Elections Act. Can the Minister please clarify if the ELD handbook is legally accurate in this respect?

Mr Speaker, to strengthen our democracy, the accessibility, integrity and fairness of our election process is of paramount importance. I look forward to the Minister's addressing the questions and concerns I have raised.

**Mr Speaker:** Mr Louis Ng.

5.46 pm

**Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang (Nee Soon):** Sir, the amendments introduced under both Bills will facilitate access to voting by voters overseas and in nursing homes, improve transparency in election advertising and strengthen election processes. I am, of course, glad to speak and I have clarifications in three areas.

My first area of clarification relates to election advertising requirements.

First, the definition of "publish" will be amended to include forwarding and sharing content. Given the ease of forwarding and sharing content on the Internet, it is not difficult to fall foul of these provisions. A number of provisions provides that the prosecution does not have to prove that an accused knew or had reason to believe that the content includes election advertising.

There is a general defence for the accused to prove that he or she did not and could not reasonably have known of the offence and took all reasonable steps and exercised all due diligence. If interpreted strictly, this defence can be difficult to establish.

Specific to election advertising, can Minister clarify whether it will be a defence for the accused to prove that he or she did not, in fact, know that the content includes election advertising? For instance, since the meaning of "content" includes hyperlinks and items that store data electronically, would it be a defence for the accused to prove that he or she did not access the hyperlink or folder?

While the public should, of course, responsibly share information online, there is also a difference in culpability between a layperson who carelessly forwards messages and links to a friend and a political operator looking to influence the elections. Can Minister share how the enforcement of the provisions relating to publication of election advertising will take into account the differences between these two scenarios?

Second, the Bill states that election advertising must include the identity particulars of persons who authorised making available to the general public the advertisement and who directed the election advertisement. Can Minister provide some examples to clarify the difference between authorising and directing an election advertisement?

Third, "publish" will exclude any communication of content between two or more individuals that is of a private or domestic nature by electronic means. Can Minister clarify what private or domestic means given that a chat on WhatsApp and Telegram can range from two participants to thousands? Further, can Minister clarify how publication provisions will apply to a situation where communication of content between two or more individuals that is initially private or domestic in nature is subsequently forwarded on a wider scale?

My second area of clarification relates to the penalties for breach of election advertising requirements.

It will be an offence to publish or publicly display election advertising that does not include the required information. Those convicted of the offence will be barred from voting for seven years and the Court will have no discretion to reduce the sentence. This is extremely harsh.

Under the current Parliamentary Elections Act and Presidential Elections Act, other so-called corrupt practices that similarly attract a seven-year ban include offences of making a false statement in relation to a candidate to affect the elections or making a false declaration as a candidate.

Election advertising should be transparent. But the failure to include required information in election advertising may be caused by honest mistakes. Such offenders are clearly less culpable than offenders who deliberately withhold information or provide false information. Can Minister share if individuals will be given an opportunity to correct breaches of election advertising requirements? Can Minister also share the rationale for the need to make the seven-year voting ban a mandatory sentence?

My third and last area of clarification relates to the special polling arrangements at nursing homes.

The amendments will allow special polling arrangements and mobile polling to be arranged to facilitate voting at nursing homes. A person in charge of a nursing home may inform the mobile polling team that a visit to an in-patient or resident is forbidden on medical grounds. The mobile polling team is then not allowed to visit or take the individual's vote.

Given that this effectively means that the individual will not be able to exercise their vote, this provision gives the person in charge significant powers. Can Minister share what safeguards are in place to ensure that the person in charge exercises such powers responsibly? For instance, will a doctor's report be required to substantiate the medical grounds for forbidding the visit by a mobile polling team? Will the wishes of the resident to vote be taken into account?

More generally, the Returning Officer is required to consider the conditions of electors, practicality and other peculiar circumstances in deciding whether to set up special polling stations and mobile polling teams.

These are highly fact specific questions that require an understanding of the residents and healthcare knowledge. In 2021, there were about 80 public, private and not-for-profit nursing homes. Can Minister share how the Returning Officer will make an informed assessment individually specific to all nursing homes? Will the Returning Officer be required to seek the advice of medical and geriatric healthcare professionals in ensuring that any polling arrangements are appropriately made?

Sir, notwithstanding these clarifications, I stand in support of both Bills.

**Mr Speaker:** Minister Chan.

5.51 pm

**Mr Chan Chun Sing:** Mr Speaker, Sir, let me first thank Members who have spoken on this Bill. Let me first address the comments on the changes to the election advertising rules.

Mr Louis Ng and Ms Sylvia Lim sought clarifications on the amendments pertaining to election advertising.

Mr Ng asked whether it will be a defence for the accused to prove that he or she did not know that the content included election advertising and whether enforcement will take into account the difference in culpability between a layperson who carelessly forwards messages and links to a friend and a political operator looking to influence the elections.

The answer to both questions is yes. It is not the intention to penalise unintentional breaches of the election advertising laws. The legislation provides for a defence if a person unknowingly breaches the election advertising rules but takes steps to rectify the breach when he or she becomes aware of it. There is also a defence for persons who breached election advertising rules due to circumstances beyond their control, for example, if the breach was due to sabotage. Ultimately, any defence has to be considered based on the facts of each case.

Mr Louis Ng also asked for clarifications on the difference between authorising and directing an election advertisement and Ms Sylvia Lim asked for the rationale for naming the individuals and entities who approved the content of the election advertisement, even though they ultimately take instructions from the candidates or political parties.

The published-by requirements require that election advertising displays the full names of all persons who played an active role in publishing it. Such persons include: one, the person who authorised making available to the general public the election advertising; two, the person who approved the content in the election advertising; and three, the person for whom or at whose direction the election advertising was published. For any election advertising, these three persons may or may not be same. Some of these roles may also be played by entities, including marketing firms engaged by candidates or political parties. It is important for the identities of those involved to be set out clearly to ensure accountability and transparency.

Let me illustrate with an example. A political party hires a social media influencer for a fee, to post election advertising on social media on its candidate's behalf. As required under the law, the candidate must first provide written authorisation to the influencer to conduct election activity on his or her behalf. Thereafter, the candidate approves the content prepared by the influencer, before the influencer publishes the content on his or her social media account.

In this case, the political party is deemed to have directed the influencer to publish the election advertising, while the candidate had approved the contents of the election advertising. Meanwhile, the influencer is deemed to have authorised the publishing of the election advertising, since the election advertising was published on his or her social media account. Hence, the full names of the political party, the candidate and the influencer must be displayed on the social media post. The post should also state that it was paid for by the political party.

Mr Louis Ng also had a question on the meaning of private or domestic communication. As stated in my opening speech, examples of private or domestic communication include sending or forwarding election-related content within a private chat, or a closed group with family or a small group of friends. When deciding whether a communication is of a private or domestic nature, the Returning Officer, or RO, will make a case-by-case assessment, taking into consideration three factors: first, the number of individuals in Singapore who are able to access the content; second, whether there are restrictions to access the content, including whether it is a public or closed group; and third, the relationship between the sender and receiver of the content, for example, whether they are strangers or known to each other.

Next, Mr Louis Ng sought clarification relating to the penalties imposed for breaching the new election advertising requirements, whether individuals will be given an opportunity to rectify breaches of election advertising requirements and whether the penalties for such breaches are too "harsh" since if convicted, a voter may be banned from voting for seven years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, any person who publishes or causes to be published any election advertising during the election period is already required to comply with the published-by requirements under the existing law. These requirements are there to promote informed voting and to safeguard our elections from external influence. The penalty for not complying with these requirements is thus serious. This has not changed.

Let me reiterate that it is not our intention to penalise unintentional breaches of the election advertising laws. In general, individuals who have breached these laws will be notified and given the opportunity to voluntarily rectify the breach. Further enforcement action will be considered only if the individuals do not comply. Let me also assure Mr Louis Ng that any prosecution for such an offence will depend on the facts of the case and will only be instituted with the consent of the Public Prosecutor.

Mr Giam asked about the kind of election activities allowed in the period from the day the Writ of Election is issued to Nomination Day. Political parties and candidates may continue to conduct routine activities, as long as they are conducted within the limits of the law.

On Mr Gerald Giam's other requests on whether former Members of Parliament are allowed to hold Meet-the-People Sessions to interact with residents, provide assistance to them, whether grassroots advisors can continue to operate as per normal after the Writ is issued, and the Candidate Handbook, these questions are out of the scope of the Bills. Mr Gerald Giam may wish to file Parliamentary Questions and we will be happy to answer them separately.

Ms Lim asked about the amendment to require the display of posters and banners only in permissible locations and whether all political contestants will be assured of ample space in prime locations. The amendment is merely to set out clearly the permissible locations for the display of posters and banners, such as lamp posts and banner structures. These locations will be set out in regulations later. And I am sure that will be sufficient space for all political parties to do the necessary.

Mr Louis Ng noted that a person in charge of a nursing home may inform the mobile polling team that a visit to a resident or in-patient is forbidden on medical grounds, and asked about the safeguards in place to ensure that this is not abused. Sir, I would like to assure Mr Ng that the mobile polling team will not take the polls of residents or in-patients if there are medical grounds, for example, because they are quarantined or are not able to receive any visitors. This is to safeguard their well-being and safety. For such cases, we will require the production of medical documentation as evidence.

On Ms Sylvia Lim's question on voters with some limitation in mental capacity, we will adopt the same approach as that for regular polling stations. That is, before the issuance of ballot paper, the election official will request the voter for his identification document and poll card. If the voter does not respond to the election official's request for his identification document and poll card after a few attempts, the voter will not be issued a ballot paper.

If the ballot paper has been issued but the voter is somehow unable to mark the ballot paper, the election official will seek the agreement of the polling agents present that the voter will be allowed to cast a blank vote.

I would also like to assure Ms Sylvia Lim that for those who are able to make their way to the special polling stations set up at the premises of the nursing homes, the procedures are the same as the regular polling stations. Candidates will be able to send polling agents to the nursing homes to observe that voting continues to be secret and that the various procedures are adhered to.

Mr Gerald Giam asked whether a voter with disability can request someone who is known and trusted by him to help him vote. Sir, our voters with disabilities are independent and many of them are able to vote on their own. Over the years, ELD has introduced various initiatives to make it easier for them to do so, such as stencils for those who are visually impaired and lap booths for those on wheelchair. If

the voter is physically unable to mark the ballot paper, he can request for an election official to assist him. These arrangements have served us well and we have no plans to change them currently.

Sir, let me now address Mr Louis Ng's question on how the RO will make the assessment to establish a special polling station in a nursing home and to authorise special polling arrangements there.

As Mr Ng rightly noted, the Bill sets out various factors that the RO is required to consider. As mentioned in my speech, ELD is piloting this new initiative at selected nursing homes with more than 50 voters for a start. In preparation for the roll-out of this new voting arrangements at these nursing homes, ELD has engaged MOH to understand the profiles of the residents and in-patients. ELD also visited these nursing homes to understand their unique context and environment.

Let me now address Ms Lim and Mr Giam's comments on the amendments to enable the use of counting machines. Let me assure Ms Lim and Mr Giam that there are no plans to introduce electronic voting for now, and ELD will continue to use standalone machines that are not connected to the Internet.

While ELD does not rule out any future solutions that can help enhance our election processes, electronic voting currently requires information on the voter's vote to be retained in the system for audit purpose. This makes it challenging to maintain voting secrecy in the event that an audit has to be done.

I would also like to assure Ms Lim that ELD will consult the political parties as it has done in the past, should advancement in technology allow the safe and secure use of electronic voting machines before rolling this out.

Mr Giam may also wish to note that the section 50B of the Parliamentary Elections Act currently sets out the various requirements to be fulfilled before electronic counting machines can be used. This includes testing of the system in the presence of candidates and their agents.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me conclude by reiterating the intent behind these Bills, which is to update the existing laws to enhance voter accessibility, strengthen trust and confidence in our electoral processes, and ensure that Singapore politics is for Singapore Citizens only.

ELD has consulted political parties on the key initiatives on the new voting modalities last year in 2022 and these are part of the continuous efforts of ELD to enhance our electoral processes and election administration.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me also touch on a few points that were raised just now. Ms Lim asked if we are going to pre-screen the electoral roll before we determine the nursing homes to be involved. As for how many people will be eligible to vote in a nursing home, this will depend on those people who have previously registered. So, we do not pre-screen as a procedure, those people that pre-register. But as I explained, during the voting, the election officials will make that assessment as to whether the person has the mental capacity to conduct the voting.

We agree with Members that the secrecy and the neutrality of the elections officials are very important. This is why the current mode is for the election officials to conduct this rather than to certify many other individuals who are not election officials to help respective individuals. Ms Lim can also be assured that the randomness of the issuance of ballot paper is the same as any polling station.

You asked whether polling agents can assess, I think I have answered that, answer is yes, to view the processes in the nursing home.

And electronic means, we have answered that as well. The counting machines are not connected to the Internet.

Mr Gerald Giam asked about whether we can qualify individuals to help the PwDs. As I have explained, I think it is best that we do this in a way that gives us confidence that the officials are cleared, neutral, impartial in their work rather than to clear many individuals for respective needs which we may not have the confidence to say that they are all clear about the processes.

With that Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move. I urge all Members on both sides of the house to give your fullest support to both Bills.

**Mr Speaker:** Any clarifications? Ms Sylvia Lim.

6.04 pm

**Ms Sylvia Lim:** Speaker, I have got two clarifications for the Minister. The first concerns what he mentioned in his main speech that the Minister's powers to make regulations or adjustments due to disruptive events, I think he mentioned that this is going to be removed from the main Act and put into subsidiary legislation for more flexibility, if there is a disruptive event.

So, I have two questions concerning this. First is that, is it the intention that Minister will actually issue subsidiary legislation well ahead of the election to cover as many scenarios as possible? And during the election, he alluded to the fact that there may be a need to issue some further regulations, for example, a transport incident – that was what he mentioned. Does he foresee that since the Minister will be a participant in the election itself, that there will be any issue with the issuance of those sorts of regulations? So, that is the first thing about the regulations concerning disruptive events, that most of them will be issued well ahead of election, and during the election, it would be limited to extreme exigencies; and whether there is any issue with the Minister being a participant in the election, issuing those regulations.

And lastly, just a clarification on nursing home voting. Will the ELD be conducting special voter education at the nursing homes to be chosen for the pilot, for the reasons which I mentioned earlier?



**Mr Chan Chun Sing:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank Ms Sylvia Lim for her two clarifications. The quick answer to the first one is, yes, of course, the Minister will work with ELD to try to anticipate all the possible contingencies that we have to deal with prior to the elections. I am sure you agree with me that during the election period, you are as busy as me. Not the time for us to make new regulations at that point in time. Yes, so ELD has a scenario plan, various contingencies, as I have described, and we will try to put this out as early as possible.

On the second question, yes, indeed, we are working closely with the nursing home, not just on the logistical and administrative arrangements, but also, as part of our outreach, to let the voters that are potentially voting in a nursing home, understand their rights and responsibilities.

**Mr Speaker:** Mr Gerald Giam.

**Mr Gerald Giam Yean Song:** Just one clarification for the Minister. I believe he said just now that section 50B of the PEA allows for the inspection and testing of voting machines and vote counting machines. I cannot remember the exact words that he used.

However, I believe that section 50b(2) actually requires for the inspection and testing of DRE voting machines and direct recording electronic voting equipment. But it does not mention vote counting machines. So, can I confirm that vote counting machines will be included in this pre-election audit by the candidates and their polling agents?

**Mr Chan Chun Sing:** Mr Speaker, sir, the answer is yes. We have done this before. The last election we used the vote counting machine that is the same as those used by the currency exchangers. That was demonstrated to all the political parties prior to ensure that the accuracy of the system.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

6.08 pm

**Ms Sylvia Lim:** Mr Speaker, for the Presidential Elections Bill, as I mentioned earlier, the Workers' Party Members of Parliament would like to record abstention on the Bill.

**Mr Speaker:** So, would you like to abstain for this Bill?

**Ms Sylvia Lim:** Yes, abstention.

**Mr Speaker:** Would you like to record your dissention by standing in place, please?

**Ms Sylvia Lim:** Record our abstention, yes. We will stand.

**Mr Speaker:** Technically, you should have stood up before I say "the ayes have it".

**Ms Sylvia Lim:** Sorry. I was a bit slow, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** Perhaps you might want to raise your dissension later, at the Third Reading instead?

**Ms Sylvia Lim:** Can we not have it recorded now?

**Mr Speaker:** When I declared that "the ayes have it, the ayes have it", that has passed, process wise.

**Ms Sylvia Lim:** Yes, let it be recorded.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill accordingly committed to a Committee of the whole House.

The House immediately resolved itself into a Committee on the Bill. – [Mr Chan Chun Sing].

Bill considered in Committee; reported without amendment.

**Mr Speaker:** The question is, "That the Bill be now read a Third time." As many of the opinion say aye, to the contrary say no.

**Ms Sylvia Lim:** Speaker, we request our abstention to be recorded.

**Mr Speaker:** Let me call on the votes. I think the ayes have it. For those who want to record your dissention, please stand in place.

**Ms Sylvia Lim:** Abstention, Sir.

**Mr Speaker:** Yes, abstention.

Hon Members Mr Chua Kheng Wee Louis, Mr Gerald Giam Yean Song, Ms He Ting Ru, Assoc Prof Jamus Jerome Lim, Ms Sylvia Lim, Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap, Mr Leon Perera, Mr Pritam Singh and Mr Dennis Tan Lip Fong stood at their seats for their abstention to be recorded.

**Mr Speaker:** Okay, noted.

Bill read a Third time and passed.

## PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL

**Mr Speaker:** Minister Chan Chun Sing.

6.11 pm

**The Minister for Education (Mr Chan Chun Sing):** Mr Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Prime Minister, I beg to move, "That the Bill be now read a Second time."

The Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Bill is associated with the previous Bill on the Order Paper, the Presidential Elections (Amendment) Bill.

In the Second Reading speech for that Bill and the debate we just had, I have explained the main amendments proposed in both Bills. Although Members have already raised their questions and expressed their views on both Bills during the earlier debate, I welcomed Members to raise any additional questions they may have on the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Bill. Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time and committed to a Committee of the whole House.

The House immediately resolved itself into a Committee on the Bill. – [Mr Chan Chun Sing].

Bill considered in Committee; reported without amendment; read a Third time and passed.

## COVID-19 (TEMPORARY MEASURES) (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

6.14 pm

**The Senior Minister of State for Health (Dr Janil Puthucheary) (for the Minister for Health):** Mr Speaker, on behalf of the Minister for Health, I beg to move, "That the Bill be now read a Second time".

Sir, this Bill proposes a single amendment to extend the validity of Part 7 of the COVID-19 (Temporary Measures) Act 2020 (CTMA) for one year. There will be no other changes to Part 7 of the CTMA. The extension will continue to allow targeted public health measures to be implemented for the purposes of preventing and controlling the spread of COVID-19 so that we can react swiftly to new and dangerous COVID-19 variants should they emerge.

Singapore has made significant progress against COVID-19 and we have emerged as a more resilient nation. We now have a high level of hybrid immunity in our population through vaccination and recovery from past infection. Our COVID-19 situation has been stable over the past months.

Last month, we stepped down to DORSCON Green and lifted the last of the legal requirements for COVID-19 community measures, namely mask-wearing on public transport and indoor healthcare and residential care settings. We now treat COVID-19 like other endemic infectious diseases, such as influenza and emphasise the need for all of us to keep up to date with vaccinations, to practice good hygiene habits and exercise social responsibility to prevent the spread of infection.

We must not take the current situation as a given or be complacent. There is still uncertainty as to how COVID-19 will develop globally. The virus continues to circulate and will continue to mutate. We cannot rule out the possible emergence of new variants that can cause infection waves and strain our healthcare resources.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) continues to monitor the COVID-19 situation and the evolution of the virus through our international networks and local surveillance to pick up early signals of new variants that could be more transmissible or cause more severe disease.

Should such a variant emerge, we must continue to have the necessary tools to take appropriate prevention and control measures. We should, therefore, continue to provide in our statutes the ability to implement measures used during the pandemic.

We have been relying on the CTMA during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was enacted as temporary legislation to tackle the threat of COVID-19.

Part 7 of the CTMA was put in place to complement the Infectious Diseases Act (IDA), the main legislation used to control and prevent infectious diseases in Singapore.

Now that we are heading into endemic COVID-19 new normal and are at DORSCON Green, we should work towards stepping down Part 7 of the CTMA and rely on the IDA to manage new variants of concern or new pandemics.

To do so, the MOH commenced a review to enhance the IDA, including incorporating provisions under Part 7 of the CTMA into the IDA so that the IDA is more robust and affords us the agility to be able to cater to different situation.

We intend to table the amendments to IDA in this House in the second half of this year. Once the amendments to the IDA are passed, Part 7 of the CTMA will be revoked.

In the meantime, this last extension of Part 7 of the CTMA allows us to continue to maintain a posture of preparedness should there be a need to deal with a dangerous COVID-19 variant, swiftly activate control measures to safeguard public health and protect our healthcare system. Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time and committed to a Committee of the whole House.

The House immediately resolved itself into a Committee on the Bill. – [Dr Janil Puthucheary].

Bill considered in Committee; reported without amendment; read a Third time and passed.

## HEALTHCARE SERVICES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

**Mr Speaker:** Minister for Health.

6.19 pm

**The Senior Minister of State for Health (Dr Janil Puthucheary) (for the Minister for Health):** Mr Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Minister for Health, I beg to move, "That the Bill be now read a Second time".

Sir, the Healthcare Services Act 2020 (HCSA) was passed in Parliament in January 2020. It will replace the Private Hospitals and Medical Clinics Act 1980 (PHMCA), which was enacted in 1980 and regulates the use of premises in which healthcare services are provided. Since 1980, the healthcare landscape in Singapore had undergone many significant changes and it was timely in 2020 to update the regulatory framework to become services-based and premises-neutral, to ensure that our regulatory approach remains relevant and flexible.

The Act is being implemented progressively with licensees coming onboard HCSA in three phases. We started with laboratory, radiological, ambulance and medical transport services in Phase 1 in January 2022 and will be progressing to hospital, medical and dental services in Phase 2 in mid-2023. Lastly, we will onboard the nursing home services in Phase 3, planned for the end of 2023. This phased approach is intended to give licensees sufficient time to prepare for, and adjust to, the new Act, and thus minimise disruption to existing healthcare services.

Since the implementation of HCSA in Phase 1, there have been developments which require further refinement of this legislation.

First, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to changes in how healthcare is delivered. For instance, new models of care such as teleconsulting and home medical services have proven to be effective and efficient. While HCSA is already a services-based framework, it needs to provide more clarity and flexibility on the requirements related to these new models of care, to continue protecting patient safety and enabling new innovations in providing care. COVID-19 also highlighted the need for HCSA to be adjusted to allow us to respond to public healthcare emergencies more nimbly. This includes instances where licence conditions must be changed immediately to address urgent patient safety or public health issues.

Second, we received feedback on several areas of the regulatory framework, which could be improved. This includes misleading advertisements including non-licensable healthcare services or business names. This was a result of engagements with stakeholders to continuously review and update HCSA while preparing for its rollout across existing and new licensees.

And third, there was a need to align the scope of regulatory action for healthcare advertising by licensees and non-licensees. All these have led us to further review HCSA to enhance and future-proof the legislation.

The proposed amendments will allow us to be nimbler in responding to the evolving healthcare landscape and enable premises-neutral care to be delivered across our healthcare settings. It will also strengthen governance to safeguard patient safety and welfare, and protect patients from misinformation, exploitation or abuse.

Sir, I will go through the key features of the Bill and highlight changes to existing legislation.

Clause 4 will amend section 9 to introduce the regulation of four primary modes of service delivery: permanent premises, temporary premises, conveyances and remote provision. Licensees must obtain approval to provide a licensable healthcare service by any of these four modes.

To give some examples, permanent premises are physical, in-person, General practitioner clinics or hospitals. Temporary premises would include ad-hoc health screenings in a community centre's multipurpose hall or when a doctor conducts a house call visit to a patient's home. Conveyances refer to the healthcare service being delivered using vehicles, like ambulances or dental screening buses. Remote provision involves the delivery of healthcare services through virtual platforms such as virtual teleconsultation.

A clear regulatory framework for these various service delivery modes will give providers the confidence to continue to provide and expand home care services, which are critical to enable ageing in the community, in particular for seniors who are homebound, or those at the end-of-life. Bringing medical services closer to the community and into homes will also enhance the convenience to patients and their

caregivers and reduce caregiver burden.

For example, home medical providers caring for patients at the end-of-life will now be able to help maximise patients' quality of life and fulfil their aspirations to spend their last days at home. The Mobile Inpatient Care at Home (MIC@Home) is another care model where suitable patients can choose to be managed at home and receive similar clinical care as in the hospital, and this includes regular review by the care team either by home visits, teleconsultation or remote monitoring of vital signs, and even intravenous medication if required.

Under this approval regime, the Ministry of Health (MOH) can prescribe regulatory requirements and impose approval conditions on licensees. MOH can also prescribe the service delivery modes that are not permitted for a licensable healthcare service. This provides licensees with better clarity on the requirements they must meet and allows them to determine the appropriate business model for the delivery of their healthcare services. This also increases public transparency on the nature of healthcare services being provided by each licensee, how they can access these services and how the Ministry intends to regulate the delivery of the various types of healthcare services.

The amendments at clauses 6 to 9, and 12 to 15, in particular the new sections 9, 11A and 11B and the amended section 20, set out the details of the approval regime for this, including the regulatory actions that can be taken against licensees who contravene the relevant regulatory requirements or approval conditions.

At present, MOH issues licence conditions to impose new safety standards, such as in instances where there is a change in the regulatory technical standards due to evolving scientific developments. MOH is now required to provide licensees with a minimum period of 14 days to send in written representation in response to the intent to amend the licence conditions, if any.

To prepare for future emergencies, clause 11 will amend section 14 to remove the 14-day notice period for any modification of licence condition that applies to a class of licensees, where there is immediate or imminent harm to patient safety or public health. This is so that MOH can expeditiously implement new healthcare protocols to protect public health and patient safety under exceptional circumstances.

To further safeguard patient safety and welfare upfront, two other approval regimes will be introduced.

First, for Specified Services which involve more complex or higher risk procedures provided in a licensable healthcare service, and therefore have distinct requirements. Examples of Specified Services are liposuction, endoscopy, or radiation oncology services. In addition to the existing licensing regime for licensable healthcare services, the new section 9A will require licensees to seek approval for the provision of any Specified Service. Having an approval process enables MOH to better verify that all requisite standards are met before a licensee can provide such a service, so that patient safety and welfare are upheld before these services are delivered. This approval regime builds on the approval process that is currently available for special care services in medical clinics and specialised procedures and services in private hospitals under the PHMCA framework.

Second, for the appointment of a Clinical Governance Officer or CGO. Clause 17 will amend section 24 to replace the existing notification regime for the appointment of a CGO with an approval framework. Under HCSA, a CGO is expected to play a crucial role in overseeing the clinical governance and technical aspects of healthcare services. By requiring licensees to seek approval for the appointment of a CGO, MOH can also ensure upfront that a competent and suitable individual is appointed and better safeguard patient safety and welfare.

Besides enhancing upfront safeguards, clause 18 also re-enacts section 28 to introduce flexibility for MOH to vary the scope of restrictions for selected individuals or groups of individuals employed or engaged in different healthcare settings, based on the anticipated risk of patient harm. Under the current HCSA, certain licensees may be prohibited from employing any individual who has committed egregious crimes involving violent acts such as rape or kidnapping, except with the approval from MOH, regardless of the duties performed by the individual. This is done to protect the safety and well-being of more vulnerable patients, as they may not be able to fend for themselves if they are harmed or abused. This is similar to the approach taken under the Early Childhood Development Centres Act 2017.

However, the risk of patient harm varies depending on the role undertaken or performed by these personnel and the nature of the healthcare settings they work in. Hence, clause 18 will repeal and re-enact section 28 to provide some flexibility. The restrictions will apply to prospective employees and those engaged, but not employed, by licensees to undertake work in healthcare settings. For a start, licensees operating in the Institute of Mental Health and all nursing homes and hospices will be required to comply with these restrictions. This is because there have been a number of cases of physical violence or abuse reported at these types of healthcare institutions.

MOH will continue to monitor for any emerging trends that indicate an increased risk of patient harm in other settings and will consider extending these restrictions to other individuals or settings in the future if needed.

The proposed amendments also seek to enable the public to make better informed choices about their use of healthcare services. In particular, the necessity of ensuring that consumers or patients are not misinformed or unduly influenced to inappropriately consume certain healthcare services. We are addressing this with tighter controls on advertising and naming.

Clause 19 will amend section 29 to prohibit licensees from using a specialty name in their names or logos – in any language – if there is no practitioner actively practising the said specialty under the auspices of that licensable healthcare service. To clarify, the specialist must be locally registered to practise the specialty in question, and can either be employed or engaged by the licensee to provide the approved licensable healthcare service under the auspices of the licensee. Specialties recognised under the Medical Registration Act or the Dental

Registration Act and their associated terms are the specialty names intended to be covered by the amended section 29. For example, a clinic cannot be called "The Neurology Clinic" or the "The Brain Clinic" if there is no neurologist practising in that clinic. This protects patients from being misled into thinking they are receiving specialty care where the provider is not a specialist.

Licensees are currently prohibited under HCSA from using the terms "Singapore" or "National" in their names or logos except with the approval of the Director of Medical Services. To further prevent public misperceptions, the prohibition against using these terms under section 29 will be amended to extend to the same terms in any language, not just English. To clarify, existing licensees will be allowed to retain their current business names if it contains the terms "Singapore" or "National", unless there are changes in the business name or licensee in future.

To streamline the regulatory framework for healthcare service advertising, some advertising requirements for non-licensable healthcare services will now be regulated under the HCSA regime, and the relevant provisions in the Medicines (Advertisement and Sale) Act 1955 (MASA) will be repealed. These requirements include the prohibition on non-HCSA licensees who claim in healthcare service advertising to "treat" any medical conditions or diseases under the new section 31A inserted by Clause 22. For example, non-HCSA licensees cannot claim that "We treat chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes and all cardiac conditions" or that "We are experienced in treating scoliosis".

At present, there is a disparity in enforcement actions between the two Acts, with MASA having significantly lower penalties and a more limited scope of regulatory action, for example, there is no power to take down non-compliant advertisements. The new section 31C inserted by Clause 22 will impose similar penalties for comparable non-compliance in healthcare service advertising regardless of whether one is an errant provider of a non-licensable healthcare service, or a HCSA licensee. This will deter non-HCSA licensees and ensure all healthcare service providers are held to the same high standards when advertising their healthcare services.

Lastly, many stakeholders have also raised concerns about cases of misuse of the title "Doctor" in healthcare service advertising by certain non-registered healthcare professionals. To protect consumers from being misled into thinking that such persons are registered medical or dental practitioners when they are not, the new section 31B inserted by Clause 22 will require any person who is not a registered healthcare professional to state their specific qualifications and a disclaimer that their qualification is not a medical or dental qualification should they wish to use the title of "Doctor", or any derivative in any language, in healthcare service advertising. These restrictions will not apply to registered healthcare professionals such as nurses and pharmacists, as they are regulated under their respective Professional Acts.

Non-registered healthcare practitioners who are PhD holders and wish to use the title "Doctor" in advertisements of healthcare services must also state their qualification and a disclaimer that the qualification is not a medical or dental qualification, in such advertisements. However, for settings beyond healthcare service advertising, for example, the use of "Doctor" by PhD holders in academic articles, this requirement will not apply.

We understand that there are instances of foreign-trained doctors or dentists who have proper medical or dental qualifications, but do not have these qualifications registered with the Singapore Medical Council (SMC) or Singapore Dental Council (SDC). There are also instances of doctors and dentists who have previously registered themselves locally but have allowed the registration to lapse as they are now retired. In both these cases, should these practitioners wish to use the title "Doctor" in healthcare service advertising, the amended Act will require them to additionally include a disclaimer that they do not hold a valid practicing certificate issued by the SMC or SDC. As these doctors and dentists are not locally registered, these incremental restrictions are designed to ensure that they are treated similarly as other non-registered healthcare professionals, for parity.

The amendments at clauses 25 and 28 pertain to the redesignation of the "Director of Medical Services" to the "Director-General of Health". This new designation is a more accurate reflection of the job scope and responsibilities of the Director of Medical Services, which goes beyond medical services to also the control of communicable and non-communicable diseases, the setting of healthcare professional standards and development and enhancing performance of the healthcare system.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Members will see that through this Bill, MOH seeks to enhance and future-proof the regulation of healthcare services, to enable premises-neutral services across any healthcare setting, to put in place better governance, safeguards and clarity in the provision of healthcare services to patients, to empower patients to make more informed choices and to enable the Ministry to address any patient safety and welfare issues expeditiously.

If passed, we intend to implement the Amendments in mid-2023, together with the second phase of the implementation of this Act, with two exceptions. First, the redesignation of the Director of Medical Services will be implemented within two months. Second, the restriction on individuals employed or engaged will be implemented at end of 2023 when the screening process for the prospective employees would be operationalised. With that, Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

**Mr Speaker:** Mr Louis Ng

6.37 pm

**Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang (Nee Soon):** Sir, this Bill will allow for more informed decision making on healthcare services by requiring greater transparency in the advertising of services. This Bill also introduces an approval framework for licences to providers of healthcare services which will strengthen and refine the regulation of healthcare services.

I thank MOH for conducting a public consultation to prepare for this Bill. MOH's report of the public consultation shows that the feedback was constructive and that the Bill we see today contains changes made due to the public consultation. I hope MOH will continue this good practice of consulting the public before making changes to the law.

I have clarifications in three areas.

My first area for clarification is on the regulation of telemedicine. The Bill will require entities providing telemedicine services to be licensed and regulated. How will MOH regulate the risks posed by telemedicine? COVID-19 has accelerated the use of telemedicine. MOH has also facilitated it through its Licensing Experiment and Adaptation Programme as well as the Voluntary Listing of Direct Telemedicine Service Providers.

Certain risks and concerns may be more prominent in telemedicine than in conventional medicine. The lack of in-person and physical examination may be more likely to prompt instances and claims of misdiagnosis. The online nature of doctor-patient interactions and the relative ease of recording these interactions may also increase the risk of breaches in doctor-patient confidentiality. That is not to mention the role of hackers, fraudsters, phishers and other cybersecurity threats that may see value in gaining access to the vulnerable and personal moments of doctor-patient consultations.

Can Minister provide details and examples on how it will leverage this licensing regime to regulate telemedicine? Will these regulations compel changes to ethical and professional codes?

My second clarification is on the removal of the 14-day notice requirement for modifications of a licence condition. Section 14 will be amended to clarify that a licence condition can be modified without the 14-day notice period if it is necessary to prevent or mitigate immediate or imminent harm to patient safety.

An example provided by MOH of a situation that may require quick changes to licensing conditions is COVID-19. The stakeholder consultations on the amendments raised concerns about frequent updates in healthcare protocols that are understandably disruptive. To help licensees better understand the exceptional situations where licensing conditions may be changed without the required notice, can the Minister provide more examples of such situations?

In MOH's reply to the public consultation responses, MOH said that it will review and see how to improve its communications with licensees during these special circumstances. Can the Senior Minister of State provide details on its review? What steps will it take to improve communications? Will these communication methods be stress-tested ahead of time and not implemented only when the exceptional situations occur?

The section 14 exception for notice is specific only to a situation where there may be harm to patient safety. However, crises in a healthcare setting can also pose harm to healthcare workers. Has the Ministry considered if there are any situations where licensing conditions may need to be changed without notice because of harm to healthcare workers?

My third and last area of clarification is on healthcare advertising controls. The new section 31B will restrict the use of the title "Doctor" in the advertising of a healthcare service. Where the title is used to describe someone who is not a medical practitioner or dentist, the advertisement must provide appropriate disclaimers, such as by stating that the title is not a medical or dental qualification.

But there are other ways for advertisements to mislead consumers without using the word "Doctor". For instance, the advertisements could feature people wearing scrubs, using stethoscopes, operating medical machinery and examining medication.

Can the Senior Minister of State share how MOH will address the risk of misleading advertising through the use of visual imagery?

Further, it is possible that written disclaimers will be insufficient, particularly if the disclaimer is verbose or if the advertisement is cleverly designed. Some consumers, such as those who do not speak English, may also fail to understand the disclaimers. They will see the word "Doctor" but not benefit from the disclaimer.

Can Minister share whether the Ministry considered a full ban on the use of the title "Doctor" in healthcare advertising, given the risk of misleading advertising? After all, is there really an honest reason for a healthcare advertisement to invoke the title "Doctor" without actually referring to a medical doctor or dentist? It is healthcare; let us not let advertisers get too creative. Notwithstanding these clarifications, I support the Bill.

**Mr Speaker:** Assoc Prof Jamus Lim.

6.42 pm

**Assoc Prof Jamus Jerome Lim (Sengkang):** Mr Speaker, the proposed amendments to the Healthcare Services Act is part of a multi-year rollout of reforms to healthcare services that aims to bring healthcare governance into the 21st century. As healthcare services as well as their mode of delivery have advanced, it has become necessary to refine regulation in the sector.



The Bill being debated today implements additional enhancements based on feedback from in-consultation with stakeholders since phase one was rolled out, while also accommodating recent changes to the face of healthcare services delivery especially over the past few years. All these are unobjectionable and for this reason, the Workers' Party supports the Bill.

The first part of my speech will sketch out some residual concerns. The second part, briefly asks about the future of healthcare services provision and what it may be for non-doctor medical professionals.

Clauses 2 and 3 of the Bill as well as sections 3 and 8 of the original Act, refine the definition of service facilities so as to weave in the possibility of remote healthcare provisions such as via the Internet or telephone.

Telecare, telehealth or telemedicine have suddenly come into their own, due to the enforced isolation practises, necessitated by the pandemic. Given the confusing jumble of possible terms in this emerging field, it is natural to ask if the language in the legislation is sufficiently encompassing, or if in this case, excessively accommodating.

After all, how does defining service delivery mode to include and I quote, "(a) at permanent premises and (b) at any premises other than permanent premises" lend guidance as to the sort of location that a licensable healthcare service may be provided from? I can guess that the motivation behind why clause 2(f)(b) was inserted but it still strikes me as so universal as to lend no additional constraints at all.

Related to this issue of location is the fact that the Healthcare Services Act is not extraterritorial in nature. I understand why imposing our domestic service delivery standards on other jurisdictions is essentially untenable, but given how it is not only possible, but increasingly likely that the healthcare services value chain becomes ever more internationalised. Think of the proverbial radiographer based in Bangalore for that matter and AI system with service located in Iceland, coded by programmers in India and consulted by scientists in Israel. What sort of regulatory mechanisms are in place to protect patients in Singapore from potential safety failures by foreign providers?

The new section 31 of the Bill deals with advertising. Much of this is commonsensical. Section A prohibits marketing of the treatment of a medical condition by unlicensed healthcare service providers and section B restricts the use of the term "Doctor" in healthcare advertising. The concern here is whether these restrictions would rule out otherwise legitimate medical providers. Non-western healthcare providers naturally come to mind.

I understand that practitioners of Traditional Chinese Medicine, or TCM, do fall within the domain of specified persons, but this still raises two separate issues. First, as far as I am aware, ayurvedic, siddha and jammu practices are not included in this list. Does this Bill then preclude their ability to advertise their services? Is the reason why these groups are not included as specified persons because they do not have official oversight boards? If so, is this sufficient justification for the exclusion, given how they simply lack the critical mass to justify a societal body?

Second, the qualifications require for different accreditation bodies are actually disparate. More specifically, each group often may impose different standards of rigour, insofar as qualification benchmarks are concern. This applies not only to this Bill, but also what a suitably qualified individual means in the original act.

Local midwives, for instance, do not appear to distinguish between different levels, compared to as many as five in jurisdictions, such as the United States. Qualifications within nursing, likewise, have only recently become more differentiated. Advanced practice nurses, senior nurses who possess advanced training and can take on some roles in diagnosis and treatment, date back to only 2006, and currently, only 57 are licensed to prescribe medicine.

Singapore only recognises two categories of TCM practitioners, and for one of these, acupuncture registration is currently only open to qualify registered doctors and dentists. Compare these to the wide range of degrees, sub-specialisations and levels that exist already for doctors.

This naturally begs the question of whether the rigour associated with classifying these different tiers or medical practices are equivalent. And if not, what does this mean for their credibility when it comes to advertising?

To be clear, I am not suggesting that these other traditional medical practices be accorded the same sort of recognition as modern medicine, or that their advertising should not be regulated in some form. Still, it remains unclear to me why non-TCM groups should be prohibited from marketing their offerings.

Conversely, I am left wondering if the qualifications embodied in advertising by the different types of medical professionals are truly comparable. Perhaps a compromise would be to require an additional disclaimer, applicable to non-western medical practices, be included in all advertising efforts from this group.

This notion of differing tiers of medical practitioners as well as the stress in section 31 be about the use of the term "doctor" sparks a more general query. What steps has the Ministry undertaken to fill the niches that currently exists in our healthcare service providers? This is especially pertinent, given the lower coverage of both doctors and nurses in our population.

The latest available data, which applies to 2016, for example, indicates that Singapore has 2.3 physicians per 1,000 people, a little higher than the world average of 1.7, but substantially below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 3.8.

It is also pertinent in the light of how our current slate of medical professionals are reportedly burning out, a bipartisan concern that has been raised in this House by, among others, my hon friend Ms He Ting Ru as well as the hon member who just spoke, Mr Louis Ng.

I understand that there are plans to increase the number of advanced practice nurses able to prescribe medication to 700. This is important and will provide some relief to our overworked doctors and fill in the gaps in healthcare services provision for our ageing population.

But what about the other tiers within the nursing profession? Has each tier been filled to an extent that would offer relief down the pipeline of medical professionals? What about increasing the number of recognised universities for basic medical degrees? The list of registrable medical qualifications only numbers to 100, while a few additions have been made in recent years, these are only a small handful.

It is hard to conceive of how a country, like France, with a population and medical school count, almost three times that of Australia, has only one lonely university on the list, versus Australia's eight. Similarly, I fail to understand how Japan, a country ranked first in at least one global index of health systems ranking, has only three of the country's 80 medical schools on the list.

Sir, the bottom line is that, as much as we focus on legislative refinements, the quality of our health services will ultimately be determined by ability to ensure that there is adequate supply of healthcare workers at all levels. This extends from the best doctors we are able to attract from around the world, to the invaluable community health workers that render so much of the behind-the-scenes support to every other role in-between.

**Mr Speaker:** Leader.

## EXEMPTED BUSINESS

### (Business Motion)

Resolved, "That the proceedings on the business set down on the Order Paper for today be exempted at this day's Sitting from the provisions of Standing Order No 2." –  
[Ms Indranee Rajah]

## SECOND READING BILLS

### HEALTHCARE SERVICES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Debate resumed.

**Mr Speaker:** Dr Tan Yia Swam.

6.51 pm

**Dr Tan Yia Swam (Nominated Member):** Mr Speaker, Sir, in the past months, there were multiple engagement sessions and email requests to doctors, and I assume all healthcare workers, asking for feedback on the Healthcare Services Act (HCSA). I was involved via the Singapore Medical Association (SMA) as well as the Singapore Medical Council (SMC). However, I would like to know how many doctors actually responded.

It is a challenge for my profession to self-govern and self-regulate sometimes, as most doctors are too busy with providing clinical work, teaching, research, maintaining competencies, and do not forget, doctors are humans too, and have our own personal lives.

Perhaps medical school curriculum needs to further expand their law and ethics segment, to emphasise these administrative components. In addition, the role of SMC versus SMA should be ingrained into medical students, so that as doctors progress in their careers, they value how a professional body can effectively do group representations with MOH in policy engagements.

I welcome the expanded scope of HCSA to include complementary and alternative medicine. But I still ask for consideration to include beauty and wellness services as well, I remain concerned over misleading claims.

I give one classic example, in my work as a breast surgeon, I have been dismayed by a few women who had discovered breast lumps while breastfeeding. They consulted their masseuse or confinement "auntie", who try to massage the lump away, telling them repeatedly: "it is just a blocked duct". While that may be true for most women, a few actually have a breast cancer and they delayed seeing a doctor until months later. People become patients when they see a doctor, but the first health encounter may be well before that.

Finally, as a follow-up to my Committee of Supply (COS) cut, asking you to help us to help you, do remember not to be prescriptive in the implementation but to guide healthcare workers with kindness and patience as HCSA rolls out in the coming months. The above notwithstanding, I support the Bill.

**Mr Speaker:** Ms Ng Ling Ling.

6.53 pm

**Ms Ng Ling Ling (Ang Mo Kio):** Mr Speaker, the Healthcare Services Act (HCSA) amendment Bill introduces a slew of changes aimed at better regulating healthcare services and providing greater transparency in their advertising to safeguard public interest in an environment of changing population health needs as our population ages.

I will focus my speech on two of the proposed changes to seek some clarifications on one, the introduction of an approval framework for service delivery modes and specified services; and two, the regulations on the advertisement of non-licensable healthcare services under the Act.

First, approval for the provision of licensable healthcare services. New sections 11(A), 11(B), 11(C), 11(D) give wide-ranging power and responsibilities to the Director-General of Health, currently called the Director of Medical Services, in granting an approval for any permanent premises, conveyance or other services' delivery mode, which I understand, can include telehealth, for licensable healthcare services of a licensee.

Under section 3 of HCSA, health services definition is very broad and can range from, I quote: "assessment, diagnosis, treatment, prevention or elevation of any ailment, a condition, disability, disease, disorder or any injury affecting any part of the human body or mind, nursing or rehabilitation care of an individual suffering from an ailment, a condition, disability, disorder or an injury, assessment of the health of an individual."

While I understand that this new section 11 is an extension to the replacement to the previous Private Hospitals and Medical Clinics Act that is more premise-based, to a more service-based legislation through HCSA first enacted amidst the thick of COVID-19 pandemic in January 2020, I would like to ask how these new sections would be judiciously administered, with a balance between safeguarding patient safety and not stifling the development of new and innovative healthcare services that can benefit Singaporeans?

Furthermore, under clause 15, power is provided that regulatory action may be taken if a licensee contravenes or fails to comply, with any condition or requirement, relating to any approved permanent premises, approved conveyance, approved service delivery mode or approved specified services. My question, again, is how can this clause be judiciously administered in an environment where provision of healthcare services is becoming more complex and diverse?

With the Healthier SG implementation and the stepping up on preventive health, will there be grey areas that will be more debatable and will placing the approvals on such broad areas on one senior public servant, the Director-General of Health, be placing too much onus and burden on one authority?

I note that clause 23 allows appeals to the Minister. I would like to ask at which point might an Advisory Panel or sort, if any, be also involved for appeal cases? One of my personal observations for Singapore's success in riding through and managing COVID-19 pandemic so well, is that we have a panel of highly qualified and respected healthcare experts, with the humility to consult both local and global healthcare experts, and use data and evidence to make recommendations and decisions with our political leaders.

I wonder if MOH should be more explicit in the amendment Bill to provide rooms for having such an Advisory Panel, comprising highly qualified medical and non-medical experts, including researchers, respected and public-spirited health tech experts and even community leaders, who are committed to the best health interests of Singaporeans to present more comprehensive inputs in approvals covered by these new sections?

This is to avoid precluding new or seemingly unconventional healthcare services or service delivery mode that may actually yield better health outcomes at more affordable costs to Singaporeans, without comprehensively assessing them first from more angles.

The next clarification is on the advertisement of non-licensable healthcare services under the Act. The new section 31(A) prohibits the advertisement of any skill or service relating to the treatment of any ailment, disease or condition and so on, affecting the human body such that it induces a person to seek the advice of, or treatment from the advertiser or the person being advertised. However, this prohibition does not apply in relations to an advertisement of a licensable healthcare service by a licensee, or a person acting on the authority of a licensee.

While the intent of the amendment is clear to me in protecting the public from being misinformed or misled by unethical parties, the latter leaves room for ambiguity. Will the section unintentionally deter building of awareness of new service delivery mode attempting to provide a more integrated health and psychosocial intervention to help those with chronic conditions and more complex illnesses, like mental illnesses, which require beyond medicine to treat.

I would like to ask, for example, if a well-trained counsellor who is working within the physical premises or virtual mode of a licensee be able to share about what they can provide for mental health management? How about a TCM practitioner that has a partnership with a licensee, like a GP clinic: can the TCM practitioner publicise its services with the GP clinic?

Mr Speaker, I would like to conclude by thanking the officers in MOH for working so hard over the past few years during COVID-19 pandemic and continually doing so in our efforts towards a healthier population against our fast-ageing society. Future-proofing our healthcare system and protecting our public and patients are of paramount priorities.

A duty of care and doing no harm should be a guiding ethic and principle, not just for doctors, but for all players, including Integrated Plan insurers, third party administrators and online search engine optimisation platform providers that want to contribute a part in managing one of the greatest "wealth" of all mankind – our health. Mr Speaker, notwithstanding the clarifications that I have raised, I support the Bill.

**Mr Yip Hon Weng (Yio Chu Kang):** Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill is a poignant one for me. I had fond memories working on this Bill as a young MOH officer deployed to the Healthcare Regulation Division in MOH. This was in 2011. I recalled that it was a steep learning curve. I had to quickly understand the vast array of medical services, ranging from acute clinical treatment in restructured hospitals, to convalescent care in community hospitals and those in the community. Working with both doctors and administrators, we also had to study the healthcare services and legislations of other countries and learn the best practices. This was with the aim of assessing what can be applied in Singapore, given the unique history and evolution of our healthcare system.

2011 was more than a decade ago. The fact that this Bill has gone through multiple amendments and iterations over the years is a testament to its complexity and multifaceted nature. The crux of the matter is that healthcare is complex. Nothing is static in healthcare. Advancements in healthcare are turbo-charged by technology. The use of mRNA in vaccines is a prime example of how technology that was not originally designed for vaccine use can be leveraged to combat diseases. Given this context, I fully appreciate the challenges that come with moving a Bill such as this through the legislative process.

I seek clarifications on four specific areas in the Bill.

First, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to seek clarifications on how the Ministry plans to enhance public education, particularly with regards to clause 19 of the Bill which seeks to amend section 19 of the Act.

This amendment states that licensees are prohibited from using terms associated with specialties in their business names if there is no such specialist employed or engaged by them. They are also not allowed to use the words "Singapore" and "national." However, I am concerned whether existing institutions or companies that contravene the new regulations will be grandfathered. While this may be reasonable, considering the goodwill that these entities may have fostered, I am concerned that this amendment may not achieve its intended goal. This is to prevent patients from being misled into believing that such clinics provide specialist services or are endorsed by the Government. Will these businesses be required to display notices to clarify such matters? Or will there be other measures to ensure that patients are not misled?

Furthermore, what measures will the Government implement to ensure that the public is informed of these new restrictions? We can use this opportunity to guide the public in identifying healthcare establishments that possess the required legitimate expertise as a medical facility to deliver their promised services. In doing so, let the public report on healthcare businesses that are errant. It is important that we weed out healthcare businesses with poor practices. This is especially important for seniors, who are more likely to take business names at face value and be misled.

Second, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a need for clarification and safeguard concerning clause 11 of the Bill that amends section 14 of the Act. This amendment proposes the lifting of the condition that MOH must give 14 days' notice before changing licensing conditions imposed by MOH on healthcare institutions. While this may be a step to ensure faster responses, there are concerns that healthcare institutions may not have sufficient turnaround time to meet the new conditions that MOH may have imposed and suffer business losses. What measures will MOH impose to balance the business considerations of healthcare institutions and public health?

What are the safeguards in place to ensure that the licensing conditions imposed by MOH are genuinely necessary, to prevent urgent patient-safety issues in extraordinary circumstances? And is there a list of what these special circumstances are?

Third, Mr Speaker, there is a need for greater clarity on the regulation of community services, such as community screening.

What exactly does the regulation of community screening encompass? Does it cover blood pressure screenings conducted by non-healthcare professionals through community blood pressure machines, for example? Have there been incidences whereby the community machines were not calibrated correctly, resulting in false positive or negative screenings?

What about eye examinations performed by optometrists, prescription of hearing aids by audiologists, or even the sale of shoe aids, sometimes carried out at pharmacies or sportswear shops catering to people with foot problems?

That being said, I recognise the need for a balance between regulation, and the costs and accessibility of these services. Healthcare in the community should be both convenient and affordable. And we must not overlook this. How does the Government plan to achieve this balance?

Fourth, Mr Speaker, Sir, will complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) be considered under the scope of the HCSA? This is a growing field. Many people turn to chiropractic, homeopathy, and other alternative therapies to manage their health. A 2016 Singapore Mental Health Study found that 6.4% of the adult population in Singapore used at least one form of CAM for the treatment and management of their mental illness. The pandemic saw a stronger demand for alternative therapies to manage stress and other mental wellness problems. Even though some of these services promise relief for insomnia and other mental health issues, these are generally health problems that should be consulted with a professional.

Many people also seek chiropractic care due to body aches from poor postures and excessive sitting while working from home. Despite not being recognised in Singapore, chiropractic services have been discussed in articles by local mainstream and online publications. These shows the popularity of these services. From 2018, there have also been calls for the chiropractic industry to be regulated, even from

within the industry itself. Can the Ministry share an update on its assessment of risks to patient safety and the need for possible regulation?

Has the Government conducted recent studies on the percentage of the population in Singapore that uses CAM on a regular basis? If there is a growing trend, we should consider regulating these services. This is to ensure that they meet the same standards of safety, quality and professionalism, as other kinds of service providers.

In conclusion, Mr Speaker, Sir, as I had worked on this Bill before, in preparing for this speech, I asked myself whether this Bill has met its intents when we first worked on this more than a decade ago. First, does the legislation help to future-proof our healthcare system? Second, does the legislation protect our people who use our healthcare system, which I think is a more pertinent consideration? I must say after reviewing the Bill, the amendments proposed are necessary and commendable. They are an important step forward in ensuring that our healthcare system remains safe, reliable, responsive and in time for the future. I support the Bill.

**Mr Speaker:** Senior Minister of State Janil Puthucheary.

7.08 pm

**Dr Janil Puthucheary:** Sir, I thank Members for their support of the Bill, as well as their various comments. If I may just address a few of the issues.

Ms Ng Ling Ling and Mr Yip Hon Weng asked about the administration of the approval framework for modes of service delivery, especially where healthcare services are becoming more complex.

I had pointed out that HCSA was designed to cover a wide scope of healthcare services, including those that have been mentioned by Mr Yip.

MOH takes a risk-based approach. This means that we only license healthcare service providers and require them to comply with the relevant requirements if there are patient safety or welfare risks that we need to control through legislations. We want to guard against overdoing this and ensure that services remain affordable and accessible.

One concrete example, we are reviewing whether to regulate community health-screening services that may involve invasive procedures, such as the drawing of blood, but which may not be provided by a medical practitioner or dentist. Bearing in mind the general aim of making such services, not only more accessible and convenient, but also safe for patients. So, we are closely monitoring the community screening landscape to identify newer models or other types of services where they may pose a higher patient safety and welfare risk, and then explore whether those need to be licensed.

There were a number of questions on telemedicine-related requirements including by Mr Louis Ng and if I may address some of those issues. We had consulted with our various licensees and communicated these to them over the past few months. From a service provision standpoint, telemedicine or remote medical service providers must ensure that the service provided is done so in a proper, effective and safe manner, similar to what you would expect in a medical service from a clinic. For example, they have to ensure the privacy and confidentiality with the medical consult, the integrity and security of patient health records, the timely escalation and referral. Providers will also need to make sure that their doctors using the remote modality are trained and competent to do so.

Our prevailing professional codes such as the Singapore Medical Council's Ethical Code and Ethical Guidelines will continue to apply. Doctors offering telemedicine will thus need to meet both professional practice and clinical service standards which will provide a more comprehensive protection for patients.

That this applies to all healthcare professionals as Dr Tan Yia Swam has reiterated. It is important that all healthcare professionals are ourselves aware of the need to actively self-regulate and participate with that process of self-regulation, including by complying with and reading of the professional codes of conduct as the ultimate objective is to ensure that patients' safety and welfare are not compromised.

There were some questions about healthcare service advertising. Mr Yip had asked whether existing licensees and businesses that contain the restricted terms "National" or "Singapore" will be allowed to retain their names. I mentioned that they can continue to use these terms unless there is a change in the business name or a change in the licensee. We understand that there is some brand equity built up already and rather than mandating that these licensees immediately remove these restricted terms, we will allow them to continue.

Mr Yip also asked about the licensees with specialty names. They may continue to use those names that they already have. But if they provide or purport to provide services within that specialty, we may impose regulatory requirements on such licensees to employ or engage the relevant specialist. Otherwise, we will work with the licensee to amend the business name; otherwise, they will be giving the wrong impression to the public and that would not be in the patient's interests.

I agree with Mr Yip about public education. It is important to complement our regulatory effort, especially around how the public engages with business names and advertising. We will be publishing the intent and scope of these naming restrictions so that the public can understand what is allowed, what is not allowed, and they can have an easily accessible reference.

More public education effort is needed to enable patients to be discerning in their consumption of healthcare services. In line with overall efforts on media literacy, we encourage the public to help one another, and we ask for Members of the House, to also help within the communities in doing so.

We will also continue to encourage the public to perform due diligence and exercise some degree of discretion before engaging the services of any healthcare provider. A list of licensees with the modes of service delivery and Specified Services that they are approved to provide will be published and also made accessible through HealthHub so that the public can check if the healthcare provider they wish to obtain services from has the necessary approvals to provide those services.

We hope that the public will also participate and report errant institutions through feedback channels, which we can then investigate and take the appropriate enforcement action.

Mr Louis Ng brought up some issues around healthcare service advertising that may mislead using visual imagery. I agree with Mr Ng that this risk exists and we have provided restrictions on the use of certain terms, not just in the licensees' names, but in the use of those terms within the logo. However, the extension of restrictions to the use of visual imagery completely may limit businesses' ability to create a brand to distinguish themselves, and I think there is room to significantly overstep.

One example I might provide for Mr Ng's consideration is the use of the heart shape. I think it is quite commonly used in a variety of settings. I do not think anybody would say that it is exclusively the purview of cardiologists, especially if it is the simplified cartoon-shape heart. So, we do need to be quite careful, not to prevent all advertising. We will investigate complaints, however, on a case-by-case basis, and the examples that he cited, if there is a non-licensed provider, or someone purporting to treat when they should not be, and doing so through the use of visual imagery, we would suggest that these cases are reported. We will look at the visual imagery, but we will also take into consideration the overall content and intent of the advertisement before we decide on whether we take an enforcement action. The intent is to make sure that those providing treatment and medical services are appropriately regulated for the safety of the public.

Mr Louis Ng suggested banning the use of the term "Doctor" outright for healthcare service advertising. We tried to have a balanced approach. The title "Doctor" is something that is afforded not only to medical doctors. The PhD holders would also have that title. And having the title of "Doctor" as a medical doctor, does not automatically mean one is licensed but one does have that title. So, we are trying through our approach, to achieve the right balance and make it clear that where you are advertising a healthcare service, the appropriate description is used, including the description of your qualification or lack thereof for the provision of medical or dental services. So, we do not think it is tenable to restrict the title of "Doctor", prevent it completely in all healthcare service advertising. But we think having this mandatory disclosure is a more balanced approach.

Ms Ng Ling Ling had some questions on the co-location of non-licensable healthcare services, such as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) practitioners together with licensable healthcare services. We have prescribed a list of services that can be co-located without needing to seek prior approval and this includes TCM acupuncture services and services provided by registered allied health professionals, such as physiotherapists.

Beyond this list, service providers who wish to co-locate their services must seek MOH's approval and conditions will be imposed, including requirements to comply with for their advertising.

In particular, the advertising must not result in a misperception by patients that the co-located non-licensable healthcare service is actually licensed by HCSA.

Where an advertisement covers both the licensable healthcare service and the co-located non-licensable service, it is the HCSA licensee that is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Healthcare Services (Advertisement) Regulations for the entire advertisement.

I would also like to address Dr Tan Yia Swam's concern. The amendments already cover misleading claims made by non-HCSA licensees, including building and wellness service providers. This means that any salon that purports to treat the medical condition will be in contravention of the law. We continue to encourage the public to exercise discretion. And if the public is aware of such misleading claims, please escalate this to the Ministry for further investigation.

Sir, Members have also asked about the safeguards in the regulatory process. Mr Yip Hon Weng highlighted that healthcare institutions may not have sufficient turnaround time given the 14-day notice period being removed.

I would like to stress again that we are only removing the 14-day notice period for a class of licensees, such as all licensees that provide an acute hospital service and only in situations where there is immediate or imminent harm to patient safety. Such a situation would have significant impact on our healthcare worker safety and our public health safety as well. Members will remember exceptional circumstances that include the recent COVID-19 pandemic. And you can extend this to other public health emergencies that are conceivable, and we would need to be able to react to these in a relatively swift manner.

Based on our experience in COVID-19, licensees can indeed meet the requirements and can do so at a relatively short notice. I would like to assure Mr Yip Hon Weng and Mr Louis Ng that the aim of this amendment is to provide the Ministry with the power to direct groups of licensees to take immediate action. The focus is on saving lives through the quick introduction of safety measures and not on penalising licensees for not being able to comply with the Ministry's direction despite their best efforts.

Ms Ng Ling Ling also asked if it was too onerous to place the burden of approvals on one authority. I would like to reassure her that MOH and agencies that are part of the family, we have a number of Expert Committees and Appeal Advisory Committees that are part of our normal processes. So, when guidance is given by Directors of Medical Services and decisions are made by the Minister, it is informed by a wide group of experts, academics, practitioners and professionals from the associations and various bodies representing healthcare



workers, including the Academy of Medicine Singapore, the Singapore Medical Association, Singapore Dental Association, the College of Family Physicians Singapore and our various Expert Committees and Appeals Advisory Boards. These are all very much part of our ongoing process; that is not going to change with HCSEA.

There were a number of questions by Assoc Prof Jamus Lim. I would point out that several of his questions addressed healthcare manpower, the professional certification of individuals, pastoral support for healthcare workers who are burning out, the universities and medical schools – none of which is covered by this Bill before the House. I would suggest that he might want to either raise the appropriate Parliamentary Questions or take these up at an appropriate time.

There are some issues that he raised that are indeed covered and I would like to just go through them. The first on the issue of TCM practitioners and other complementary and alternative medical practitioners. They are not prohibited from advertising, from describing what they do. What they are prohibited from is purporting to treat and diagnose medical conditions. I just want to make sure that we have a clear understanding.

The TCM practitioners themselves have their own Professional Board that regulates them. So, that is not something that, under this legislation, we require them to state their qualifications.

Assoc Prof Jamus Lim also brought up the issue of the language around premises. The intent is not to constrain premises. The intent is to regulate the service provisions. So, in describing premises, we have tried to cover indeed as many possible premises and models of service delivery. So, the intent is to look at the service and then specify and agree with the licensee how they will provide that service. Hence, we do need the language to cover the various possibilities of how and where a service will be provided. I hope that addresses Assoc Prof Jamus Lim's query about why we have the language around permanent versus non-permanent versus conveyancing within the Bill.

Indeed, the point he brought up around international providers around the virtual tele-consultations is important. We cannot regulate what people has access to through the Internet, but we do want to educate members of the public to be discerning about where they get their healthcare information from. Ideally, they should get it from identified locally registered licensed healthcare provider. If they do get information online from healthcare providers overseas, that is not something that this Bill is going to be able to regulate.

However, if that advice then requires them to have prescribed medication, consume medication, treatments and services and interventions, those are controlled by a variety of legislation and regulatory frameworks and that is where we can perhaps assure more patient safety. Ultimately, the main thing is that when people look for information, they should be doing so ideally from a licensed, locally registered healthcare provider.

Assoc Prof Jamus Lim also brought up the issue of midwifery professionals and nursing professionals. This Bill does not regulate any of those. This Bill is a Bill to regulate the provisions of services. It is not a Bill to regulate the professional certification of individuals. There are other legislation and regulation for that.

Sir, in conclusion, this Bill introduces changes to future-proof our regulatory framework for agility, to enhance the operational efficiency and clarity, as well as strengthen safeguards to patient safety and welfare to ensure our regulatory regime remains robust, agile and responsive to provide better healthcare services to our population in Singapore.

I thank Members for their support of the Bill. I would also like to take the opportunity here to thank our licensees, healthcare professionals, professional associations and members of public who have contributed throughout our stakeholder consultation exercises, including virtual sessions which have involved more than 1,000 attendees, helping with ideas and suggestions to jointly improve the healthcare services regulatory framework. Mr Speaker, I beg to move.

**Mr Speaker:** Are there any clarifications? Ms Ng Ling Ling.

7.24 pm

**Ms Ng Ling Ling:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I just have one clarification for the Senior Minister of State of Health. On the comment that MOH will take a risk-based approach and impose regulation mainly when there are patient safety risks especially, some GPs, in my constituency has asked, in preparation for Healthier SG, to the best intent, they wonder whether vaccination such as flu vaccine that is in the national vaccination recommendation, is allowed to be done in community clubs where the footfall is higher, where there is more natural flow and there are grassroots leaders who can share the benefit of being vaccinated. But whether that is actually out of premise and whether can they claim the subsidies for flu vaccination? I just wanted to ask: are these imposed after Healthcare Services (Amendment) Bill has been implemented to actually formally ask MOH before they do?

**Dr Janil Puthucheary:** Sir, I thank Ms Ng for her question. If the issue is the subsidies for vaccination, that is beyond the scope of this Bill. I will encourage the Member to file a Parliamentary Question or bring it up in an appropriate point in time.

If the question is about could GPs perform vaccinations in the community centres and other locations, it is precisely this sort of flexibility that this Bill now provides. The specifics would depend on which GP, which vaccination and which community centre. And so, there would have to be an application made to MOH for approval.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time and committed to a Committee of the whole House.

The House immediately resolved itself into a Committee on the Bill. – [Dr Janil Puthuchery].

Bill considered in Committee; reported without amendment; read a Third time and passed.

## CIVIL LIST

### (Motion)

7.26 pm

**The Senior Minister of State for Finance (Mr Chee Hong Tat):** Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move,

That this Parliament, pursuant to section 7 of the Civil List and Gratuity Act 1970, resolves that the Schedule to that Act be varied by deleting the figures "\$4,532,400" and "\$2,762,300" in the second column, and substituting for them the figures "\$6,696,700" and "\$3,342,200" respectively.

Sir, the Civil list was last adjusted for FY2012. Operating costs have risen over the last decade. The President's Office has been able to manage within its budget by re-allocating savings across expenditure across Classes II, III and IV. It is provided for under section 5(2) of the CLGA.

To enable the President's Office to continue to meet its expenditure needs, I propose to vary the sums in Class II and Class III of the Civil List. The provisions for Class I expenditures relating to the President's salary and entertainment allowance and Class IV expenditures concerning special services will remain unchanged.

For Class II expenditures, in respect of the salaries of personal staff, these were last increased for FY2010. The proposed increase more than 10 years later is to cater for increases in expenditure on manpower, including the Civil Service salary adjustments announced last year. Therefore, I propose an increase from \$4,532,400, to \$6,696,700 for Class II expenditures.

For Class III expenditures, which provide for the expenses of household, I propose an increase from \$2,762,300 to \$3,342,200. This is to cater for higher IT costs, including IT security. We expect this round of increase to be sufficient for up to FY2025. Sir, I beg to move.

Question put, and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this Parliament, pursuant to section 7 of the Civil List and Gratuity Act 1970, resolves that the Schedule to that Act be varied by deleting the figures "\$4,532,400" and "\$2,762,300" in the second column and substituting for them the figures "\$6,696,700" and "\$3,342,200" respectively.

**Mr Speaker:** Leader.

## ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, "That Parliament do now adjourn to Monday, 20 March 2023." – [Ms Indranee Rajah.]

*Adjourned accordingly at 7.31 pm*

## WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWER NOT ANSWERED BY END OF QUESTION TIME PLANS TO CURTAIL CROSS-BORDER SCAMS GIVEN EASE OF MONEY TRANSFERS THROUGH REAL-TIME PAYMENTS

8 **Mr Yip Hon Weng** asked the Prime Minister (a) what are the Government's plans to curtail cross-border scams given the enhanced connectivity to transfer money through real-time payments; and (b) how is the Government working with international financial and security organisations to prevent such cross-border scams from taking place.

**Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam (for the Prime Minister):** The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) has launched real-time cross-border retail payment linkages with India and Thailand in the recent past. These will facilitate faster, cheaper, more accessible and more transparent cross-border payments for individuals and businesses.

We are keenly aware that criminals can exploit a more efficient and interconnected global payment network. We have seen scammers make use of faster cross-border payments to transfer their criminal proceeds out of Singapore, to where it is difficult to trace, and beyond the jurisdiction of our Police to freeze. The Government is working actively to address this risk, both domestically and in collaboration with our international counterparts.

Domestically, MAS has worked with our major retail banks to tighten and implement anti-scam controls. These include lowering the default transaction notification threshold to S\$100 or lower, alongside the daily limit of S\$1,000 or lower for real-time cross-border transfers. Banks actively monitor changes in scam typologies and will adjust these measures as appropriate.

Globally, our agencies work closely with our international counterparts to combat cross-border crimes and scams. For example, (a) MAS proactively exchanges relevant information with its international counterparts to surface suspicious cross-border flows and activities so that the authorities can take the appropriate mitigating measures; and (b) our Singapore Police Force (SPF) works with its overseas counterparts to exchange information and conduct joint operations to dismantle scam syndicates. SPF is a member of the "Asset-Recovery Interagency Network- Asia Pacific", a network spanning 28 jurisdictions in the Asia-Pacific region which aims to increase members' effectiveness in depriving criminals of their illicit profits. SPF also shares intelligence on transnational scams with the international policing community through INTERPOL.

We aim to reap the real benefits to the public of fast and efficient real-time cross-border payments while mitigating the risks. MAS and the Police will continue to work closely and proactively with industry to review and enhance the suite of anti-scam measures.

#### **ADDING ON HDB'S WEBSITE THAT SINGLE PARENTS NOT ELIGIBLE FOR INTERIM HOUSING CAN APPROACH HDB FOR ASSISTANCE**

9 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for National Development (a) whether the Ministry will consider including in the section in HDB's website dedicated to addressing common queries from single parents to state that single unwed parents who are not eligible for interim housing under the Parenthood Provisional Housing Scheme (PPHS) can approach HDB for assistance; (b) how many single unwed parents have applied for interim housing under PPHS since 2021; and (c) what are the outcomes of the applications.

**Mr Desmond Lee:** On the Housing and Development Board (HDB) webpage on housing support for single parents, we already state that single unwed parents who require housing assistance can approach HDB, and we will assess each request holistically, based on their individual circumstances.

Since January 2021, eight single unwed parents have applied for the Parenthood Provisional Housing Scheme (PPHS). HDB assisted two of them with Interim Rental Housing. Of the remaining six, one was invited to select a PPHS flat but did not do so, three were not successful in the balloting, one is awaiting the ballot results, and one withdrew the application to take up alternative housing arrangements.

#### **APPEALS FROM RESIDENTS INELIGIBLE FOR PUBLIC RENTAL HOUSING AND CANNOT AFFORD OPEN MARKET RENTALS**

12 **Mr Yip Hon Weng** asked the Minister for National Development (a) for the past three years, how many housing assistance appeals were received from residents who were ineligible for public rental housing and cannot afford to rent from the open market; (b) what was the outcome of these appeals, including the percentage that were unsuccessful; (c) what were the alternatives provided; and (d) with the expansion of the Progressive Wage Model, whether the Ministry anticipates an increase in appeals and how it ensures that low-income workers have access to housing.

**Mr Desmond Lee:** When assessing requests for public rental housing, the Housing and Development Board (HDB) adopts a holistic and needs-based approach and does not reject applicants based on income alone. Various factors, such as applicants' circumstances, household size, family support and ability to afford other housing options, are also considered. Applicants may be ineligible for multiple reasons, including not meeting the citizenship requirement, or having alternative housing options, such as being able to afford a flat or having family members who can accommodate them.

We do not specifically track the number of appeals from residents who were ineligible for public rental housing and cannot afford to rent from the open market. Nonetheless, applicants who do not have family support and do not have other housing options will be assisted with a public rental flat.

Those who are ineligible for public rental housing and cannot afford to rent from the open market may consider other housing options, such as staying with their families or friends, to minimise their financial outlay. For lower-income households who are waiting for their new BTO flats to be completed and have no other temporary housing options, HDB may offer them interim rental flats on a case-by-case basis.

The expansion of the Progressive Wage Model will increase the wages of more lower-wage workers, putting them in a better position to purchase homes of their own. We also have various generous housing grants and subsidies that they can tap on, such as the Enhanced CPF Housing Grant and Step-Up CPF Housing Grant. For those who are not ready for home ownership and have no other housing options, HDB will assess their applications holistically and consider them for public rental housing.

#### **WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

##### **CHICKEN MEAT PRODUCTS FROM INDONESIA AND PLANS TO STREAMLINE IMPORT PROCESSES**

1 **Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin** asked the Minister for Sustainability and the Environment (a) what proportion of our chicken meat products now come from Indonesia after last year's approval of Indonesian producers to export to Singapore; and (b) whether there are any plans to streamline import processes for more countries that export meats to Singapore.

**Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien:** The Singapore Food Agency (SFA) accredited Indonesia as a new source of chilled, frozen and processed chicken meat in June 2022. It will take time for the industry to grow the amount of chicken imports from Indonesia. SFA's regulatory processes for meat imports serve to ensure our food remains safe. There are, currently, no plans to change these processes even as we work with foreign counterparts and the industry to diversify the sources of our protein imports.

##### **EXTENT OF THREAT OF GLOBAL AVIAN FLU TO LOCAL POULTRY AND EGG SUPPLY**

2 **Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin** asked the Minister for Sustainability and the Environment (a) to what extent does the global avian flu situation pose a threat to our local poultry and egg supply; and (b) how many recalls or suspensions of poultry products has the Singapore Food Agency implemented in the past three years.

**Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien:** The Singapore Food Agency (SFA) and National Parks Board monitor High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI) outbreak incidents globally and suspend import sources with outbreaks of HPAI. SFA has not recalled any poultry products due to HPAI.

Incidences of HPAI have had a significant impact in their source countries, affecting both poultry and egg production. As Singapore imports more than 90% of our food, we cannot insulate ourselves completely from the impact of disease outbreaks, such as HPAI. We mitigate the potential impact through source diversification. Consumers, too, can play their part by being flexible with food options in the event of supply disruptions.

## **ROLE OF NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AGENCY AND LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCIES IN RODENT MANAGEMENT**

3 **Mr Yip Hon Weng** asked the Minister for Sustainability and the Environment (a) what are the roles of the National Environment Agency (NEA) and other land management agencies, such as Town Councils, in rodent management measures; (b) how does NEA ensure that the other land management agencies follow up on their rodent management plans to effectively deal with the issue; and (c) what are the penalties when plans are not followed up.

**Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien:** The National Environment Agency (NEA) adopts an integrated surveillance and control approach to keep the rat population in check. This involves island-wide surveillance of public areas to detect signs of potential rat infestation and conducting inspections of areas with rat infestations.

All premises owners, including land management agencies, are responsible for ensuring their premises do not create conditions favourable for vector propagation. Where necessary, they should engage the services of licensed vector control operators to put in place a sustained programme to prevent rat infestation. NEA shares surveillance information, best practices and know-how with land management agencies to support them in their rat control efforts. Where an area with rat infestation involves several stakeholders, NEA will bring them together to implement coordinated rat control measures.

Premises owners who fail to practise proper refuse management or who create conditions favourable to the harbouring or propagating of rats are subject to enforcement by NEA under the Environmental Public Health Act and the Control of Vectors and Pesticides Act (CVPA) respectively. The maximum penalty under CVPA is a fine of up to \$20,000 or imprisonment for up to three months, or both, for a first offence. For a first offence under the Environmental Public Health (Public Cleansing) Regulations, premises owners can be fined up to a maximum of \$1,000 and to a further fine not exceeding \$100 for every day or part thereof during which the offence continues after conviction.

## **LESSONS ON DANGERS OF ONLINE SCAMS AND PLANS TO EXPAND FINANCIAL LITERACY PROGRAMMES IN SCHOOLS**

4 **Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin** asked the Minister for Education (a) what lessons are incorporated in schools to teach students about the dangers of online scams; and (b) whether the Ministry will consider expanding financial literacy programmes in schools to include lessons on common banking services, practices and safe habits on online banking.

**Mr Chan Chun Sing:** In school, students are taught to guard against scams through various subjects and resources.

Character and Citizenship Education classes teach students to evaluate and verify the credibility of online information sources and to recognise and report different types of online scams, including phishing scams, online purchase scams and Internet love scams.

Food and Consumer Education classes teach lower secondary students to be a discerning consumer, exercise financial responsibility, and not fall prey to scams.

Social Studies classes teach students the impact of cybersecurity risks and are equipped with information and media literacy skills to critically evaluate different sources of information, both online and offline.

The Singapore Student Learning Space provides self-paced lessons for all students to learn financial literacy.

As scams constantly evolve, the Ministry of Education will continue to work closely with partners, such as Inter-Ministry Committee on Scams, the Singapore Police Force and other agencies, to promote anti-scam messages through talks and programmes in schools and Institutes of Higher Learning. Public education for adults would still be needed.

## **RELOCATION OF SCHOOLS TO SUBURBAN AREAS AND ITS IMPACT ON HOUSING AND RENTAL PRICES**

5 **Mr Yip Hon Weng** asked the Minister for Education in view of the impending move of Anglo-Chinese School (Primary) to Tengah new town (a) whether there are plans for more of such schools to move to the suburban areas; and (b) what is the expected impact of housing and rental prices in such non-mature estates.

**Mr Chan Chun Sing:** This question has been addressed in the Ministry of Education's reply to Question No 2 for oral answer on the Order Paper for 28 February 2023. [*Please refer to "Considerations for Converting Single-sex Schools to Co-ed Schools and for Relocating Schools", Official Report, 28 February 2023, Vol 95, Issue 88, Oral Answers to Questions section.*]

## PLANS TO DEEPEN CHARACTER AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

6 **Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin** asked the Minister for Education whether there are plans to deepen the Character and Citizenship Education curriculum in primary and secondary schools to encompass digital ethics and engagement in respectful and meaningful online civic discussions.

**Mr Chan Chun Sing:** Since 2021, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has enhanced the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) curriculum to give a stronger focus to guide students' online learning and interactions. Through CCE lessons, primary school students learn to be discerning of what they read and share online and to be respectful of one another, including of their privacy. Older students at the secondary and pre-university levels learn to engage in online discussions in a respectful and meaningful manner, and to value multiple perspectives.

Beyond the CCE curriculum, MOE also engages parents to highlight the importance of guiding their children to have respectful online and offline discussions.

## TAKE-UP OF GOVERNMENT-PAID CHILDCARE LEAVE BY PARENTS

7 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for Social and Family Development from 2019 (a) how many and what percentage of mothers took Government-Paid Childcare Leave (GPCL); (b) what is the average and median number of days of GPCL taken by mothers; (c) how many and what percentage of fathers took GPCL; and (d) what is the average and median number of days of GPCL taken by fathers.

**Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M:** The Ministry of Social and Family Development only tracks the number of parents who took more than three days of Government-Paid Childcare Leave (GPCL), as employers only claim for reimbursement for this group. In 2019 and 2020, about 76,000, or 60% of eligible working mothers took more than three days of GPCL<sup>1</sup> each year. During the same period, about 83,000 fathers, or 55% of eligible working fathers, took more than three days of GPCL each year. Of this group, the average and median amount of leave taken was six days in 2019 and 2020, for both mothers and fathers. Data after 2020 is not yet available.

Note(s) to Question No(s) 7:

<sup>1</sup> As employers only claim reimbursement from the Government for employees who take more than three days of GPCL, we do not require them to submit information for employees who took three days or less. These figures are rounded to the nearest thousands.

## NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF PRIVATE COMPANIES OFFERING PARENT-CARE LEAVE

8 **Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang** asked the Minister for Manpower from 2021, what are the number and percentage of private companies that offer parent-care leave.

**Dr Tan See Leng:** Based on the latest available survey data in 2020, 1,785, that is, 13.2% of private companies provided paid parental care leave<sup>1</sup> to their employees<sup>2, 3</sup>. The Ministry of Manpower does not track the number or percentage of private companies that offer unpaid parental care leave.

Note(s) to Question No(s) 8:

<sup>1</sup> Refers to leave granted to employees for taking care of their parents, including step-parents and parents-in-law, or to accompany them for medical appointment when they are sick or when the main caregiver is not available.

<sup>2</sup> Private companies each with at least 25 employees were surveyed.

<sup>3</sup> Data pertains to permanent employees and employees on term contract of at least one year.

## VERNACULAR SPEECHES

Vernacular Speech by Mr Saktiandi Supaat( )

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Vernacular Speech by Ms Mariam Jaafar( )

Vernacular Speech by Mr Muhamad Faisal Bin Abdul Manap( )

Vernacular Speech by Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin( )

Vernacular Speech by Mr Zhulkarnain Abdul Rahim( )

Vernacular Speech by Dr Shahira Abdullah( )

Vernacular Speech by Dr Shahira Abdullah( )

Vernacular Speech by Dr Shahira Abdullah( )

Vernacular Speech by Mr Zhulkarnain Abdul Rahim( )

Vernacular Speech by Dr Wan Rizal( )

Vernacular Speech by Dr Wan Rizal( )

Vernacular Speech by Mr Mohd Fahmi Aliman( )

Vernacular Speech by Mr Mohd Fahmi Aliman( )

Vernacular Speech by Mr Sharael Taha( )

Vernacular Speech by Mr Sharael Taha( )

Vernacular Speech by Ms Mariam Jaafar( )

Vernacular Speech by Ms Nadia Ahmad Samdin( )  
Vernacular Speech by Mr Masagos Zulkifli B M M( )  
Vernacular Speech by Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman( )  
Vernacular Speech by Mr Zaqy Mohamad( )  
Vernacular Speech by Ms Tin Pei Ling( )  
Vernacular Speech by Ms Tin Pei Ling( )  
Vernacular Speech by Mr Alvin Tan( )  
Vernacular Speech by Mr Alvin Tan( )  
Vernacular Speech by Mr Eric Chua( )  
Vernacular Speech by Ms Tin Pei Ling( )  
Vernacular Speech by Ms Low Yen Ling( )